Improving the Effectiveness of a Regional Development Network

Doctor of Business Administration

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Declaration

I, Judith Claire Walker, declare that:

- except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work in this thesis is that of the candidate alone;

- the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award;

- the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program;

- ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed:

Name: Judith Walker
Date: 19 March 2013
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Abstract

Regional development networks operate in complex environments in which the needs of member organisations may not necessarily be aligned with the vision and objectives of the networks themselves. The ability of regional development networks to achieve their aims is further complicated by the often voluntary nature of network membership. Such groups must also deal with the political reality of how governments enact social policy as various levels of governments themselves change. This research, which used an insider action research approach, identified the strengths and weaknesses of a voluntary regional development network to improve the practice of that group. The insights gained through the research were used to develop a framework of four capabilities: building the group’s internal and external identity; developing strong relationships with stakeholders; sourcing and using information effectively to build knowledge; and gaining the commitment of members and stakeholders to work towards the group’s goals and objectives. These capabilities are linked together by leadership capability. The framework may be used to assist and improve the effectiveness of networks in achieving their vision and goals. The research objectives included identifying areas which were problematic for the network and developing strategies of use to both this and other such groups to address weaknesses and take advantage of regional opportunities. The framework developed by the researcher is not designed as a ‘one size fits all’ solution to all of the problems and issues likely to be faced by regional development networks. Given the variations in size, composition and purpose of such groups, this would be neither practicable nor desirable. Rather the framework is a guide for network leadership. Members can identify the capabilities which are most relevant and useful for their own particular circumstances, and work to develop those capabilities which are meaningful to them.
1. Introduction

Regional development networks operate in complex environments in which the needs of member organisations may not necessarily be aligned with the vision and objectives of the networks themselves; and in which such networks must navigate the changing focus of government social policy as various levels of governments themselves change. This is particularly complex when those networks are formed by voluntary members.

This thesis examines a voluntary regional development network which operated between 2006 and 2009, and which achieved some remarkable results as well as faced some challenges. The network, of which the researcher was a member, was situated in a region which was visited in 2012 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a case study on regional cooperation (G21 2012). The researcher chose this topic due to her own professional work role as a consultant to several voluntary regional development networks and her personal involvement with this particular voluntary regional development network. Her involvement raised questions and insights for her about which factors contributed to the network achieving its objectives; which factors impeded them in this process; and how these factors could have been strengthened or mitigated.

The “story” presented in this thesis examines a voluntary network, located in Geelong in southern Australia. Geelong, which is the twelfth largest city in Australia and the largest regional city in the state of Victoria, is located 74 kilometres south of the State’s capital city of Melbourne. The thesis examines the work the group undertook to address local skill shortage problems and the impact on the network of the development and enactment of labour market policy by the Australian Federal and Victorian State Governments. In doing this, the researcher used an existing model of urban planning (Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour 1999) which she presented to members of the regional development network under examination in order to test its applicability to that group. Feedback from those interviewed as part of the research, as well as reading of the relevant literature, was then used to further develop that model into the framework presented in this thesis. The process used by the researcher was therefore a combination of theory testing and theory building.

In the paradigm of a global economy which is characterised by the fast paced development of new technologies, new policies and ways of policy making are needed, and regions are playing an increasingly important role in this process (Sotarauta & Hukkinen 2002). Other academic researchers have examined the rising eminence of
regional entities such as city regions in developing and implementing, not only
government policy, but community mobilisation to address local issues (Amdam 2000;
Cameron & Gibson 2005; Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007; Mouawad 2009).

There are a variety of definitions of what comprises a region. These include geographic
descriptions (Dalby & Mackenzie 1997); economic connectedness (Sotarauta & Viljamaa
2002); and community connectedness (Storper 2005). For the purposes of this thesis, the
researcher has defined a region as a number of communities in proximity to each other
which have mutual interests and which work cooperatively together to achieve common
goals (Dalby & McKenzie 1997; Sotarauta & Viljamaa 2002; and Storper 2005).

It is not just in academic circles that the issue of regions is being considered.
Governments and other institutions, such as universities and employer organisations, are
also looking at the regional level as a vehicle for implementing policy and economic
development. For example, in Britain, the UK government launched a £1,400,000,000
regional growth fund (UK Government 2010) in recognition of the critical role being played
by regions in driving the British economy, as shown by the Barclays Business Regional
Impact Index (Barclays 2010). This same recognition led the G-20 group, which includes
the largest developing and industrialised nations in the world, to ‘call on the International
Monetary Fund to develop new regional financing tools’ (Wall Street Journal 2010). In
2011, the Australian national Government created the Federal Government Department of
Regional Development, Local Government, Arts and Sport, as well as Regional
Development Australia (RDA) which is ‘an Australian Government initiative that brings
together all levels of government to enhance the growth and development of Australia’s
regions’ (Regional Development Australia 2010). At the State level, the Victorian
Government, through its Regional Development Victoria agency, launched Ready for
Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria which was a ‘new $631 million
blueprint unveiled by the Victorian Government today will drive economic growth in
regional and rural Victoria by attracting jobs and population growth, major new investment
and more opportunities for young people to keep them living and working locally’ (Premier
of Victoria 2010).

1.1 Defining key concepts
This research will examine how a regional community attempted to use federal and state
government labour market policies to address its own regional issues through the
effective operation of a voluntary regional development network; in particular, addressing
the skill shortage problems faced by the region. For the purposes of this particular
research, the terms ‘labour market policy’, ‘community’ and ‘skill shortages’ are defined as follows.

Labour market policies are those government policies which relate to improving the lives of people by providing a range of support services such as education, health and welfare services (Bessant, Watts, Dalton & Smyth 2006; Vargas-Hernández, Noruzi & Ali Irani 2011). This thesis will consider labour market policies as they relate to regional development, education and employment.

There are varying definitions of what comprises a community. These include geographic definitions related to ‘particular places ... focused on the internal and local origins of identities that have a regionally-specific flavor, or focused on the economic circumstances of particular places in the changing global economy’ (Dalby & Mackenzie 1997, p. 100). According to these definitions, communities could be differentiated from “society” which Storper (2005, p. 32) defines as involving ‘interactions coordinated through anonymous, rule-bound, transparent exchanges’ formed by ‘tradition, interpersonal contacts, informal relationships, and particularistic affinities’ (2005, p. 31). According to Storper, ‘[c]ommunities improve the functioning of labor markets, generate entrepreneurship, and organize the provision of the public goods that alleviate both private and state burdens in creating prosperity and social integration’ (2005, p. 32).

For the purpose of this research, both Dalby and Mackenzie’s geographical definition and Storper’s interpersonal and informal relationships have been applied to the researcher’s definition of “community”. The community examined in this research includes interrelationships between various agencies and organisations working in the employment/education/training/government sectors and other community groups, as well as local industry likely to be affected by skill shortages in the region.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) publication, Skill Shortages Australia: 2011, defines skill shortages as:

‘when employers are unable to fill or have considerable difficulty in filling vacancies for an occupation or specialised skill need within that occupation, at current levels of remuneration and conditions of employment, and within a reasonably accessible location’ (2012, p. 4).

The researcher defines regional skill shortages as the mismatch between the needs of employers who are seeking staff and the capabilities of the regional labour force to supply the required vocational skills. An added dimension of skill shortages involves the
effectiveness of the processes and educative functions by regional stakeholders to address the oversupply or undersupply of suitably skilled staff to meet industry needs.

1.2 Research setting
The researcher has used the G21 Skills Taskforce as the focus for this thesis. The charter for the Taskforce included:

a) Develop more effective mechanisms to link all stakeholders
b) Provide opportunities for the transfer of information between key stakeholders (schools, teachers, students, parents, industry and employers).
c) Create mechanisms to maximise the links between the unemployed with jobs, industry and employers.
d) Market the region to stakeholders and promote career opportunities externally.
e) Develop an integrated communication strategy (information, distribution channels (Walker, 2007, p.6).

For the purpose of this thesis, the researcher defines the “community” as the G21 Region, that is, the geographic area comprising the Local Government municipalities of City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire, Golden Plains Shire, Colac Otway Shire and Borough of Queenscliffe, located in southern Victoria. The region covers 8,972 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 298,000 people (G21 2010).
The G21 Region is a city-region, with Geelong being ‘a national and regional service centre’ (Mouawad 2009, p. 206) with retail, community services, arts and culture and a strong education presence through its Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Institute and Deakin University. The city has services available at the regional and sub-regional levels; engages in partnering arrangements which work flexibly across the region rather than being limited by traditional boundaries; and has strong regional leadership, ensuring transparency of processes and building accountability into those processes (Mouawad 2009, pp. 206-7). In doing this, the G21 region has developed a strong coalition of a variety of public and private sector organisations which Sotaarauta & Viljamaa (2002, p. 15) state is ‘important in the mobilization of resources, people and in the creation of mutual empowerment’.

1.3 Rationale
The rationale for the researcher in undertaking this research is two-fold. First, over the past ten years, the researcher has worked with voluntary regional development networks in her full time professional role as a labour market research consultant. In this role, the researcher has seen some networks falter and “die” due to an inability to engage
effectively with relevant stakeholders such as governments to secure the labour market policy funding necessary to forward the work of the group. Second, the researcher was a member of the G21 Skills Taskforce, as well as having been a member of various other voluntary regional development networks, and has an ongoing interest in trying to find ways to improve the effectiveness of such groups in terms of goal achievement. This has been a difficult task due to a lack of relevant data on what makes some networks successful in achieving their objectives and why others fail to do this. The researcher hoped that, in undertaking this research, she could add to the body of knowledge in this field.

1.4 Contribution to knowledge and practice
Increasing emphasis is being placed on the importance of regions and their contributions to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of diverse states and countries. In examining the literature which relates to regions, the role of regional development networks and other regional groups, as well as the contribution that they make to regional economic success, has not to date been formally researched by many researchers (Sotarauta & Viljamaa 2002; Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007; Lorentzen 2008), with limited literature available about how such groups could become more successful in achieving the aim of economic and social contribution. This is even more apparent when it comes to researching voluntary regional development networks. The researcher therefore intends that the framework developed, and the findings and recommendations of this research, can assist in addressing this gap and contribute to the body of knowledge regarding regional development networks, as well as contribute to ways to improve practice for those who work in, and with, these networks.

1.5 Aims and objectives
An aim of this thesis was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the G21 Skills Taskforce, and to use that knowledge to develop a framework of capabilities to assist and improve the effectiveness of the group in achieving its vision and objectives. The research objectives included identifying areas which were problematic for this particular voluntary regional development network and developing strategies of use to both this and other such groups to address weaknesses and take advantage of regional opportunities.
1.6 Research questions
The primary research questions were:

‘Which factors contributed to the G21 Skills Taskforce achieving its objectives and which factors impeded them in this process?

How could these factors have been strengthened or mitigated?’

A series of subsidiary questions were also considered. These included:

1. What were the main characteristics of the G21 Skills Taskforce?
2. How relevant is the Healey et al (1999) model of network effectiveness to the G21 Skills Taskforce?
3. How could the Skills Taskforce been more successful in identifying and achieving its objectives?
4. Can the lessons learnt from the G21 Skills Taskforce response be used to improve voluntary regional development network responsiveness to other local issues?

1.7 Research design in brief
The researcher used a realist action research methodology. The tools included semi-structured interviews with sixteen G21 Skills Taskforce members and twelve other relevant stakeholders who either were involved with the Taskforce, or who were members of other regional development networks. In some cases, where Taskforce members did not have a depth of knowledge, or appeared reluctant to voice their opinions, structured interviews were also conducted in order to draw out information. In total, twenty-eight interviews were conducted. Information gathered also included:

- analysis of documents including minutes from meetings;
- a review, by an external consultant, of the Skills Taskforce which was conducted in 2007;
- the researcher’s field notes and journal (2007-2012);
- a Social Network Analysis questionnaire completed by twelve members of the Skills Taskforce Executive, including the researcher.

Analysis of the data was based on the preliminary framework developed by the researcher from her initial reading of the literature and her own experiences as a member of the G21 Skills Taskforce. These initial findings were coded into themes by the researcher using NVivo® qualitative analysis software.
1.8 Overview of thesis organisation

This thesis is comprised of the following chapters:

1. Introduction - a brief overview of why the researcher chose this topic, and where and how the research was conducted.

2. The Research Context - includes an examination of the Australian social policy framework, recent history of networks, and a description of the characteristics of the region within which the research has been set.

3. Research Methodology - describes the ontological and epistemological approach taken, the reasons for choosing action research, and the methods, structure and process used by the researcher in seeking to gather, analyse and make meaning of the available data.

4. Literature Review - examines historical and contemporary thinking with regard to regional development networks. This includes selected aspects of development of public and social policy at both Federal and State levels in Australia, leadership, social capital, regionalism, network structures and operations, and individual and group dynamics.

5. Findings – includes data gathered through interviews, a Social Network Analysis questionnaire, network related documents, and the researcher’s field notes. The Findings Chapter includes a micro story of the creation and operations of the G21 Skills Taskforce; and a macro story of how the network evolved within the framework of Australian government social policy.

Within this Findings Chapter, when presenting these stories, this thesis will not separate primary analysis of the data and secondary analysis of this data with regard to the literature. The researcher believes that, in this case, it is important to integrate the links between theory and practice in order to ‘enfold the literature around the findings as they emerge from the interviews’ (Sobh & Perry, 2006, p. 1202).

The Findings Chapter also includes a framework of capabilities which could have improved the effectiveness of the G21 Skills Taskforce in achieving its goals. The framework was developed as part of the research process from ideas generated from a combination of practice and theory.
6. Discussion and Recommendations – identifies the areas which provided most insight for the researcher with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of the G21 Skills Taskforce and uses the literature and data to identify areas for improvement. Recommendations for application to practice and suggested areas for further research are also included.

7. Conclusion – presents the key points which arose from analysis of the data, and which the researcher found particularly useful.

8. References – the researcher has used the Harvard referencing system in this thesis.

9. Appendices – Includes a description of the G21 Region, the Social Network Analysis questionnaire which was completed by twelve members of the G21 Skills Taskforce; the sociograms which were the output of the results; indicative questions used in the semi-structured interviews; and recommendations from previous research undertaken by the researcher, which were the catalyst for formation of the G21 Skills Taskforce.
2. The Research Context

This chapter establishes the context within which the research took place, including how labour market policy is enacted by Australian governments, the importance of networks in the Australian environment and a description of the region within which the research was conducted.

2.1 Labour market policy in the Australian context

Labour market policy, in the Australian context dates back to the 1890’s with the beginnings of a welfare system for the poor, followed by the creation of aged pensions, and industrial relations (Murphy 2011). Labour market policy does not deal only with education and employment, but has an effect also on the health and wellbeing of the population.

Australian government operates at three levels: federal, state and local, with all levels containing departments which enact and administer labour market policy.

At the Federal level, as at 2013, Departments which enact labour market policy and which are relevant to the work of the G21 Skills Taskforce include:

- Education, Employment and Workplace Relations;
- Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs;
- Health and Ageing;
• Human Services; and Veterans Affairs,
• Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education;
• Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities; and
• Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations was the key Federal Department with which the G21 Skills Taskforce interacted.

At the State level in Victoria, Departments engaged with labour market policy include

• Education and Early Childhood Development, including Higher Education and Skills;
• Health;
• Human Services;
• Justice; and
• Planning and Community Development.

Figure 3 – Victoria (Wikipedia 2010)

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, including the Higher Education and Skills Division, was the key Victorian State Government Department with which the Skills Taskforce engaged.

In the City of Greater Geelong, local government operates in a number of labour market and social policy areas including aged care; improving living conditions for children and their families; community safety, health and wellbeing; and youth services; with the Economic Development Unit also engaged in skills development through its Skilled Migration program.
According to Bessant et al. (2006, p. 60):

In 2004-05, the Australian government budgeted to spend some $74 billion on personal benefits to unemployed people, single parents, supporting children, old-age pensioners and so on. This was approximately 38 per cent of the total projected expenditure of $192 billion by the federal government. If we add education, other welfare expenditures, and spending on hospitals and medical care, well over half of all money spent by the federal government goes on social or welfare policies. Broadly speaking, this pattern of spending has not altered over the last decade.

The areas of spending which are of particular relevance to this thesis are those which deal with regional development, planning and community services, education, employment and skills development.

### 2.2 The importance of networks in the Australian environment

In 2010, the Australian Government created a new advisory body called *Regional Development Australia*. The charter of this body is to bring all levels of Government together to work on projects which contribute to the growth and development of Australian regions. In 2011, the Government also created the Federal *Department of Regional Australia, Local Government and the Arts*. At the fifteenth conference conducted by Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA)\(^1\) in 2011, the Minister for...

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\(^1\) This conference was held in the City region of Geelong during the period 24-27 October 2011. Minister Crean addressed the conference on 26 October 2011.
the Department, the Hon. Simon Crean, discussed the importance of regions to the Australian environment and the need for both a “whole of Government” approach – that is a cooperative approach in which all relevant Federal Departments work together to address the needs of regions – and a “whole of Governments” approach – that is a cooperative approach in which Federal, State and Local Governments work together. In this way:

Regional Australia can drive the new approach to government and drive new investment in their regions by “joining up the dots” across governments at all levels and breaking down the silo approach that still dominates government thinking and funding. It is only by “joining the dots” that we challenge the departmental structures of government (Crean 2011).

The literature review conducted as part of this thesis examines the importance of innovation in regional development. This viewpoint is also reflected in the Australian Government’s decision to create a new network of Innovative Regions Centres throughout Australia, one of which is located within the region examined by this researcher. These centres work with local regional networks to promote innovative practices and more cooperative ways of working in order to bolster the economic performance of the region, and the Innovative Regions Centre in the city region of Geelong, which is known as the G21 region (Geelong into the 21st Century), is now working closely with other voluntary regional development networks such as the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (GRLLEN) to build stronger relationships between local industry and education providers in order to foster innovative pathways into industries such as the health sector within the region.

Other factors, such as economic growth, socio-cultural factors such as community identity and the political dimension (Moulaert & Sekia 2003) have also been investigated by the voluntary regional development network examined by this researcher and discussed later in this thesis. The researcher hopes that the insights gained through this research will address the existing gap in the literature about what makes some regional development networks more effective in identifying and addressing local issues. This should add to the body of knowledge about how to improve the success of regional development networks in achieving their objectives and thereby adding to the economic prosperity of their regions and the improved health and wellbeing of the population.

Since the disbanding of the G21 Skills Taskforce in 2011, this type of work is now being undertaken by other local regional development networks such as the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network which is part of a state wide group of networks
which have been created by the Victorian Government to facilitate better relationships between the education/training and community sectors with local industry in order to develop innovative pathways for young people into ongoing education and employment.

2.3 The G21 region – Labour Market and other demographics

![Figure 5 - The G21 Region (Walker 2007)](image)

The G21 Region has a population of about 298,000 people, with Geelong as its major centre. The region is defined as an inner region (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001). However, the researcher also believes that a region cannot be simply defined by its geographic locality, but must also take account of the social and economic interconnectedness of the communities which are located within that region.

According to G21:

Population forecasts prepared by Department of Planning and Community Development indicate that most of the growth in the G21 region to 2026 will occur in the Surf Coast and Golden Plains Shires, with the City of Greater Geelong also contributing a significant proportion to the future growth.

Growth Projections are as follows:

- Surf Coast – East (3.0% pa)
- South Barwon-Inner (2.6% pa)
- Golden Plains – South East (2.3% pa)
- Greater Geelong – Pt B (Bellarine Peninsula – 1.7% pa)
Greater Geelong – Pt C (1.3% pa).

An important feature of the projected population growth is the anticipated ageing of the population, with the region expected to have a significantly older population than the Victorian and Australian average. The G21 region’s population over 65 is expected to make up 26.9% in 2031, compared with:

- Victoria - 23.8%
- Australia – 21.3%.

Between 2006 and 2026, the number of people in the G21 region aged 60 and over is projected to nearly double, from 55,113 in 2006 to 99,787 in 2026.

This will mean that by 2026 it is expected that:

- those aged 60+ will rise to 28.1% (up from 20.4% in 2006)
- those aged 0 to 19 will increase by 15,453 persons (from 71,641 in 2006 to 87,094 in 2026). Nevertheless, it is projected that there will be a slight decrease in the proportion of 0 to 19 year olds between 2006 and 2026, from 26.5% of the population down to 24.5%.
- those aged 20 to 59, will increase by 25,162 (from 143,234 in 2006 to 168,396 in 2026). Nevertheless, the percentage of the population in this age cohort will drop from 53.0% in 2006 to 47.4% in 2026 (G21 2013).

A description of the region can be found at Appendix 1. The G21 $9.66 Billion (GRP) economy is characterised by being:

- highly complex and diverse, with a number of different industries and businesses ranging from large (over 200 employees) through medium (21-200 employees) and down to small (5-20 employees) and micro businesses (less than 5 employees) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001);
- under pressure from labour abundant nations such as China and India to which some of the region’s manufacturing base has been relocated;
- in transition - that is moving away from its traditional reliance on manufacturing, and moving into more innovative industries such as carbon fibre and advanced materials development; and
- reviewing how labour, land, capital and technological knowledge assets are managed (Henry & Edwards 2009).
In October 2011, the City of Greater Geelong updated its skills shortage information through the conduct of an on-line industry based survey which was sent out to over 1,700 local businesses (the response rate was not identified). A total of 133 regional businesses reported difficulty in filling positions. In total, 318 existing skills shortage positions were reported by employers. 46% were in the health care & social assistance sector, 14% were in manufacturing and 8% in the education and training sector. A total of 382 anticipated skills shortage positions were also reported, with 51% being in health & social assistance, 13% in manufacturing and 13% in public administration & public safety. 40 non-skilled occupations were also reported, with 25% of these in health care & social assistance, 20% in manufacturing, 20% in other service sectors and 15% in transport, postal & warehousing (City of Greater Geelong 2011, pp. 1-4).

The G21 Region comprises three Small Area Labour Markets (SALM’s). These include Greater Geelong, East Barwon and West Barwon.

Greater Geelong contains the largest section of the City of Greater Geelong and contains most of the large employers in the G21 Region, as well as being the greatest residential catchment area for those working in the Region. At the 2011 National Census, 83,906 people identified themselves as participating in the labour force, with 56.2% employed full-time and 32.1% employed in part-time work (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

The G21 Alliance is auspicing a number of major projects in the area. In the short to medium term, there is expected to be a boom in both the commercial and residential construction sectors. However, in the longer term there will also be opportunities for ‘encouraging further innovation and specialisation amongst our businesses, helping the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector exploit engineering opportunities, attracting new industries and assisting the displaced workers to improve their skills and develop new careers’ (G21 2012, p. 9). What is of concern for the researcher, however, is that the robust planning process adopted for these projects does not appear to include the further planning necessary to identify those occupations and to prepare the labour force to take advantage of this labour market growth (G21 2012).

The second Small Area Labour Market district within the G21 Region is East Barwon, which acts mainly as a residential catchment area for employment in Geelong or Melbourne, as well as having a strong tourism presence (Borough of Queenscliffe 2012). The Borough of Queenscliffe is the smallest of the Local Government Areas (LGA) within the G21 Region’s boundaries and holds an interesting position within the fabric of the labour market in that it is not a high density employment LGA. There is only a small pool of potential labour within the Borough and a number of people commute to Queenscliff for
work. As well, there is also a problem with skills mismatches in the Borough with 53% of the residents employed in senior white collar positions, whilst the nature of employment within the Borough is for occupations such as clerical, sales and services (Zaluski 2009). The highest employing industries within the Borough include health care & social assistance, education & training, public administration & safety, accommodation & food services, retail and construction (Cotsell et al. 2010, pp. 56-58).

The other LGA included in the East Barwon SALM is the Surf Coast Shire. The major towns within the Shire are Torquay, Lorne and Winchelsea. According to the Shire, the surf industry, retail, building & construction, tourism & hospitality and agribusiness are the Surf Coast’s major industry sectors. The Economic Development department of the Shire also notes that there is growth in Home Based Businesses (HBB) and Small to Medium Enterprises (SME’s) (Surf Coast Shire 2011), and is aware of serious interest on the part of a number of major industrial companies and businesses exploring opportunities for relocation to the Surf Coast, in particular to Torquay and Winchelsea which are identified as growth areas in the Surf Coast Shire. Service Business Estates in Torquay and Winchelsea will take on significant strategic importance when the Geelong Ring Road is completed (Cotsell et a., 2010, pp. 44-49).

The final SALM in the G21 Region is West Barwon which includes the LGA’s of Golden Plains and Colac Otway Shires. Only the southern part of Golden Plains Shire falls within the boundaries of the G21 Region. The majority of this area is rural, with a number of medium (such as Bannockburn, with a population of approximately 2,600) to small townships (such as Lethbridge, with a population of 950). It is estimated that there are 2,305 jobs within the Shire (Golden Plains Shire, 2012). The highest employing industries for Golden Plains include manufacturing, retail, health care & social assistance, construction, and agriculture, forestry & fishing. The Shire also contains over 300 home based businesses (Golden Plains Shire 2011).

The final LGA in the West Barwon SALM is the Colac Otway Shire. Economic activity in the Shire includes agriculture and food processing, forestry and timber processing, tourism, business services, retailing, health and public sector. Tourism is a key export sector, and is labour-intensive and likely to be the biggest job generator in the Shire in the foreseeable future (Colac Otway Shire 2011).

The Shire’s Action Agenda 2009-13 focuses on ‘agriculture; education & training; health & community services; retail & professional; tourism; town development; and partnership & regional structures’ (Colac Otway Shire 2011).
As can be seen, the G21 Region is diverse in both its geographic structure, comprising urban and rural areas, and its labour market which contains many different industry sectors as well as large, medium and small businesses. As a result of global factors such as new and improved technologies, the economy is in transition from a predominant reliance on traditional manufacturing base to a mix of industries. Many networks in the region, including the G21 Skills Taskforce attempted to address the labour market issues, such as skill shortages, which resulted from this ongoing transition.

2.4 The G21 network

The G21 region within which this research has been conducted involves a participatory partnership between the Councils of five Local Government Areas (LGAs) and the private and community sectors. The G21 Geelong Region Alliance is a not-for-profit network formed by a Board made up of the CEOs and Mayors of the five municipalities which form G21 as well as five independent elected members. The Board oversees the work of eight paid staff, including the CEO. The G21 Alliance also delivers projects through eight volunteer working groups which are known as Pillars. These Pillars cover specific regional issues which include arts and culture; economic development; education and training; planning and services; health and wellbeing; transport; environment; and sport and recreation.

The G21 Skills Taskforce which is the subject of this research was a separate voluntary entity created specifically to analyse and address labour market issues, particularly skill shortages within the region.
3. Literature Review

This research explores why a regional approach is important as well as the “human” side of regional development networks, including community responsiveness, leadership, social capital and the concept of networking. In attempting to understand how a voluntary regional development network operates, the researcher has focused on the institutional school of labour market analysis (Ross & Whitfield 2009, pp. 18-21) due to its recognition that consideration of people are as important in the development of labour market policy as economic factors. This approach asserts that labour markets cannot simply be understood in terms of economic rationalist supply and demand, but rather are complex dynamic systems which also need to be examined through the multi-disciplinary lenses of sociology and politics. This is highlighted particularly as governments come to terms with the relationship between employment and other aspects of social policy such as health and wellbeing.

This chapter examines literature which relates to how labour market policy is enacted in Australia and other parts of the world; regional development, particularly as it relates to city regions as well as innovation and learning cultures; social and institutional capital and their importance in group development; leadership in various types of organisations, particularly regional development networks; and group behaviour, including trust, reciprocity and mutual gain. The literature includes case studies, presentation of theory and literature reviews and was used by the researcher to examine the research questions of identifying which factors contributed to the G21 Skills Taskforce achieving its objectives and which factors impeded them in this process.

3.1 The underpinning theory

The researcher started the research process with an initial examination of the literature before commencing the data collection. A useful theory was a model proposed by Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999), which considered institutional capacity building for urban planning and regeneration. The theory and model proposed in this article formed the basis for the early development of the researcher’s framework, which has been further expanded by analysis of the data collected during this research; and deeper and broader examination of the literature which is the subject of this chapter.

The model proposed by Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) resonated with the researcher as the three aspects of institutional capacity building which form the model: that is knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capability, were
consistent with the capabilities which the researcher had begun to recognise were needed by the Skills Taskforce to achieve its goals.

In their review of the literature on this topic, Healey de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) found that the issue of institutional capacity building was becoming important for urban planning in Britain. The UK government was trying to move from a centralised form of control to a more dispersed partnership based model, and the literature on regional development identified the importance of ‘locality’ (1999, p. 118) in regional economic success. Healey de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999, pp. 121-122) used the term “institutional capital” which they defined as including intellectual capital, social capital and political capital. Their article:

explores how institutional capacity can be identified and evaluated, the forces which shape it and how it might be deliberately transformed. The paper draws on ideas being developed in the literatures on interpretive/communicative planning theory and “institutionalist” perspectives on planning and property development, and on regional economic development (1999, p. 117).

Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour describe institutional capital as a critical factor in building institutional capacity. Healey (1998 p. 1544) describes institutional capacity as the ability to ‘shape ongoing “place-making” activities in ways which can promote long-term and sustainable improvements to material quality of life and to the sense of identity and well-being of people in places’. In this article, the authors draw on their own extensive experience in working in urban planning as well as a comprehensive examination of the relevant literature to develop their theoretical model of the importance of the inter-relationship between knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capability within a community. In this context, knowledge is considered to be socially constructed rather than simply existing; relationships are examined from ‘a social-constructivist and institutional point of view’ (1999, p. 127).

They define knowledge as not just a “thing” or an “asset” (1999, p. 125) which can be objectified, but as dynamic and socially constructed, with four components: range – scientific, technical and other types of knowledge; frames –the various lenses through which knowledge is interpreted; integration – the way in which different types of knowledge are linked; and openness & learning – the level of willingness to learn new things and respond to new stimuli occurs.
Relational resources include civic associations, social and business networks, as well as the ways in which trust and reciprocity are played out in varying bonds and social obligations. Healey de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) define four components of relational resources. These include *range* – involves identifying the key players in the network and how they relate to other stakeholders; *morphology* – the structure and linkages within and between networks; *network integration* – the level to which the work of networks is integrated or isolated; and *power relations* – which refers to both the authoritarian notion of power as well as the level to which networks are open and welcoming versus closed and ‘deliberately mystifying’ (1999, p. 129).

Mobilisation capability has ‘both an “agency” perspective and a “structural” one’ (1999, p. 131). Agency relates to the processes which are in place to ‘accelerate learning, release creativity, develop trust and generate a capacity to act collectively’ (1999, p. 131); whilst structure relates to the way in which existing power structures and dynamics can be used to initiate change. Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour identify the “change agent”, leader or “broker” (1999, p. 131) as particularly important in this process. Four components are identified for this element of the theory: *opportunity structure* – how the network stakeholders perceive the potential change and around which aspects of it they decide to mobilise; *arenas* – the targets identified for institutional change; *repertoires* – the mobilisation techniques on which the network will draw; and *change agents* – the people who are critical to the mobilisation effort and the characteristics which are required to drive different stages of change.

Other researchers have since used the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model in different contexts and have drawn from that model to develop their own frameworks and examinations of practice. These include broadening the understanding of empowerment planning in regional development (Amdam 2010), regional capacity building (Khakee 2001), regional learning and innovation (Amdam 2003), and dynamic capabilities for regional economic development (Sotarauta 2003).

In examining the role of local empowerment in regional development, Amdam (2010, p. 1806) used the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model to examine the way in which local community ‘social’ power is transformed into political power. He defined empowerment as ‘a gathering of power in a dynamic way over a period of time in a combination of external support and internal mobilization’ (2010, p. 1806). Amdam (2010, p. 1810) concludes that ‘regional empowerment processes are dependent on the existence of an appropriate balance between ... five variables: context, mobilizing, organizing, implementing and learning’ as shown in the diagram below.
Amdam (2003, p. 441) also applied the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model to regional learning (see the diagram below).

He described ‘dialogue, trust and partnership’ as ‘strategies for the development of regional competence’ (2003, p. 452) and discussed the importance of Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour’s (1999) three components in building regional capacity. He stated that, ‘in order to register, develop and exploit (knowledge resources and relational resources), the regional community must have the ability to mobilize in relation to challenges’ (2003, p. 452), and that ‘[k]ey factors (in doing this) are trust, cooperation and relationships between people’ (2003, p. 452).

Learning was also seen as important to sustainable regional development by Khakee (2001) who focused on the knowledge resources of the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model. He identified four criteria to ‘identify and evaluate the generation of intellectual capital:

1. Range of knowledge emphasising how various ways of thinking about and shaping policies for sustainable development are emulated.
2. Frame of knowledge including different ways for justifying ideas, making distinctions and observing limitations.

3. Linking knowledge that is constructed in different arenas.


The Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model has also contributed towards Sotarauta’s (2003) capacity model for city-regions (see diagram below):

![Diagram of capacity model for city-regions](image)

Sotarauta (2003, p. 11) stated that 'one of the main tasks of the managers engaged in promotion of urban economic development is to create functioning development networks and to mobilize resources and expertise both internal and external to the city-region in question'. He believed that '[i]nstitutional capacity in terms of direction, policies, procedures and other explicit guidance are often used to integrate different organisations and their explicit knowledge'. Sotarauta (2003, pp. 11-12) examined the ‘combinative capacity’ in which institutional capacity focuses on ‘webs of relations ... which interlink public development agencies, firms, and educational and research institutes in collective action’.

### 3.2 Labour market policy

The work of the G21 Skills Taskforce was situated in the area of labour market policy, which the researcher understands to be policy enacted by governments at all levels which deal with issues relating to how people live their lives as part of Australian society; that is, in areas such as education, health, employment and welfare. The researcher was
interested in how labour market policy is developed and implemented by governments, and the impacts that these policies might have at a regional level.

The focus on market forces to gain social outcomes has had an impact on the development of labour market policy (Gates & Steane 2009). These authors conducted a literature review of research into economic rationalist policy making at both a global level and, specifically, within the Asia Pacific region. They state that ‘[d]ebates motivated by economic rationalist policies have tended to polarize Australian society’ (2009, p. 90). In discussing this topic, they examine the development and implementation of ‘the ‘Fight-back policy package of the Liberal Opposition in 1993 and the new coalition government’s introduction of the goods and services tax in 2000’ (2009, p. 94). Gates and Steane (2009, p. 102) conclude that:

> [t]he adoption of economic rationalistic policies tends to produce affluence amongst some people and poverty among others. ... Governments ... need to accept responsibility for the needs of the poor and make ethical policy decisions directed at the eradication of poverty.

Labour market policy forms a component of public policy which Curtain (2000, p. 33) examined in the Australian context. He stated that ‘analysis indicates that there are clear signs that public policy making in Australia, compared with [the UK, Canada and New Zealand] is still deficient in a number of respects’. In drawing this conclusion, Curtain examined official documents with regard to policy development and policy reviews and appraisals conducted by governments in these three countries, and used the results to identify the key elements which he believes comprise good public policy. These include the need for policy to be framed in the long term, rather than in the shorter electoral cycles. It should also be developed in such a way as to enable the recipients of the policy to be involved. He stated that ‘[g]ood policy also needs to be outcome-focused by identifying carefully how the policy will deliver desired changes in the real world’ (2000, p. 36). Finally, Curtain (2000, p. 36) asserted that ‘[p]olicy making needs to be a continuous, learning process, not as a series of one-off isolated initiatives’. These three elements are particularly important where labour market policy is being enacted at the regional level.

Having identified these elements, Curtain used them as the vehicle to critically examine the development of three specific national policies. He concluded that the Australian government did not specifically detail what it believed was good policy, and stated that ‘[t]he capacity to reflect critically on the shortcomings of existing policy processes and to draw lessons on how to improve them in toto does not appear to be a feature of the
operating environment of Australian Governments or the Australian Public Service’ (Curtain 2000, p. 42). He believed that this could be improved by consulting more extensively with the public and by seeking alternative sources of advice when developing policy (2000, p. 43). Curtain’s article is based on a review of the literature as well as his own practice as a public policy consultant; and draws on his involvement in the development of the policies discussed in the article. Curtain raises some interesting points which would benefit from being tested through a deeper analysis of a wider range of policy development and appraisal processes, particularly as these relate to countries which are not as similar to the Australian environment as the UK, Canada and New Zealand. Although it is useful to identify common experiences, it would also be interesting to see what lessons could be learnt from other cultures and the ways in which their governments enact public policy.

The development of labour market policy needs to consider both the potential economic outcomes of the policy as well as the likely impact of that policy on the people concerned. Qureshi (2009, pp. 93-94) believed that ‘human development (HD) and economic growth (EG) are interdependent and intertwined in feedback processes which suggest that both are mutually reinforcing, either leading to an upward spiral of development or a poverty trap. Qureshi (2009) examined how human development and economic growth have occurred in the Pakistani environment, using a ‘[s]ystem dynamics approach ... to model, identify and help manage the development path of HD and EG in Pakistan’ (2009, p. 93), using economic, demographic, literacy and human development indicators. He stated that ‘[t]he concept of HD puts people at the centre stage of all aspects of the development planning process and demands a high level of government’s commitment to HD’ (2009, p. 94). However, Qureshi found that Pakistan still focuses on economic growth at the expense of human development expenditure in the expectation that one will automatically lead to the other. Qureshi’s modelling indicated that this is not the case and that, for sustainable “real” growth, fiscal policy should be refocused on human development which he believes will, in turn, lead to sustainable growth. This article indicates that non-western countries are also struggling with the tension between economic rationalism and labour market policy development. In the regional setting examined by the researcher, the focus of government has been on the economic issues and relevant infrastructure, with very little focus on the “human” aspects of the labour market. The G21 Skills Taskforce was one of the few groups which worked in that area.

In working in the “people” side of labour market development, one of the problems faced by the G21 Skills Taskforce was in trying to gain commitment from the community itself to address the issue of skill shortages. The importance of this factor was examined by
Scott, Russell and Redmond (2009) in their review of how Europe’s rural society and economies are changing. They considered the role of people in the development and implementation of policy and discussed the importance of what they called active citizenship. This paper used two case studies of rural communities near Dublin in the Republic of Ireland to examine how local communities have responded to spatial changes resulting from rapid population growth and changing social structures. They stated that ‘[i]n Irish society, as elsewhere, there is a growing interest in public participation in governance processes and in the role of civil society to create deeper and a more embedded democratic culture and citizenship’ (2009, p. 251). In doing this, Scott, Russell and Redmond examined the literature to identify how ‘[p]ublic policy in all spheres is moving towards a greater degree of engagement with public participation for the development and implementation of government objectives’ (2009, p. 252). It was this public participation which the Skills Taskforce attempted to foster.

Labour market policy was also examined by Miles and Tully (2007), who believed that ‘[e]conomic exclusion and “worklessness” is high on the current political agenda. ... During the past decade a myriad of national and locally based policies, programmes and projects have been devised in order to address the issues of economic exclusion and worklessness’ (2007, p. 856). They used case studies of five community development projects in North East England and state that the Regional Development Agency ‘has experimented with a more “holistic” approach to regional economic development. This approach involved combining and integrating actions addressing housing, health, education and cultural issues, with more traditional area-based regeneration interventions such as physical infrastructure interventions or support for intermediate labour markets and small businesses’ (2007, pp. 856-857). The G21 Skills Taskforce worked with other agencies where the skills shortage issue impacted on education and cultural issues.

In considering labour market policy in the education and training context, Gemici and Curtis (2012) examined the Australian workplace learning program and concluded that ‘[t]he COAG [Council of Australian Governments] policy of increasing Year 12 completion is based on macroeconomic policy analysis that projects increased labour force participation and enhanced productivity arising from the skills bonus of higher educational attainment’ (2012, p. 42). This was an area of particular concern to the Skills Taskforce as the G21 region has lower than national and state averages of tertiary education attainment, which is defined as vocational Certificate III level through to post-graduate qualifications. This low education attainment rate was one of the issues which would have been the focus of the Career Development and Skill Service, which is discussed in the Findings chapter.
Olsen (2008) presented a study which ‘examined qualitative changes to key income security and social service programmes in labour market policy in three nations, the United States, Canada and Sweden’ (2008, p. 323) in order to identify whether there is convergence of policies between the three. He did this by reviewing the literature produced by “convergence” and “resilience” theorists from the 1950’s to the present. Olsen defined convergence theorists as those who believe that welfare policies are developing in a similar manner across national boundaries, whereas resilience theorists posit that varying socio-political factors have differentiated national responses. He concluded that:

“Convergence theorists”, emphasizing the impact of domestic and/or global pressures on states, maintain that national welfare states have been declining in tandem, often suggesting that they will all look broadly similar over time. “Resilience theorists”, in contrast, argue that a range of domestic social and political factors allow nations to respond differently to similar pressures, strengthening or diluting their impact. However, both cross-national research streams have often utilized narrow economic/budgetary measures which miss important qualitative changes within policy domains that can be quite distinct across nations (Olsen 2008, p. 333).

Gurtoo (2007) used a literature review to examine labour market reforms in India, and compared India to six other Asian countries in terms of labour demand policies, labour supply policies, labour regulation policies and economic growth (2007, p. 474). In particular, he purported that the existing Indian labour relations framework was impeding the capacity of corporate organisations to grow. He identified two reasons why behavioural variables need to be considered in developing a better framework which would facilitate that growth. These include the fact that ‘processes in the labour-government-employer relationship were seen to be guided by specific socio-economic-cultural debates within a nation, and ... work and employment were found to be a direct reflection of other larger developments in a society like economic prosperity, education status, and even crime rates’ (2007, p. 473). The G21 Skills Taskforce worked to foster the dialogue between government, employers and those seeking work to address imbalances and skill shortages in the local labour market.

Pieroni and Pompei (2008) examined labour market policies in the context of investigating the impact of labour markets on innovation in the northern regions of Italy. They suggested that ‘the Italian economic debate around the labour market has been
particularly animated in recent years. Pieroni and Pompei (2008, p. 220) used mathematical modelling to examine ‘the manufacturing sectors of Italian industry taken at the regional level. ... The size of the sample adds up to 1,400 observations (20 regions x ten sectors x seven years)’, and found that the lack of flexibility has often been identified as the determinant of a pathological unemployment rate which has been recognised as hindering investments in innovations’ (2008, p. 217).

Atzmüller (2009) examined the tensions between national and local labour market policies in Vienna since the 1990s through the use of a case study based on interviews and analysis of documents. He stated that ‘reconfigurations of social policies can thus be analysed as strategies to reorient welfare systems from a static conception of social rights and entitlements to a more dynamic conception of opportunity, mobility and adaptation in order to support economic growth and structural change and to reconcile social inclusion and competitiveness’ (Atzmüller 2009, p. 599). Atzmüller discussed the role of cities in developing new forms of regional cooperation by forming alliances with a range of local stakeholders and provides detailed labour market data to support his arguments. In examining the case study, Atzmüller described the tensions which can form between national social policies and local initiatives and indicates that these can be exacerbated when local actors belong to national organisations.

A number of researchers examined labour market policy through the lens of capability theory which proposes that individuals should be given the freedom and capability to have a voice in making their own labour market choices. In preparing the way for a discussion of activation policies, Bonvin and Orton (2009, p. 566) stated:

At the core of all these changes, there is an undisputed view of the objective to be pursued within the field of social policies: that is, increasing employment rates at a macro level, and accelerating reintegration into the labour market at a micro level. This issue being settled, the challenges faced in social policies boils down to finding the most efficient means of achieving these goals.

Bonvin and Orton’s (2009) paper set the scene for the following articles by discussing existing labour market activation policies and introducing the concept of capability theory.

Green and Orton (2009) used a case study method to examine Great Britain’s City Strategy as it was implemented in Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country. The City Strategy brought together local actors to work cooperatively to address worklessness. They stated that ‘[t]he empirical investigation is based on analysis of documentary evidence including strategy papers and “grey literature” such as minutes of meetings and
internal briefings. In addition, the case study drew on in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with 18 local actors involved in the City Strategy’ (2009, p. 612).

Green and Orton (2009) discussed the importance of social policy being enacted at the local level to addressing imbalances in the labour market, but believed that this is situated in ‘a series of policy tensions around issues of marketisation, centralisation and localisation’ (2009, p. 615). They examined the case study in terms of these tensions and in the context of the various local initiatives which were introduced as part of the City Strategy, and concluded that ‘[t]he case study is interesting in showing how activation policy has been successful in drilling down to a micro-level, and incorporating a wide range of local actors. ... The City Strategy can be seen as evidence of recognition of the failure of a hierarchical model of state authority and the need for situated public action. But what has been seen is that the City Strategy still operates within a framework very much determined by central government’ (2009, p. 621). This was also the case for the G21 Skills Taskforce which attempted to address local issues, but which was often frustrated by the central focus of national labour market policy. This was one of the factors which impacted on the capability of the Taskforce to achieve its goals.

Sztandar-Sztanderska (2009) continued the discussion of capability theory in labour market policy with her examination of ‘how recent changes in labour market policy in Poland, such as the activation shift, formal incentives for policies integration and inclusion of private and civil society actors in the policy-making process, are actually put into practice on the local level’ (2009, p. 624). She stated that successful social integration requires cooperation between various local organisations. Sztandar-Sztanderska supported her argument with in depth financial and unemployment data and concluded that punitive labour market policies stigmatise those at whom they are aimed and are largely unsuccessful in the longer term.

Another article relating to capability theory in relation to labour market policy is a Swiss case study undertaken by Galster, Rosenstein and Bonvin (2009). This involved the researchers interviewing 25 local agents and managers from the welfare sector. The project examined by the authors involved the bringing together of the three major agencies involved in the Swiss welfare system. These included the unemployment insurance agency, the disability insurance agency and the social assistance agency. The project was launched in 2001 but ‘faced several limitations, mostly due to the fact that it was not binding for the partner institutions and thus had to rely on their goodwill’ (2009, p. 639). The authors presented a model of the process used by the project for moving individuals through the welfare system, and indicated that these individuals had no voice in their situation and were not empowered to take individual action, with ‘no possibility of applying
for a MAMAC intervention or contesting a decision’ (2009, p. 644). Galster, Rosenstein and Bonvin (2009, p. 646) concluded that ‘[t]he integration of employment policies is often presented as a promising tool to improve the efficiency of public policies in the field of social and professional integration. ... Integrating employment policies is not a panacea for enhancing all recipients’ capabilities as the limitations observed in terms of both “empowerment” and “freedom to choose” illustrate’.

One of the problems encountered by the Skills Taskforce in trying to integrate employment issues with other social policy areas such as education, health and wellbeing, was the complexity brought to the work by having to deal with multiple levels of governments. As described by Bessant et al, 2006, pp. 203-4:

Policy-making can be complex because of the numerous layers of government that Australians have developed. With three “levels” of local, state and federal government, there is plenty of scope for complications and problems about who does what or who gets the money to pay for various policies or programs.

Bessant et al. (2006) examined social policy as it is developed and implemented in an Australian context. They talked about the messy nature of social policy as it deals with the human situation, and stated that ‘[t]he first thing we need to acknowledge is the complexity of the organisational frameworks within which modern policy-making gets done. So ... we show why accounts of social policy-making are more convincing if they recognise that policy-making processes are going on simultaneously in many different organisations, both within state agencies and in the broader society’ (2006, p. 204). Bessant et al illustrated their arguments with a number of case studies showing how social policy is enacted in a range of situations.

One area in which both Federal and State Governments have enacted changing labour market policy is in the education and training sector, particularly in vocational education and training (VET). This has been done partly in response to the issue of skill shortages and the resulting need for changes to the VET system, and partly as a way to include disadvantaged groups such as those with disabilities, the long term unemployed and Aboriginal people in the labour market (Kell, 2010, p. 98).

Over time, problems have been encountered in the enactment of social policy in this area. The 1970s saw a focus by Governments on addressing inequalities and promoting social justice, but in the 1980s this was superseded by a:

more punitive and oppressive approach where any commitments to equity and social justice were subordinated to the broader needs of the economy ... which
overwhelmed any sense of choice about what people, and more particularly young people, might want in their lives (Kell, 2010, p. 99).

In the 1990s, a continuing emphasis on economic rationalism saw reduced assistance to disadvantaged groups (Kell, 2010, p. 100) and a growing emphasis on competition amongst VET providers in which:

- profound conflicts [are] emerging from the shifts in VET policy where altruism and traditional notions of vocations are challenged by the values of the market competition and flexibility and these suggest some important tensions around the values and norms associated with work and learning (Kell, 2012).

Competition amongst VET providers has continued to grow in the 2000s, whilst the focus of VET policy over the past decade has been on more strongly connecting the VET sector with industry. This is occurring in an environment where VET providers have been identified as not meeting the needs of industry (Kell, 2011, p. 181) and in which the VET system ‘has not benefited from the ambivalence of Australian industry to training and a reluctance of all stakeholders to fund a world class VET system’ (Kell, 2012, p. 75).

Further research is needed to identify how the VET sector can be improved (Kell, 2012) and this is one of the areas in which the G21 Skills Taskforce worked.

These articles reflect the tension between “top down” social policy as it is enacted by Governments and community activism for changes in social policy at a local level, set in the context of complex regional social structures. It is within this tension that the G21 Skills Taskforce, which is the subject of this research, had to operate.

### 3.3 Regional development

In many countries around the world, the role of regions is becoming more important and increased consideration is being given to regions and the contributions that they can make.

In the immediate post-World War II decades almost all of the major capitalist countries were marked by strong central governments and relatively tightly bordered national economies. ... Today, after much economic restructuring and technological change, significant transformations of this older order of things have occurred virtually across the world, bringing in their train the outlines of a new social grammar of space, or a new world system .... One of the outstanding features of this emerging condition is the apparent though still quite inchoate
formation of a multilevel hierarchy of economic and political relationships ranging from the global to the local. Accordingly, there has of late been a resurgence of region-based forms of economic and political organization (Scott 2001, pp. 813-817).

According to a review undertaken by the Australian Government into one of its immigration programs:

[t]he term 'region' was an elastic one, being widely understood but seldom defined. It incorporated a myriad of meanings in the Australian context, and encompassed everything from geographical areas located in rural and remote Australia, through all non-metropolitan areas of Australia, to provincial and industrial cities. There was no clear definition of what constituted a region or regional Australia (1999, p. 10).

This view is also reflected by the Australian Government’s Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) which reflected that:

Regions do not always have commonly accepted boundaries. Regions can be defined by formal boundaries (as in the case of state or local governments), by a sense of economic and social interdependence, by natural environments and landscapes, or by other connections that distinguish them from neighbouring areas. ... the main spatial concept used to summarise information about Australia’s regions is the ABS Remoteness Structure. ... This classification groups Census Collection Districts into five broad classes of remoteness, which share common characteristics in terms of physical distance from services and opportunities for social interaction. These classes are: Major Cities of Australia; Inner Regional Australia; Outer Regional Australia; Remote Australia; and Very Remote Australia (2008, p. 2).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) identified the 'specific definition of remoteness based upon the distance people must travel along a road network to get to Service Centres (areas where they can access goods, services and opportunities for social interaction). It is a geographical concept and does not attempt to define the broader concept of accessibility which is influenced by many factors such as the socioeconomic status or mobility of a population' (2001, p. 9).

As well as examining regions based on a geographic basis, governments and industry also identify regional characteristics which relate to economic factors. The Local Government Areas within which this research has been set include Economic Development Units which consider a range of economic factors, such as industry mix,
natural resources and infrastructure, in determining the regional context. As discussed by Maude (2004, p. 7):

Much of the theoretical and policy related discussion of regional growth in Europe emphasizes the role of knowledge, and the ways in which it is generated and applied, as the major factor in regional economic growth. In Australia, however, the only significant contribution to regional growth theory has been to emphasize the role of natural resources, and to explain the development path of a resource dependent region.

A number of researchers have examined the rising importance of regions in today’s global economic and social environment.

Studies of competitiveness and economic development have tended to focus on the nation as the unit of analysis, and on national attributes and policies as the drivers. As regional scientists and economic geographers have long understood, however, there are substantial differences in economic performance across regions in virtually every nation. This suggests that many of the essential determinants of economic performance are to be found at the regional level (Porter 2003, p. 550).

Research has also been undertaken to examine regions from both an economic and cultural perspective. In conjunction with universities in Britain and Japan, Finnish researchers Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002) have undertaken a research project which examines regional innovation environments (RIE) in order to ‘better understand the role of management and leadership in the development of RIEs of the Information Age’ (2002, p. 1). As part of this project, they undertook an extensive examination of the literature available with regard to regional development and then used this information to draw out the learning from a number of Nordic case studies undertaken by other researchers. They discuss the growing importance of regions since the 1980s and 1990s and reflect on the rhetoric and practices which resulted in the ‘Europe of Regions’ approach to policy development. They do not define a region by its physical borders but rather by the interaction and operation of regional networks (2002, p. 3). This accords with the view of Allen et al. (1998, p. 5) that regions are ‘a series of open, discontinuous spaces constituted by the social relationships which stretch across them in a variety of ways’. Florida (1995, p. 528) also examines the role of regions in the knowledge era and states that ‘there is likely to be a shift from strategies and policies which emphasize national
competitiveness to ones which revolve around the concept of sustainable advantage at the regional as well as national scale’ (1995, p. 535).

3.4 Regional development and innovation

Factors in the rise in prominence of regions and sub-regions include their contribution to global competition (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007, p. 81) and the way in which those who live in regions cooperate to achieve a competitive advantage (Lorentzen 2008, p. 539). Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 80) discussed how, in the industrial era, ‘[t]he nation-led approach supported hierarchical and harmonizing regional policies, but these do not seem to function in the information era’ as the availability of timely and focused information allows local ‘actors’ (2007, p. 81) to become involved in policy and decision making.

Aula and Harmaakorpi (2008, p. 524) believed that ‘innovation and good reputation are seen to be important sources of regional competitiveness’. In trying to gain a greater understanding of the importance of regions in driving innovation, Aula and Harmaakorpi provided a case study of the Lahti region which is one of the largest urban regions in Finland. They chose this region as ‘it is the only urban district without a university of its own, which results in a lower level of research compared to the other large urban regions’ (2008, p. 530). In this case study they examined a variety of population statistics and review the innovation strategies developed by all nine large Finnish urban regions. They then described the specific innovation strategies which had been developed by the Lahti Region. Aula and Harmaakorpi discussed how regions may be examined through a number of lenses including evolutionary and institutional economics, network theory, innovation and learning systems and sociology. This article included an examination of the literature on regional development and used this to argue that regional economic development is enhanced by innovation. Both statistical and qualitative data were provided to support their argument that innovative capability is a positive factor in building regional competitiveness. They stated that ‘in a vast array of literature the regional level is strongly growing in importance as a reasonable entity in assessing economic growth and socio-institutional adjustment’ (Aula & Harmaakorpi 2008, p. 524).

In a critical review of theories of regional innovation, Danish researcher Lorentzen (2008, p. 538) stated that ‘ideas of regional embeddedness … face the problem that theoretically there is no definition of what a region is and, empirically, the territories researched are quite different in size and status – from states, provinces, countries, city regions or groups of villages’, but, despite this view, still asserted that competitive advantage will be driven
from the local level as ‘the source of growth and competitiveness is to be found in the local environment’ (2008, p. 533). This view was supported by UK based researchers Moulaert and Sekia (2003) who discussed the interplay between regional ‘growth and development factors such as human capital, local business culture and schooling systems, infrastructure, quality of production factors and systems, and learning from the regional experience for renewed regional development’ (2003, p. 290) in contributing towards regional innovation. They defined economic growth, in which ‘inputs that are at least partly available or generated locally’; socio-cultural factors such as ‘cultural needs and community identity’; and the political dimension, ‘relative to political decision making and involvement of regional groups and individuals in the policy process’ as factors in regional endogenous development theory (2003, p. 296).

In developing successfully, regions need to build capabilities in the areas of learning, networking, leadership, innovation and being visionary (Harmaakorpi 2006, p. 1087) and successful regions have been defined as being characterised by four factors: ‘a plethora of civic associations, a high level of interaction between social groups, coalitions which crossed individual interests, and a strong sense of common purpose’ (Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour 1999, p. 119). As mentioned earlier, the G21 Region, which is the subject of this research, is defined as an inner region. However, it is the presence of these four factors which give the area a sense of identity which differentiates it from other geographic locations in the area.

### 3.4.1 City regions

Mouawad (2009) discussed the UK Government’s increasing interest in the role played by regions and their defined need for ‘strong and prosperous communities’ (2009, p. 203). According to Mouawad, ‘the main driver of the issues raised [by the Government] ... is concern about strengthening economic competitiveness in a globalising economic context, facilitated through inter-municipal cross border cooperation within city regions’ (2009, p. 203). He used a case study approach to examine the economic development of the city region of Manchester in England, and discussed the importance placed on city regions by the UK Government due to ‘concern about strengthening economic competitiveness in a globalising economic context’ (2009, p. 203.

Mouawad considered that the research conducted into modern European cities indicated that their more autonomous nature is resulting in greater proactivity and entrepreneurism, and he saw the city region as the new driver for economic success (Mouawad 2009, p. 204). Mouawad’s role as the leader of the group, which had the task of developing the
city region concept for Manchester, enabled him to provide some detail about the processes undertaken. His paper described the economic imperatives which led to the city region model being adopted by the UK Government. However, his paper is brief with little examination of the literature, covering description of the early stages of development of Manchester as a city region, rather than a critical review of how effective the model was in achieving the economic aims of the Government. It does not discuss the impact of the project on Mouawad as the leader or on the other members of the group.

According to Sacco and Blessi (2009), the growing prominence of regions is occurring in an era in which the boundaries between many nations are becoming more blurred. This results in national identities becoming less meaningful, and the city region needed to deal with increasing demands with regard to infrastructure, transport, labour market efficiency, ‘environmental sustainability and quality of life, ... production and dissemination of ideas, ... attainment of education and research excellence and ... vitality of the cultural sphere’ (Sacco and Blessi 2009, p. 1118).

As regions begin to coalesce, particularly city regions, they will have to deal with what Dunn, McGuirk and Winchester (1995, p. 149) defined as the ‘territorial parochialism’ of cities. They believed that the changing identities of regions are socially constructed (1995, p. 150) and have their own distinct personalities (1995, p. 151). Australian researcher Hodge (1996) compared the geographic, social and economic conditions in Western Sydney to more affluent parts of Sydney and examined why the decision was taken to consider these more affluent suburbs as the location for a new university rather than siting it in Parramatta which contained a wider pool of potential students than the other locations. In examining the types of personalities and identities which different regions develop, Hodge discussed the problems which can arise when labels such as ‘disadvantaged’ are placed on regions and concluded that these introduce ‘notions of empowerment and disempowerment’ (1996, p. 35). In his case study examination of Western Sydney which he stated is viewed as ‘homogenous’, he described that region as actually being ‘a diverse and contested space more adequately portrayed as a variety of western Sydneys’ (2008, p. 36).

In their examination of the Bicocca city region in Italy, Sacco and Blessi (2009) also discussed the diversity of communities and businesses which have resulted from that city’s urban renewal program. They stated that city regions ‘must be regarded as multifaceted hubs where all aspects of contemporary living — production, residence, leisure, social relationships, personal expression — tend to occur in the same, deeply layered economic and social space’ (2009, p. 1118). This describes the G21 region in which this research is located.
Mouawad stated that the drivers for the development of successful and dynamic City Regions include ‘driving economic competitiveness and skills development; supporting and facilitating investment in transport infrastructure; and building sustainable communities’ (2009, p. 204), whilst Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002, pp. 16-17) proposed that regions can develop programs which involve a strong vision, community cooperation, result in the development of new regional processes and turn sentiment into action. In doing this, regions can find different ways of working and, in the process, become more creative and innovative. Tura and Harmaakorpi (2005, p. 1113) viewed this as being as much a social process as a technical one.

3.4.2 Learning regions

The concept of the ‘learning organisation’ was developed by Garratt (1987) and Senge (1990). The researchers included in this section of the Literature Review extended this work to create the concept of ‘learning regions’ and the importance of the learning process to innovation and economic prosperity. In a theoretical article, US researcher Florida (1995) discussed the rise of knowledge based capitalism in most parts of the world and believed that the role of regions in this process is poorly understood. He examined the importance of knowledge and learning in the ‘new’ capitalism and used the literature to examine the development of theories and practices with regard to the learning region. According to Florida (1995, p. 528) ‘learning regions, as their name implies, function as collectors and repositories of knowledge and ideas, and provide an underlying environment or infrastructure which facilitates the flow of knowledge, ideas and learning’. He believed that regions are similar to a knowledge based business, needing to build capabilities in ‘continuous improvement, new ideas, knowledge creation and continuous learning’ (1995, p. 532). The regional development network examined by this researcher has grappled with ways in which they might contribute to the collection and dissemination of knowledge within the G21 Region.

US researchers Christopherson and Clark (2010) examined the literature with regard to the ways in which European and American universities work with regional governments, other parts of the education sector, business and the community to build competitive economic advantage. According to the authors, ‘[t]he learning region is about practice as well as ideas’ (2010, p. 121). They also examined ‘potential conflicts arising from the relative power of private and public interests in determining the learning region agenda’ (2010, p. 122). These are issues with which the G21 region is dealing. The region has a local university which is working to build relationships with a number of private sector
organisations in order to commercialise the research being developed by the university. This public private partnership process is in the early stages, but shows some promise with regard to building some competitive advantage for the region.

Knowledge and learning in the modern economy are vitally important factors and learning is a collective process which is dynamic and synergistic (Harmaakorpi & Melkas 2005, p. 642), whilst knowledge has been recognised as a valuable resource in its own right by economists (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, p. 245). As well as learning from their successes, groups need to also learn from their failures in order to do things better in the future (Sotaarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 13).

In working to increase the learning capability of regions, Finnish researcher Harmaakorpi (2006) developed ‘a tool for assessing the regional potentials on which sustainable, competitive advantage could be built’ (2006, p. 1085) in a regional environment and analysed the effectiveness of using this tool in the Lahti region of Finland. According to Harmaakorpi, ‘The objective of the ... study is to develop and conceptualize an innovation policy tool for designing and running regional innovation systems in order to increase sustainable regional competitiveness’ (2006, p. 1086). The innovation tool, which Harmaakorpi called the Regional Development Platform Method:

- consists of eight phases: (i) analysis of the changing techno-economic paradigm and benchmarking through the assessment of regional innovation system theories and conventions, (ii) background study of the industries and areas of expertise in the region, (iii) expert panels, (iv) assessment of future scenarios, (v) definition of potential development platforms, (vi) conceptualization of the regional innovation system, (vii) search of the core processes of the regional innovation system and (viii) definition of knowledge creation and management system (2006, p. 1091).

Harmaakorpi stated that ‘regional learning capability can be defined as a regional innovation system’s ability to create and manage knowledge in a collective, interactive and cumulative learning process leading to new settings of resources, competencies and skills’ (2006, p. 1088). The G21 Skills Taskforce struggled to develop a workable process for learning from the knowledge gained from its experiences and so was unable to maximise its regional learning capability.

In their examination of regional innovation systems, Moulaert and Sekia (2003, p. 290) reflected on the work undertaken by ‘regional economists, geographers and planners’ in developing ‘new’ models of regional development. They critically reviewed the main features of a number of such models and then analysed the models for ‘conceptual clarity’
(2003, p. 290), finding that many of them were conceptually ambiguous due to the
different ways in which the models were theorised. This included varying concepts of
what comprises innovation and the terminology used in its description; and differing
interpretations of agglomeration in regional economics. They also found that there were
‘a large range of interpretations and combinations’ of the economic, social and political
factors which are included in many of these theories (2003, p. 296). In undertaking this
analysis, Moulaert and Sekai discussed ‘the role of collective learning, which in turn refers
to deep cooperative relationships between members of the system’ (2003, p. 293) and
this process needs to be facilitated by regional leadership, particularly as regional
development networks come into being (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen, 2007, p. 84).

3.5 **Networks**

A central determinant of the network society is that dynamics, activities
and processes are increasingly organised in networks and participation
in the networks and network dynamics are critical sources of power.
Paradoxically, at the same time, it would appear that the sources of
global competitiveness are increasingly dependent on local economic,
political and social institutions, processes and networks (Sotarauta &
Viljamaa 2002, p. 3).

Finnish researchers Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 81) believed that ‘regions
must build their prosperity in a new, network-based environment’ and discussed the
various types of networks which occur in regional settings (2007, p. 85). They defined
three archetypes of networks. These include what they described as the ‘large and loose’
network in which some members may have different values and may not know each
other, and in which members may form cliques or coalitions with different ideas about how
to progress the work of the group (2007, p. 86). The second network archetype is the
‘ssmall, homogenous, public sector network’ in which members know each other well, have
similar values and have a clear task and shared vision (2007, p. 87). The final archetype
of network described by Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 86) is the ‘heterogeneous,
multi-actor, innovation network’, the characteristics of which are:

- ‘the members come from different sectors of society;
- the network has a commonly accepted goal;
- interactive learning is emphasized in getting results;
- it produces several sub-networks; and
the commonly accepted coordinator steers the activities’ (2007, p. 86).

Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen discussed these different types of networks in terms of both the literature for a theoretical examination, and from a case study of networks in the Lahti Region of Finland. They found that these networks were not only important from an economic point of view but also from a sociological point of view, as networks have become ‘one of the basic forms of social organisation’ (2007, p. 82).

This is a particularly useful article as it enables readers to identify the particular types of networks with which they are concerned and this then assists them to consider the most appropriate strategies for such a network. This differentiation of types of networks is also a useful construct for those who work with networks, including stakeholders and consultants. By understanding the different network characteristics, it is then possible to consider the types of interventions which may be useful to assist those networks to achieve their objectives. For example, a ‘small homogenous, public sector network (Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen 2007, p. 86) may need to consider the need to ensure that external points of view and alternative ways of working are considered lest they become too insular and resistant to change. On the other hand, a ‘heterogeneous, multi-actor, innovation network (Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen 2007, p. 87) may choose to work on identifying the areas of mutual gain and common interest, and initiating robust communication processes to ensure that the engagement of members and stakeholders is maintained.

A number of researchers examined the effectiveness of regional networks of firms seeking to innovate (Pekkarinen & Harmaakorpi 2006, p. 402), the capacity for businesses to cluster in order to create competitive advantage (Harmaakorpi & Melkas 2005, p. 644) and the use of networks to build competencies through partnerships with other organisations (Davide Parrilli & Sacchetti 2008, p. 392). The same benefits can be accrued by members of regional development networks.

Other researchers outlined specific components of networks. In their empirical research into part of the Lahti Region in Finland, Kallio, Harmaakorpi and Pihkala (2009, p. 304) discussed the way in which networks are bound through the relationships of those involved, and defined the strength of a tie as ‘a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy and the reciprocal services that characterise the tie’ (2009, p. 304). They commented that it was important for an innovation system such as a network to have both strong and weak ties because ‘[s]trong ties include a common language and high level of trust, whereas weak ties enable the flow of novel information to the system’ (2009, p. 304).
3.6 Community responsiveness and mobilisation

In building an understanding of how regions operate, it is useful to view the region in terms of the communities which live and function within its boundaries. Research has been undertaken into the capacity of a community to mobilise in response to natural disasters (Dunbar 2007), health issues (Lindsay, Shields & Stajhuhar 1999; Lindsey, Stajhauhar & McGuinness 2001), local planning and development (Amdam 2000) and disability rights (Rummery 2004). This thesis examines the processes which the G21 Skills Taskforce uses to try to mobilise sections of the community to develop strategies to deal with regional skills shortages.

Another lens through which communities can be viewed involves analysing the ways in which local labour markets operate. In her examination of welfare versus ‘workfare’ labour markets, German researcher Dingeldey (2007) compared theoretical constructs against empirical case studies of labour market policies in Denmark, the UK and Germany. Her analysis included comparisons of spending as a percentage of GDP; participant inflow to the national labour market; as well as numbers of participants in work placements, training and counselling programs.

Activating labour market policy ... is supposed to play a central role within the paradigm shift of welfare state policies. It is understood to involve a mix of the enforcement of labour market participation, the conditioning of rights and growing obligations of the individual at one side, and an increase of services in order to promote employability and restore social equity at the other (Dingeldey 2007, p. 823).

Dingeldey discussed the ‘notions of the “enabling” and the “activating” state … that highlight changes in the governance of the public-private mix’ and found that, whilst the evidence points to some similarity in approach, ‘[d]ifferent welfare state types keep on producing different mixes of workfare and enabling policies’ (2007, p. 823). Whilst most labour market policy is likely to be developed at a national or state level, these different mixes are likely to be enacted within local communities.

In his theoretical article, Amdam (2003) analysed the policy change taken by the Norwegian Government to increase the role of the County Communes in Norway in the regional planning process. This was done to move ‘from vertical government to horizontal government’ (2003, p. 440). In analysing the importance of communities in undertaking regional planning, Amdam discussed the importance of trust and cooperation between public and private organisations, as well as with the community if that community is to be mobilised effectively to meet regional challenges. Amdam believed that, whilst external
stakeholders can stimulate this process, only the community and its members can effect proactive change. In his examination of these issues, Amdam discussed the challenges to regional planning, the importance of regional industry and research universities to innovation and concluded that the community itself plays a very important role in regional development through entrepreneurs and networks.

In attempting to understand how a community can best respond to local issues, it is useful to consider what is meant by the word ‘community’. Canadian researchers Dalby and Mackenzie (1997) undertook a comparative study of two communities: one in Nova Scotia and a second in the Outer Hebrides in Scotland, each of which faced a threat to their economic security. Their comparative study examined the structure of the communities; the specific threat which they faced – in each case the proposal to locate a ‘superquarry’ in their community; and the ways in which each community responded to that threat. In doing this, they drew ‘on contemporary geopolitical literature to theorise community identity as partly formulated in response to external “threats”’ (1997, p. 99). According to Dalby and Mackenzie, ‘communities have often been understood in terms of geographically specifiable entities linked to particular places ... focused on the internal and local origins of identities that have a regionally-specific flavor, or focused on the economic circumstances of particular places in the changing global economy’ (1997, p. 100).

In his theoretical article, Storper (2005) examines the literature from the disciplines of economics and sociology to discuss the difference between society, which he describes as ‘interactions coordinated through anonymous, rule-bound, transparent exchanges’ (2005, p. 32) and community ‘in which people are tied together through tradition, interpersonal contacts, informal relationships, and particularistic affinities’ (2005, p. 31). He differentiated society, which he defined as involving rules to govern how individuals will live together, from community which involves the social bonds between individuals and groups, and asked ‘which is most important to social and economic development?’ (2005, p. 31). According to Storper, ‘[c]ommunities improve the functioning of labor markets, generate entrepreneurship, and organize the provision of the public goods that alleviate both private and state burdens in creating prosperity and social integration’ (2005, p. 32).

Researchers have examined methods of activating the community through strategies such as participatory action research (Kelly 2005), labour market programs (Cameron & Gibson 2005) and public-private partnerships (Andersen 2004; Diez 2000).
Scottish researcher Clunies-Ross (2005) undertook an examination of the existing national funding structures which have been used to assist poorer countries and posited that wealth can be created within communities which have been empowered to address their own local issues. She stated that ‘community mobilization, appropriately structured, can greatly enhance the amenities and earning power of poor rural and urban people, while also potentially promoting social harmony’ (2005, p. 331). According to Clunies-Ross, allocation of resources for community mobilisation may be made available ‘if an initial vision and trust can be created and structures set up which ensure that contributions are not wasted, that all participants are likely to benefit, and that there is universal participation by contributor-beneficiaries’ (2005, p. 334).

3.7 Social capital

In working to develop a powerful and effective region and to initiate community mobilisation and engagement, it is important to build cohesion and a sense of shared identity within the community. This requires the development of extensive, strong relationships, and this will require the presence of both social and human capital. The researcher believes that social capital involves the process of building trust and mutually beneficial relationships between individuals and groups.

Finnish researchers, Tura and Harmaakorpi (2005) examined social capital in terms of its relationship to regional innovation, which they argue is a social process. The paper introduces a conception of social capital defining it functionally as a field-specific social resource of an actor. This conception is applied to analyse social capital as a central element in enhancing regional innovative capability’ (Tura & Harmaakorpi, 2005, p. 1111). Tura and Harmaakorpi discuss the issue of varying, and sometimes contradictory, understandings of social capital due to the different theoretical schools of thought (2005, p. 1114).

Italian researchers Sacco and Blessi (2009) used a case study approach to analyse the Bicocca district in the metropolitan core of Milan, which ‘has experienced a radical change in its social, economic and environmental profile as a consequence of the transition from a heavily industrial development model to a characteristically post-industrial one’ (2009, p. 1115) in order to ‘investigate the relationships between cultural activities/investments and urban transformation processes’ (2009, p. 1115). They described social capital as consisting of ‘a shared pool of norms, informal rules, conventions and practices connecting members of a group and allowing them to coordinate their actions in order to reach common goals’ (2009, p. 1120). They further described human capital as ‘the
“competence base” created by education, skills development and training, and the purposeful gathering of information and experience’. US based researcher Portes (1998, p. 7) stated that ‘whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital adheres in the structure of their relationships’. All of these characteristics are important in the development of a strong region.

In his case study examination of the contribution made by social capital to the success of the Basque industrial cooperative Mondragon, Spanish researcher Lizarralde (2009, p. 27) ‘describes the development of the Mondragon cooperative movement around a four-pillared structure which includes training, research, enterprise promotion, and financial and social support’. He described social capital as “the missing ingredient” in successful practice that economics cannot explain’ and believed that ‘high trust, learning capacity and networking competence are now widely perceived to be associated with relative economic and social success’ (2009, p. 28). Whilst Lizzaralde claimed that these views are ‘widely perceived’, he did not provide any specific evidence to support this comment. He described social capital as involving a shared value system, which includes trust and reciprocity, and manifesting itself in formal social interaction through entities such as networks.

In developing social capital and building a unified approach to regional development, it is important to articulate the values and skills necessary within the group. Wilson (1997, p. 746) stated:

Whether the focus is community economic development, community social development or strengthening local democracy, productive social capital rests on the values of trust and openness. The role of the professional as technical expert, master planner or manager will be embedded in the larger role as catalyst, facilitator, communicator, team-player.

According to Woolcock and Narayan’s (2000, p. 226) examination of the literature, ‘those communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and civic associations are in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability’. However, they also warned that some social capital theorists assume that ‘communities are homogenous entities that automatically include and benefit all members’ (2000, p. 230). In analysing the relationships within communities which have experienced extreme poverty, civil war or endemic crime, they were concerned that ‘the social ties individuals have can be both a blessing and a blight’ where those ties relate to misuse of power relationships and do not enable the community to build strong ties outside the community in order to access resources.
Social capital may also become unproductive or self-destructive. This can occur when the region becomes too insular and complacent, resulting in networks which are not responsive to external stimuli such as new information and changing circumstances (Harmaakorpi & Melkas 2005, p. 643) and in which the network closes itself off from new information and new ways of seeing the world (Tura & Harmaakorpi, 2005 p. 1116). Dysfunctional social capital can also result from an environment of fear or hate where the group sees the outside world as a threat (Wilson, 1997 p. 747).

3.8 Leadership

3.8.1 Leadership practices in community groups and not for profit organisations

Specific research devoted to leadership practices, styles and traits in regional development networks is limited (Sotarauta 2005, p. 54). It may therefore be useful to examine leadership in other settings such as in community groups, not-for-profit organisations, bridging groups and those organisations or industries which may have a public service orientation such as the health and education industries, to see if there are parallels in these examples.

Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010) examined the relationship between servant leadership and trust building through a quantitative survey conducted with teaching and administrative staff in two Indonesian universities. The psychometric survey questionnaire included 35 items comprising six behavioural dimensions. Their findings indicated that trust is perceived to occur when the leader demonstrates the personal qualities of integrity, communication and strong moral behaviours, rather than through an authority position.

Marinelli-Poole, McGilvray and Lynes (2011) discussed leadership in the health industry in New Zealand, using an examination of the practices in two New Zealand health boards and found that:

[e]ffective and sustainable leadership occurs when individuals develop practices which are then enacted and reflected upon. When these practices are consistently applied in context, leaders are better able to engage others with the complex challenges that their organisations face in a manner that is well considered, timely, highly focused on intent and action, but expansive in thinking (2011, p. 256).

The practices they identified included viewing leadership as a complex collective endeavour which cuts across organisations.

McMullen and Adobor (2010, p. 715) discussed ‘the emergence of new and
unconventional forms of intermediary organizations dedicated to fostering multiparty or cross-sector collaboration’, and asserted that leaders in such groups operate in very complex environments which ‘place multiple, conflicting and significant pressures on such leaders’ and in which ‘a bridge leader needs to navigate the conflicting expectations of different stakeholders without the usual sources of power’ (2010, p. 716). McMullen and Adobor defined bridging organisations as independent and providing a structure for collaboration between other organisations. They used a case study approach to examine one bridging organisation in the North East of the United States. Data was collected over a two and a half year period and included interviews, analysis of documents and participant observation. Their findings included the identification of specific bridge leadership behaviours such as championing, building relational capital, communication skills, managing expectations and the ability to recognise and celebrate others’ efforts (2010, p. 724).

Leadership has also been researched in the context of voluntary and not-for-profit organisations and groups. Schneider and George (2010) tested the efficacy of transformational and servant leadership in volunteer organisations by surveying 110 leaders and members of eight service clubs. Their results indicated that servant leadership was suited to volunteer organisations, due to the empowering nature of this type of leadership which ‘motivate and guide followers, offer hope, and provide a more caring experience through established quality relationships’ (2010, p. 63). Schneider and George’s (2010) survey results indicated that servant leadership resulted in higher levels of empowerment in members.

With regard to leadership in not-for-profit organisations, Githens (2009) used an insider action research methodology to conduct a twelve month analysis of his role as the leader of a human resource development professional group which was trying to revitalise itself, and had members complete an anonymous survey at the end of the project about whether leadership had been shared within the group. Githens realised that his group ‘lacked a collective professional identity’ (2009, p. 417), that he needed to foster open dialogue, deal with the power relationships within the group and balance the ‘leader’ and ‘facilitator’ roles.

Two Australian studies examined leadership in not-for-profit organisations. The first, conducted by McMurray et al. (2009) explored ‘the effects of leadership on organisational climate, employee psychological capital, commitment and wellbeing in a religious/church based non-profit organization’ (2009, p. 436). The research team conducted five focus groups and used the resulting themes to develop a pre-test for the pilot study. Secondly, a number of scalar instruments were used with 43 completed surveys being received – a
fairly low response rate of 21.5%. The study found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and the level of empowerment within the organisation. McMurray et al. (2009, p. 451) stated that ‘more research is required on the complexities of enacting leadership in non-profit environments that arguably rely on different leadership approaches to private enterprises in order to achieve outcomes’.

The second Australian study, undertaken by Sarros, Cooper and Santora (2010) was designed to ‘investigate the relationships among leadership vision, organizational culture, and support for innovation in not-for-profit (NFP) and FP organizations’ (2010, p. 291). The sample for the study was drawn from the membership of the Australian Institute of Management, with 2,380 completed surveys returned – a 37% response rate over the five month period in which the survey was conducted. The surveys were designed to measure leadership vision, organisational culture and support for innovation. The research team used path analysis to analyse the data and compared the responses from members of not-for-profit and for-profit organisations. They found that ‘NFPs scored higher on a socially responsible cultural orientation’ whilst ‘FPs scored more highly on a competitive culture orientation as expected’ (2010, p. 300). They also found that ‘leadership vision and support for innovation were partially mediated by socially responsible cultures’ (2010, p. 300). This would seem to indicate that leaders of not-for-profit groups need to be aware of the socially responsible orientation when working with the group to identify goals and strategies for success.

As can be seen from the articles discussed in this section, there appear to be some similarities between the characteristics required to lead not-for-profits, volunteer and service oriented organisations with those characteristics identified in research on effective leadership of regional development networks. These characteristics relate to the leader’s ability to effectively engage and inspire other members of the group through vision, communication and facilitation skills. Leadership in a regional development network does not result from the actions of one single nominated individual but, rather, is the result of the actions of a group of individuals who want to make a change and achieve ‘joint and/or separate aims, consciously or unconsciously’ (Sotarauta 2005, p. 59).

3.8.2 Network leadership

Much of the research with regard to regional development networks relates to structure, purpose and learning, rather than considering the role of leadership in a voluntary network (Sotarauta 2005, p. 54). Sotarauta (2005, p. 55) notes that:
‘The nastiest question usually is not what should be done but how to do it; for example, how a fragmented bunch of actors, resources, competencies, ideas and visions can be pulled together, how people can be mobilized, how a new perception about the region and its futures can be created’.

The role of leadership is vital in achieving these aims, but the issue is whether leadership in networks, particularly regional development networks, is the same or different as that which has been extensively researched in business organisations. It appears that a combination of authority and enthusiasm is necessary in regional development networks (Sotarauta 2005, pp. 56-57).

According to Baker and Kan (2011, p. 855) ‘recent theoretical writing on leadership in networks tends to assume that network leadership needs to be different, but with little empirical evidence to support this’.

The advent of the networked society has had an impact on power and influence and how leadership is used (Sotarauta and Viljamaa 2002, p. 2), and in which ‘no single organization is capable of such effective development work alone as that which can be achieved in cooperation with other development organizations’ (2002, p. 2). Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 14) stated that ‘in networks shared power and leadership should be accepted – no single development organization could easily take precedence over others in issues of regional development’.

Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 84) used a case study methodology to examine leadership in the context of regional development networks and posed the questions ‘what is network leadership in today’s regional development environment, and how does leadership differ in different regional networks?’ (2007, p. 81). Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen used the Lahti Region in Finland to gather empirical evidence, supported by their examination of the literature, to form the basis of their framework of three network types. Their framework presented a robust argument for the different types of leadership which they identified as ‘an action, which directs all the operations and resources of the network to the desired direction’. The volunteer nature of many regional development networks and the lack of a formal hierarchical authority mean that, ‘in the case of regional development, the role of leadership in a network-based operating environment is particularly essential’ (2007, p. 84). Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) developed a framework of three different archetypes of regional development networks and then used a panel of three experienced network leaders to identify a range of different leadership characteristics which are required and identify capabilities such as ‘negotiation, communication, persuasion, trade and visionary skills, ... organizing complex projects,'
managing conflicts and anomalies, as well as processing and disseminating information’ (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen (2007, p. 83), and identified as important the ability to:

- involve people and empower them to act as a network;
- make people work to reach joint separate goals and renew the goals in an ongoing process;
- promote interaction serving as an intermediary in interaction between actors, as well as steering activities towards seeking goals and enabling cooperation;
- connect various actors to the cluster from their own starting points;
- create and utilize creative tension in development and create a sense of drama. This means presenting issues so that people become enthusiastic and excited;
- get short-term success so as to sustain motivation; and
- form partnerships competently and to efficiently utilize informal relations (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen (2007, p. 83).

The capabilities identified by Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) deal with the interpersonal skills needed by leaders of regional development networks, rather than those leaders being able to rely on the authority of their leadership position.

Sotarauta (2005, p. 62) also identified a number of important regional leadership capabilities as shown in the diagram below:

![Figure 9 - Capability model for regions (Sotarauta 2005, p. 62)](image)

According to Sotarauta (2005, p. 67), strategic capability refers to ‘the ability to make decisions about what to focus on in regional development in the long run, and thus to set the strategic direction for many development efforts’. Interpretive capabilities involve the ability to understand various mental models and concepts (2005, p. 66), whilst
combinative or networking capabilities include the ability to build trust and facilitate joint work (2005, p. 65). Absorptive capability relates to the ability to adapt readily to the changing environment (2005, p. 66) and excitement capability refers to ‘the ability to create and utilize creative tension in development work’ (2005, p. 68). An understanding of these capabilities is very useful for those examining leadership in regional development. Considering the gaps in the capabilities described here will assist regional development networks to seek members who are able to bring such needed capabilities to the group.

One of the key requirements of leadership in a regional development network is to gain cooperation from members and to find the common ground which will enable those members to work towards a common purpose. To do this, an understanding of Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1991) is useful. This theory includes four elements, the first of which is individuality, or a realisation that people are different and understanding these differences will facilitate negotiation. The second component, experience, indicates that people make sense of the world based on their own personal histories and their decisions will be made in that context. The third element, sociality, involves exposing members to the views of others so that different perspectives can be appreciated; and the final component of Personal Construct Theory is commonality, or finding the common experiences which provide a starting point for communication and negotiation (Ackermann & Eden 2011, p. 296).

The Sotarauta (2005, p. 67) model and the Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1991) are very useful for regional leadership to examine in order to identify the types of people who are likely to contribute the necessary capabilities and insights which are needed in any type of regional development network. The two constructs provide an indication of the skills and experience necessary to both develop and implement sound structures and strategies to the work of the network, as well as in understanding the ‘human’ side of network operations. Those networks which focus on structural capabilities and ignore the human elements run the risk of alienating members and stakeholders; whilst those which spend all of their time in trying to make people feel valued and trusted at the expense of developing robust strategies and relevant structures can find themselves unable to achieve the network’s objectives.

These various capabilities need to work in harmony in order for leadership to be effectively enacted in a regional development network. As stated by Claxton, Lucas and Webster (2010, p. 27) when discussing the importance of general leadership characteristics:
it is important to remember that, in action, they do not function alone or in a neat sequence, but weave together in intricate and ever-changing ways. If we look at each [capability] as an instrument, we should think of them as instruments in a jazz ensemble, not playing in isolation, but interacting and responding to each other, and to the shifting energies and responses in the audience.

3.8.3 Shared or distributed leadership

A number of researchers examined the concept of shared or distributed leadership (Amdam 2004; Harris 2008; Cope, Kempster & Parry 2011; Edwards 2011; Ocker et al. 2011; Berber & Rofcanin 2012)

While the terms used to describe these leadership models include dispersed, devolved, democratic, distributive, collaborative, collective, co-operative, concurrent, co-ordinated, relational and co-leadership, the terms shared and distributed leadership are by far the most common (Fitzsimons, Turnbull & Denyer 2011, p. 313).

Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) viewed network leadership frequently as an indirect process in which network members are influenced to become champions of the network within their own organisations. They believed that leadership needs to occur at the strategic, tactical and operational levels of the network, but that the depth of emphasis on each of these components will vary depending on the type of network (2007, p. 89). The expert panel used by Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen identified a number of personal network leadership characteristics such as:

- logical thinking, perseverance, visionary thinking, creativity, all-round education, consistency and charisma. Rather than the traditional command and control type of leadership which is often seen in organisations, the importance of communications and networking skills in regional development networks were highly emphasised. In particular, negotiation skills and ability to listen to others were seen to be crucial (2007, p. 92).

The researcher considers that more research is needed in order to fully understand how leadership is enacted in a network and a new, more indirect form of facilitative leadership is required in a regional network than in the corporate environment, relying more on social skills and the ability of the leader to interact effectively with network members (Sotaarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 4). Sotaarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 17) stated that ‘despite
differences in power and resources, the main empowerment in network management is based on information rather than authority’.

US based researcher Miller (2008) used a qualitative methodology to examine boundary-spanning leadership, leadership which crosses organisational boundaries, in two urban regions of the US in networks comprising university, school and community partnerships. In undertaking the research, Miller used his examination of the literature and two case studies, as well as analysis of records and other documents. From this research, Miller compiled a number of characteristics of boundary-spanning leaders. These included the observation that effective network leaders have extensive contacts which they can use to further the work of the group. According to Miller’s Taskforce members, they are also ‘effective collectors and disseminators of information (2008, p. 357), have the trust of stakeholders, understand the complexities involved in networks with a range of constituents, have excellent interpersonal skills, are able to bring diverse partners to the table, can unite ‘disparate groups around a common cause’ (2008, p. 357) and are able to ‘move freely and flexibly within and between organisations and communities’ (2008, p. 358) to engage with a wide range of stakeholders.

Leaders need to be aware of the values and attitudes within both the group and the community (Sotaarauta and Viljamaa 2002, p. 7) and recognise that, in a network, leadership and followership may be interchangeable depending on the issue or project at hand, resulting in a more collaborative form of leadership (2002, p. 2).

Other researchers also examined the components of successful regional network leadership. Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999, p. 131) described the leader as a change agent, whilst Harmaakorpi, (2006, p. 1088) stated that ‘leadership capability in a networked regional development environment can be defined as a regional innovation system’s ability to effect actions steering the processes and resources of the system in the desired direction’.

Thorpe, Gold and Lawler (2011, pp. 244-247) provided a framework in which distributed leadership was plotted along two axes, the first being whether the activities of the group are planned or emergent, and the second of which is whether that activity is aligned or misaligned, ‘where people may be unaware of or unintentionally ignore the activities of others and the potential benefits of sharing aims and interests’ (2011, p. 245).
According to their model (2011, p. 244), the upper left quadrant, or Classical Distributed Leadership (DL), relates to circumstances where ‘the manager/leader has a clear focus, powerful control and existing structural arrangements through which to operate’ (2011, p. 245). The upper right quadrant, or Mis-planned DL, represents organisations which would like to use distributed leadership but whose structures are not appropriate or whose members are not receptive. The lower left quadrant, Emergent DL, ‘recognises the realities of day-to-day organizational life where the everyday cannot be designed with certainty, and where contradictions and disturbances to work occur’ (2011, p. 246), whilst the lower right quadrant, which they define as Chaotic DL, ‘illustrates a situation where elements of DL may develop locally but in relatively haphazard ways, with a focus on local contexts and goals and without sufficient attention to operations in other parts of the organization’ (2011, p. 246). Whereas other theories of leadership described in this section relate to leadership as it applies to human interactions, Thorpe, Gold and Lawler’s (2011) model relates more to leadership as it applies to structure and operational management. The researcher considers that this aspect of leadership is important as the work of the G21 Skills Taskforce which is the subject of this research has shown that having the ‘right’ structure and operational management for that particular network had a bearing on the capability of the group to achieve its objectives.

3.9 Individual and Group behaviour

The final section of this literature review deals with various aspects of individual and group behaviour, particularly as they may relate to members of regional development networks. These aspects include trust and mutual gain, group identity, relationship building and commitment.
3.9.1 Trust, reciprocity, mutual gain and identity

Effective leadership in regional development networks, as well as in other types of groups, requires the ability to build and maintain trust amongst group members. Literature on marketing strategies discusses the need for product branding and this concept is becoming more popular in relation to cities and regions (Macleod & Jones 2007, Lee 2009; Meijers, Hoekstra & Aguado 2008; Mahnken 2011). This need for a sense of identity is also reflected in the literature on trust which frequently discusses the need for a shared vision, values and goals. Kantabutra (2009) presented the need to articulate the vision in a way which organisational members can understand and with which they can identify.

Christoforou (2011, p. 699), discussed the 'norms and networks of reciprocity, trust and cooperation that facilitate coordinated action for a mutual benefit'. She stated that the development of trust is ‘influenced by more institutional and systemic factors that characterize the social, political and cultural context in which individuals interact’ (2011, p. 700). Christoforou used binary logistic regression models to examine data on individuals which was derived from the European Community Household Panel. This information included data on personal income, education level, housing, health and socio-economic status. Christoforou found that individuals are more likely to become members of social groups when they have higher levels of education, are in their 30s and 40s, have higher levels of income and are more disposed to social and political trust. These descriptors are representative of the organisational leaders who were members of the regional development network examined by the researcher.

According to US researchers Dass and Kumar (2011, p. 1), ‘trust is conceptualized as a social construct that results from long-standing interpersonal relationships’. In their theoretical article, Dass and Kumar (2011, p. 1) developed a mathematical model to analyse the ‘impact of an individual’s economic and social orientation’ in developing trust with other individuals. They posited that economic factors are related to an individual’s expectations of others whilst social factors relate to their past experiences and the influence these have on trust. However, their research indicated that high levels of trust do not necessarily result in reciprocity.

Kottila and Rönni (2008) used a case study approach to examine collaboration and trust along the supply chain in two organic food chains in Finland. They conducted 28 semi-structured interviews and then analysed the communication processes to identify collaboration indicators. Kottila and Rönni (2008) found that the length or frequency of
the organisational relationship did not necessarily indicate a high level of collaboration and trust where the individuals in those organisations changed constantly.

Innes and Booher (1999, p. 412) considered that ‘[c]onsensus building and other forms of collaborative planning are increasingly used for dealing with social and political fragmentation, shared power and conflicting values’. Innes and Booher drew on their own experience in researching a range of consensus building cases to develop a theoretical model which drew on complexity science and communicative rationality; that is establishing the optimum conditions for discourse to occur. They discussed how collaborative planning:

can be understood as part of the societal response to changing conditions in increasingly networked societies, where power and information are widely distributed, where differences in knowledge and values among individuals and communities are growing, and where accomplishing anything significant or innovative requires creating flexible linkages among many players (Innes & Booher 1999, p. 412).

Australian researcher Dovey (2009, p. 311) presented a conceptual paper which ‘explores the role of trust in the collaborative learning processes that underpin innovation as a competitive strategy’. Dovey (2009, p. 311) stated that ‘[i]n a global context ... continuous renewal based upon proactive learning and knowledge generation practices becomes an important leadership responsibility’. He claimed that innovation is a critical strategy in that renewal process and that trust is essential in developing an environment in which innovation can occur. Dovey (2009) described the ‘building blocks’ for developing trust which have been defined by Nelson Mandela. These included identifying stakeholders and agreeing on the vision and values for the group; building respect for each other; honouring commitments; and ensuring forgiveness and reconciliation where mistakes occur. Dovey (2009) also examined the leadership dimensions which are necessary to build trust, and asserted that the actual structure of the group can influence levels of trust. He stated that ‘[t]rust is structurally induced in strongly networked emergent organisational structures ... that are driven by a mobilising vision and shared values’ whilst ‘stocks of trust are depleted through the layering of authority levels (and) segregation of functions’ (Dovey 2009, p. 317). In the cognitive dimension, he believed that the ongoing interactions resulting from membership of various networks will build shared frames of reference which facilitate knowledge sharing, which are inhibited by the siloed nature of some functional structures. Finally, in the relational dimension, Dovey proposed that the ongoing social encounters will ‘develop social norms concerning the virtue of a covenantal culture in which voluntary cooperation, reciprocity of obligation and
equal commitment to a shared future are a feature’ (2009, p. 317). Dovey (2009) also discussed the need for the group to consider how power will be used to ensure that trust can be maintained. To do this, Dovey (2009, p. 320) stated that ‘leadership oriented towards sustainable organizational success always manages power in the interests of the stakeholder community’ rather than for the self-promotion of the leader.

US researchers Holste and Fields (2010) also examined trust in relation to knowledge sharing and use. They used multivariate regression to analyse data collected from 202 individuals from a global non-profit organisation. The data collected related to the respondents’ willingness to share and use tacit organisational knowledge. They found that both ‘affect-based and cognition-based trust are positively related to a worker’s willingness to share and use tacit knowledge’ (2010, p. 134) and suggested that organisations seeking to improve the transfer and use of tacit knowledge need to invest in activities which will build trust rather than simply improving information technology systems.

Knowledge management was also examined by Capó-Vicdeo, Mula and Capó (2011), who used social network analysis and a case study of a Spanish construction supply chain to test their ‘social network-based model for improving knowledge management in multi-level supply chains’ (2011, p. 379). Their model was predicated on the need for certain conditions relating to both the industry and the specific supply chain to be met. These conditions included the need for collaboration for mutual gain, reciprocated confidence, the ability to see things from the ‘global’ perspective, strong communication and innovation. The authors suggested that organisations need a better understanding of their knowledge creation and transfer processes and they provide a sample of a knowledge network model which they believe will assist in this process. They also stated that the development of ‘inter-organizational networks [will] encourage knowledge exchange and creation’ (Capó-Vicdeo, Mula & Capó 2011, p. 386) as mutual confidence is built between members.

According to Camén, Gottfidsson and Rundh (2011), it is important for there to be some form of contract between partners if trust is to be established and consolidated. In reaching this conclusion, they used a qualitative approach in their examination of 21 formal contracts within the public transport sector. The authors discussed the need for negotiation on required outcomes and the necessary systems and processes needed to achieve those outcomes, and see the contract, covenant, etc. as defining each partner’s contribution and as acting as a communication tool (Camén, Gottfidsson & Rundh 2011). Trust can be difficult to develop where there is competition between network members,
such as some of those involved in the G21 Skills Taskforce. The issue of ‘partner opportunism’ was discussed by US based researchers Das and Rahman (2009) in their conceptual paper which was based on a review of the literature, and they proposed a framework which they believed was suitable for testing through empirical research. Das and Rahman (2010, p. 55) proposed that this issue was important as ‘strategic alliances are becoming more and more a necessity for ensuring a competitive edge’. They discussed the scarcity of research which has been done in the area of partner opportunism which they defined as ‘behavior ... that is motivated to pursue its self-interest with deceit to achieve gains at the expense of the other alliance members’ (Das & Rahman 2010, p. 57). Thus, partner opportunism is the opposite to the concept of mutual gain, which is one of the underpinning values needed for trust to establish within a regional development network. Das and Rahman (2010) discussed some of the behaviours which may indicate that partner opportunism exists. These include dishonesty in the relationship, evading responsibility and refusing to adapt to required circumstances. They hypothesised that partner opportunism will be reduced where members have an equity interest in the partnership, through the exchange and sharing of resources, where strong relationships exist, where there are stronger cultural similarities, where there is a congruence between desired goal and where there is a longer term commitment without the pressure for quick results.

Cooperation and mutual dependence can be useful strategies for building trust in groups. Semlinger (2008) presented his analysis of the literature with regard to cooperation and competition in network governance in regional industrial networks in Italy. He contended that regional networks are faced with growing global competition and posited that close cooperation and mutual dependency ‘stimulates and controls cooperative collaboration and ensures ... commitment’ (2008, p. 558). According to Semlinger, ‘a mutually shared understanding of belonging to a corresponding endeavour and an ... understanding of the basic processes, structures, requirements and advantages of such a network is decisive for its development’ (2008, p. 548). He concluded that ‘to coordinate decisions and activities, it is necessary to communicate goals and requirements’ (2008, p. 549).

3.9.2 Building relationships and commitment
If regional development networks are to achieve their shared vision and goals, they must have the capability to establish robust relationships with their stakeholders and to build commitment from those stakeholders as well as their own members. Mainardes et al (2011 p. 229) define a stakeholder as ‘a person, an informal group, an organization or an institution’ influenced by the organisation or network. According to Mainardes et al,
‘stakeholder theory draws on four key academic fields – i.e. sociology, economics, politics and ethics – and especially the literature on corporate planning, systems theory, corporate social responsibility and organizational theory’ (2011 p. 229). They examine how organisations need to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders if they are to successfully achieve their aims. Neville, Bell and Whitwell (2011) discussed stakeholder identification in terms of the legitimacy and power of their claim on the network. In voluntary regional development networks, members and stakeholders may work either in industry or in business units of government, education or community sector agencies. It is therefore useful to examine research which relates to building commitment in a range of environments, not just in regional development networks.

US researchers Henry, Lubell and McCoy (2010) used ‘statistical modelling of network structures to investigate the factors that drive policy network formation in the context of collaborative regional land-use and transportation planning’ in order to ‘analyze the relevance of belief similarity and social capital as two possible drivers of policy network structure’ (2010, p. 419) and used regional planning in California as the vehicle for their research. Henry, Lubell and McCoy (2010, p. 441) found that ‘bonding forms of social capital are critical [if] like-minded agents are to work together effectively’. That is, networks need to find the common ground, vision, values and goals if they are to engage successfully with their own members and other stakeholders. Mawson (2010) uses his own practitioner experience to examine a series of case studies of network development in the West Midlands area of the UK. He also concludes that a strong sense of identity and a cohesive vision are necessary for effective stakeholder engagement.

Spanish researchers Ayuso et al. (2011) used logistic regression analysis to examine their ‘empirical analysis based on an international sample of 656 large companies, drawn from the annual assessment for the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes’ (2011, p. 1399) in order to better understand how internal and external stakeholder engagement impacts on innovation. They examined human resource management systems as a vehicle for engaging internal stakeholders; and relationship building and knowledge sharing as ways of engaging external stakeholders. Ayuso et al (2011, p. 1411) concluded that the ability to ‘establish strong and interactive relationships with their stakeholders [and] the capacity to manage the acquired stakeholder knowledge and transform it into socially and environmentally sustainable innovations’ are key capabilities for organisations seeking to develop an innovation orientation. Regional development networks which are seeking innovative solutions to local issues may need these same capabilities.

Knowledge management, which is an important requirement for many regional development networks, was researched by Mariotti (2011), particularly how ‘knowledge is
recombined and new knowledge generated’ (2011, p. 877). Mariotti used a qualitative and inductive approach to examine knowledge management in the British motorsport industry. She conducted 58 semi-structured interviews with 21 companies, and found that strengthening ties between partners allowed those organisations ‘to combine knowledge in novel or creative ways that would not be possible without joint efforts’ (Mariotti 2011, p. 880). The engagement with stakeholders also enabled the sharing of expert knowledge. This ability to share knowledge and to use this capability to build trust and commitment is important for many types of groups including voluntary regional development networks.

In their examination of open innovation networks, Jarvenpaa and Wernick (2011, p. 521) discussed the importance of ‘embracing external ideas and knowledge along with internal ideas and knowledge. They analysed the operations of networks in Finland through interviews with network members from business, government and the tertiary sector, using a paradox management perspective. In managing paradox tensions, Jarvenpaa and Wernick discussed the need to explore the underlying tensions, reducing anxiety and frustration and taking self-corrective action. They viewed paradoxical tensions as relating to boundaries – that is, ‘the combination of inward/outward and present/future focuses in innovation activities’ (Jarvenpaa & Wernick 2011, p. 525); relationships – that is the tension between cohesiveness through homogeneity and diversity; and organisation – that is, the tension between creativity/ proactivity and responsibility, control and discipline (Jarvenpaa & Wernick 2011, pp. 525-526). They also recognised that tension can occur between joint creation and how returns are allocated. They referred to this as the paradox of ownership. Jarvenpaa and Wernick concluded that it is important to be aware of the poles of each paradox and to manage them rather than ‘thinking of them as trade-offs’ (2011, p. 545) and presented an argument that this awareness will enable network leaders to deal with tensions within the network which are adversely impacting on the relationships and willingness to commit b members.

Worley and Parker (2011) used their examination of the literature to discuss the tendency of some organisations to compete with one another and work to gain power and control over resources. They stated that an alternative response is to ‘form multiorganization collectives’ (Worley & Parker 2011, p. 189). This involves understanding existing and potential members of the network; bringing stakeholders together ‘to explore mutually their motivations for joining and their perceptions of the joint task’ (Worley & Parker 2011, p. 192); formalising structures and processes, including roles and relationships; and having systems in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the network. Worley and Parker used the revitalisation of the Cuyahoga River Valley in the United States as a ‘longitudinal, qualitative field study’ (2011, p. 194) to examine these issues.
3.10 Causal Layered Analysis
The effectiveness of the Skills Taskforce was examined within the context of how social policy was applied by Federal, State and Local Government agencies. In attempting to understand this process, the researcher used a process called causal layered analysis (Inayatullah 2002). This process is based on work undertaken by Slaughter (2002) in which he analysed the field of futures research in terms of 'pop', ‘problem' and ‘worldview' levels.

Inayatullah further developed this concept to explore issues in relation to the assumptions individuals make and stated that ‘it leads to the inclusion of different ways of knowing’ (2002, p. 2). His methodology included four levels: litany – that is, the surface events, issues and trends which are often presented in the media; social causes – the ‘economic, cultural, political and historical factors' (2002, p. 7) which are often presented by academia or policy agencies; worldview – the deeper, often unquestioned civilization level assumptions; and finally, myth/metaphor – the ‘deep stories, the collective archetypes, the unconscious, often emotive, dimensions of the problem or paradox' (2002, p. 7).

The researcher has used the causal layered analysis process in exploring the macro-level story of how the Skills Taskforce operated within the political environment of social policy application by exploring the various discussions and actions taken by both the Taskforce members and the political actors with whom they were engaged at each of Inayatullah’s four levels.

3.11 Conclusion
As has been discussed in this literature review, regions are emerging as important economic and social entities in many parts of the world. Regional development networks are playing an increasingly important role in growing the health and prosperity of these regions. These networks need to be examined through the lens of labour market policy development and implementation, sociology, psychology and politics as well as economics and business studies. Community capacity building, social capital and leadership are some of the critical components of this process.

The research conducted by this researcher used a realist approach to identify and test a particular theory of institutional capacity building (Healey et al 1999), which has been discussed in this chapter, for its applicability to the G21 Skills Taskforce. In undertaking this process, the research sought to identify those factors which contributed to the Taskforce achieving its objectives and those factors which impeded them in this process.
Another of the research questions used by this researcher was to identify the characteristics of successful regional development networks. The literature has identified a number of such characteristics which have been used by the researcher to further develop her understanding of the Taskforce operations and how they might have been improved. The researcher was also interested in identifying how the Taskforce could have worked more effectively with stakeholders and how the group could have learnt from its experiences in order to improve its future capability. The literature has highlighted a number of areas, particularly shared or distributed leadership and social capital, which could have improve the success of the Taskforce in engaging with its stakeholders. The literature of learning regions has been used to further develop the framework which is one of the results of this research.

The following chapters will show how the responses of those interviewed plus the insights gained through the examination of the literature in this chapter were used to further develop the Healey et al (1999) model into the framework introduced in the Discussion and Recommendations chapter. The intent of the researcher was to add to the body of knowledge with regard to the capabilities needed by regional development networks, as well as to the professional practice of those groups.
4. Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction
This chapter describes the methodological approach taken by the researcher. The chapter includes discussion of the ontology and epistemological understandings of the researcher, describes the methods used for data gathering, and the tools and approach used to organise and analyse the data. The characteristics of the participants are summarised along with the questions used in the interviews. Information is also included with regard to field notes and other written sources of material used in the research. In undertaking this research, three specific data gathering processes were used: interviews with 27 individuals who were either members of the G21 Skills Taskforce or were members of other regional development networks, a social network analysis questionnaire which was conducted with twelve members of the Taskforce Executive group, and the researcher’s observations in her capacity as a member of the Skills Taskforce.

4.2 The research paradigm
As discussed in the Research Context chapter, the Australian Government has begun implementing policies through regional groups such as regional development networks. The research topic identified relates to the examination of one particular voluntary regional development network. The research questions asked by the researcher were:

‘Which factors contributed to the G21 Skills Taskforce achieving its objectives and which factors impeded them in this process?’

How could these factors have been strengthened or mitigated?’

In order to explore these questions, a realist paradigm was selected and an action research approach chosen. This enabled the researcher, who was a member of the Skills Taskforce, to work with the other people involved in the network in order to find practical solutions to the issue of improving the way in which this voluntary regional network could address its own local issues.

In designing a research program, it is important for a researcher to clearly understand the paradigm within which that researcher is situated. According to Heron and Reason (1997, p. 3):

inquiry paradigms may be viewed as sets of basic beliefs about the nature of reality and how it may be known; and that these beliefs are thrown into relief by three fundamental and interrelated questions. There is the ontological
question, "What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?"; the epistemological question, "What is the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known"; and the methodological question, "How can the inquirer ... go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known about?".

The ontology, or understanding of the nature of reality, of the author is objective, which Collis and Hussey (2003, p. 49) define as considering that reality is ‘objective and singular, apart from the researcher’. The epistemology, or conception of what constitutes valid knowledge, of the author is subjective or indirect, that is based on the belief that the researcher cannot help but affect that which is being researched.

The researcher’s epistemological approach meant that quantitative research would ‘constrain the data in ways that misrepresent the phenomena the researcher wishes to understand’ (McMurray, Pace & Scott 2004, p. 187). A realist insider action research methodology was considered more appropriate. The selected research paradigm and methodology are consistent with both the research topic and the ontological and epistemological paradigm of the researcher, as it allows the researcher to use ‘a process of reflexive awareness [to] articulate tacit knowledge that has become deeply segmented because of socialization in an organizational system and reframe it as theoretical knowledge’ (Brannick & Coghlan 2007, p. 60).

4.3 The realist approach
According to Burrows, there are three domains which must be considered when undertaking social research. These include the ‘real’, the ‘actual’ and the ‘empirical’. The empirical domain refers to ‘those elements of the social which can be observed or detected by the human senses’ (1989, pp. 49-50). The actual domain refers to ‘those elements of the social which are not observed … but have an impact upon the social’. The real domain ‘is constituted by a given set of relatively enduring historically and spatially intransitive social structures which have real causal powers’ (Burrows, 1989, p. 50). With regard to the environment within which this research took place, the empirical domain involved examining the actions and interactions of members of the Skills Taskforce; the actual domain involved examining the result of those actions and interactions on the effectiveness in achieving the goals of the Skills Taskforce; and the real domain involved exploring the cultural, political and social issues relevant to the community and which impacted on the work of the Skills Taskforce.
Burrows goes on to state that, in a realist approach, ‘the only way in which we can “test” the applicability of our theories about the real domain is by attempting to apply them to the real practices and structures of the social domain’ (1989, p. 52). The researcher “tested” the theories used in the research by exploring them in relation to the structure and the operational practices of the Skills Taskforce.

This accords with Sobh and Perry’s contention that ‘the aim of the realism paradigm is to generalise to theoretical propositions and not to populations’ (2006, p. 1195). The researcher is aware that the results of this research are relevant to the group which was examined, but will need further testing against other groups before the resulting theory may have more general applicability.

Sobh and Perry examined the differences between the realism paradigm and other paradigms such as constructivism and critical theory research (2006, p. 1201). These include that ‘realism researchers enter the field with prior theories’ and that a ‘preliminary conceptual framework about the underlying structures and mechanisms should be developed from the literature and/or from people with experience of the phenomenon before entering the field to collect data’ (2006, p. 1201). To do this, Sobh and Perry expounded that the researcher should begin to read the literature before beginning the data collection, and then continue to read the literature whilst in the data collection mode in order to ‘enfold the literature around the findings as they emerge from the interviews’ (2006, p. 1202). Before commencing the research, the researcher read an extensive array of the literature in the field and formed a ‘preliminary conceptual framework’ (2006, p. 1201) based on the literature, her own experiences as a member of the Skills Taskforce and her work in the field. As data collection and analysis proceeded, the researcher continued to source additional literature which related to the theories espoused in this field, complementing Sobh and Perry’s (2006) logical advice on this method of research.

4.4 The Underpinning Theory
Theories in qualitative research ‘reflect the contestation of meaning and significance in social and organisational life’ (Llewellyn 2003, p. 664) rather than being ‘an ordered set of assertions about a generic behaviour or structure assumed to hold throughout a significantly broad range of specific instances’ (Sutherland 1975, p. 9). In her initial consideration of the research topic, the researcher chose an existing theory (Healey, de
Magalhaes & Madanipour 1999) as the basis for designing this research (this theory is explored in the Literature Review).

4.5 **Insider Action Research**

Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview … It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people (Reason & Bradbury 2002, p. 1).

The above citation reflects the chosen research approach and exemplifies the researcher’s intent in undertaking this research, which was to work with the other people involved in the Skills Taskforce in order to find practical solutions to the issue of improving the way in which this regional network could address its own local issues.

Action research can be described as ‘forming a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting’ (Collis and Hussey 2003, p. 67), and as ‘generating actionable knowledge, which can be defined as knowledge that is useful to both the academic and practitioner communities’ (Coghlan 2007, p. 293). As part of this process, the researcher gathered qualitative data through individual interviews with members of the Skills Taskforce and other relevant Taskforce members, as well as through the use of social network analysis with members of the Skills Taskforce Executive.

According to McInnes, Hibbert and Beech ‘(a)ction research is perhaps one of the most popular yet most contentious labels in the field of organisational research’ (2007, p. 381). They discuss some of the issues relating to action research, including:

the degree to which the researcher should identify themselves as a researcher; whether the research agenda of the researcher should be made explicit; and how far the researcher should intervene in the organisations (2007, p. 381).

In this research as the researcher was conducting “insider” action research, it was important to clearly identify herself to other members as acting in the role of researcher as well as Taskforce member. Insider action research is ‘research by … members of organisational systems and communities in and on their own organisations’ (Brannick & Coghlan 2007, p. 59). As someone who was an existing member of the Skills Taskforce,
the researcher and her views were known to the Taskforce members and her research agenda was made explicit. This could potentially have caused problems, with the danger of the researcher imposing her views on the participants. Past robust discussions which had taken place within the Skills Taskforce on a range of topics suggested that the various individuals were sufficiently confident in their views and their relationship with the researcher that this would not be and was not, an issue. The researcher also conducted the interviews in locations chosen by each Taskforce member, where they were comfortable and assured of privacy.

In describing insider action research, Coghlan states that:

> Issues of organizational concern, such as systems improvement, organisational learning, the management of change and so on are suitable subjects for practitioner research, since (a) they are real events which must be managed in real time, (b) they provide opportunities for both effective action and learning and (c) they can contribute to the development of theory of what really goes on in organisations (2007, p. 336).

According to Robson (1993), insider research was becoming more common and has clear advantages:

> Generally you will have an intimate knowledge of the context of the study, not only as it is at present, but in a historical or developmental perspective. You should know the politics of the institution, not only of the formal hierarchy but also how it “really” works. You will know how best to approach people. You should have “street credibility” as someone who will understand what the job entails. ... In general, you will already have in your head a great deal of information which it takes an outsider a long time to acquire (1993, pp. 297-300).

Robson, however, also identifies a number of disadvantages including managing the dual role of colleague and researcher, use of confidential information and the difficulty of maintaining objectivity. The first two issues were not problems for the researcher in this case. The Taskforce members accepted their colleague in the role as researcher due to her “normal” role as a labour market research consultant; and the information accessed by the researcher was not confidential. Effectively she was seen as a trusted person working in the field (Denzin & Lincoln 2004) The researcher’s field notes and journal note that she
sometimes become involved in the discussions which occurred during the interviews and had to make a conscious effort to maintain her researcher role.

Coghlan (2007) also describes some of the challenges of insider action research:

> Insider action researchers need to build on the closeness they have with the setting while, at the same time, create distance from it in order to see things critically and enable change to happen. This is referred to as preunderstanding. They have to hold dual roles, their organisational member (role) and the action researcher role, and the consequent ambiguities and conflicts between these that can arise. They also have to manage organisational politics and balance the requirements of their future career plans with requirements for the success and quality of their action research (2007, p. 338).

The researcher needed to deal with some of the issues mentioned above, such as the dual role and the need to keep some distance from the setting. She did this by discussing the process with her supervisors and by constantly reflecting on her field notes and journal entries. The researcher was also challenged by the level of knowledge of some of the participants. The insider action research process requires the research to be undertaken in a particular scenario, that is a specific organisation or group of which the researcher is a member (Collis & Hussey 2003). This means that the researcher needs to work with the other members of that organisation or group. In this instance, the researcher worked with members of the Skills Taskforce. Whilst these individuals had extensive expertise in their own specific field, there were varying levels of expertise with regard to some of the broader topics under discussion, with some having a deeper understanding of these topics than others. However after one individual who the researcher thought to have a deep, rich understanding of the skills environment and the ways in which various volunteer groups operated did not offer any useful information or insights during the interview, the researcher chose to prompt such participants a little more, switching to a more structured interview in order to assist the interviewees to engage with the research questions.

The researcher also interviewed some individuals who were not members of the Skills Taskforce in order to gain the perspectives of those who were either involved in other regional development networks or who were stakeholders of the Skills Taskforce. The data collected in interviews was also compared with information in a range of written documents.
4.6 Data Collection
Data collection and analysis involved four separate processes.

1. The researcher conducted individual semi-structured or structured interviews with sixteen other members of the Skills Taskforce and twelve other relevant stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews are those which have some questions in common as opposed to structured interviews in which the interview structure is more prescriptive (Carruthers 1993).

2. The researcher examined minutes of Skills Taskforce meetings and other documents including the concept paper for the establishment of the Taskforce and a review of the Taskforce operations.

3. The researcher maintained a personal journal and field notes to record insights and issues.

4. The researcher administered a Social Network Analysis questionnaire to thirteen members of the Skills Taskforce Executive group to examine the interactivity of this group (see Appendices 2-7 for questionnaire and results).

Gillham discusses the use of a multi-method approach in which data is collected through a range of sub-methods including 'interviews, observations, document and record analysis, work samples and so on' (2000, p. 13).

A common discrepancy is between what people say about themselves and what they actually do. In an interview people can be very convincing, because they are sincere. But, as G.K. Chesterton observed in *The Return of Don Quixote*, “people are never more mistaken about themselves than when they are speaking sincerely and from the heart”. They’re not lying; they’re just not accurate (Gillham 2000, p. 13).

According to Yin ‘[e]vidence … may come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation and physical artefacts’ (1994, p. 83). The researcher used this multi-method approach to gathering and analysing the data by using documents, participant-observation and interviews, as well as through the use of the Social Network Analysis questionnaire.

4.7 Interviews
Whilst interviews can provide a depth and richness of data, there is a risk of distortion due to people’s tendency to remember themselves in the best light. The researcher therefore
attempted to ensure that the data gathered was robust by using multiple sources. According to Sobh and Perry, this is an important process to address ‘reality’s several contingent contexts, to capture a single, external, and complex reality’ (2006, p. 1203). One of the techniques they discuss which can be used to achieve this is by asking interviewees the same questions to check whether their perceptions are the same. The researcher used a semi-structured format for interviews. This included asking a series of questions to each interviewee (see Appendix 8), whilst at the same time giving the opportunity for Taskforce members to offer additional insights not covered by the set themes.

The interview … appears, on the whole, as a valid source of knowledge production, although it is indicated that the social process and local conditions need to be appreciated and actively managed by the interviewer in order to accomplish valid results (Alvesson 2003, p. 17). The author’s intent was to use semi-structured individual interviews to identify themes, using an abductive approach to argue from the research evidence. Abduction is the process of identifying possible hypotheses and then using the data gained from the research and the literature to identify the most useful hypotheses (Atocha 2006). Put more succinctly, ‘[u]nlike more traditional deductive and inductive approaches, abduction jumps from a Result to a possible Rule that would, if true, make a Case reasonable’ (Ross 2010, p.145).

According to Blaikie (2000, p. 114), abduction also ‘refers to the process used to generate social scientific accounts from social actors’ accounts’. In a semi-structured interview, ‘[q]uestions are likely to be open-ended and probes may be used to explore answers in more depth’ (Collis & Hussey 2002, p. 168). Whereas this process worked with some interview participants, due to their more sophisticated understanding of the issues under discussion, other participants needed a more structured interview approach in order to elicit their thoughts and reflections on the effectiveness of the Skills Taskforce.

You start with descriptive observation; the setting, the people, activities, events, apparent feelings. A general picture of what’s on the surface. Gradually (without losing sight of the overall picture) you focus in on, and seek out, those elements which are particularly related to your research aims (Gillham 2000, p. 53).
This was the process used by the researcher in conducting the interviews. By asking the Taskforce members to reflect on their own experiences and observations, the researcher was able to build a descriptive observation. Where possible, that is where the participant had deeper, richer knowledge with regard to the research topic, the researcher invited that person to discuss their observations by prompting them to expand on points they were making, and then focused in on those elements which were particularly related to the research. The researcher used her field notes and journal, as well as the data analysis to reflect on the initial theory which was developed through the researcher’s own experiences and early examination of the literature to develop an initial theory into a more robust framework.

Bryman and Cassell (2006, pp. 41-2) state that ‘the interview is not a static event, but an active, dynamic process where both the interviewer and the interviewee are co-constructing meaning’. Gillham (2000) discusses how development of effective questions is a critical part of the research process and that the process a researcher needs to go through in examining which questions are likely to uncover the richest information helps the researcher focus and continually examine the research methods. He states that ‘[g]ood research questions are those which will enable you to achieve your aim and which are capable of being answered in the research setting’ (2000 p. 42). By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher drew out information with regard to the specific themes associated with the developing framework, whilst at the same time allowing space for Taskforce members to articulate additional important information.

According to Collis and Hussey (2003, p. 168), ‘one aspect of semi-structured … interviews is that the issues discussed, the questions raised and the matters explored change from one interview to the next as different aspects of the topic are revealed’. This tended to occur in those interviews where Taskforce members had wide or deep experience.

Collis and Hussey define an interview as ‘a method of collecting data in which selected participants are asked questions in order to find out what they do, think or feel’ (2003, p. 167), and also describe a number of problems which can occur in using semi-structured interviews, including the issue that they can be ‘very time consuming and there may be problems with recording the questions and answers, controlling the range of topics and, later, analysing the data’ (2003, p. 168). The author did not encounter problems other than the process being time consuming. The researcher took field notes and also audio recorded each interview so was able to ensure that an accurate written transcript could be produced. The audio recordings also assisted the researcher to gain a richer
understanding of the Taskforce members’ observations as she could reflect on the tone, emphasis and pacing of comments.

An issue which had not been anticipated by the researcher was the lack of ability to discuss their views and perceptions encountered with some of the interviewees. As the research was designed to examine a specific group, it was necessary to interview those Taskforce members. A number of these people had engaged with the Skills Taskforce as organisational representatives, rather than because of particular expertise or commitment to the cause of addressing skill shortages. Some needed to be questioned in specific detail in order to gain their perceptions, observations and insights, and several were not able to offer any new ideas or understandings to the issues under discussion. This resulted in less ‘rich’ data being obtained in some interviews. The researcher has reflected on whether this may have been because they had not thought deeply about the topics under discussion; or whether there was some reticence on behalf of those interviewees to express their candid perceptions, perhaps due to the dual role of the researcher as labour market research consultant and researcher. To ensure that a sufficient level of rich data was obtained, the researcher chose to also interview other stakeholders who had more expertise and were able to offer well considered comments with regard to the Skills Taskforce.

4.8 The research participants

In undertaking this research, the researcher conducted twenty-eight interviews. The following is an outline of the participants’ characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members of the Skills Taskforce</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals who became involved in the Career Development &amp; Skills Service project but were not part of the Skills Taskforce</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders from other regional development networks</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total interviews conducted</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the Taskforce Executive group</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 30-39</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 40-49</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 50-59</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 60-69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for community based organisations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for employer peak bodies</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government employees</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State government employees</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for Federal government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Federal political system</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked in private enterprises</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked in VET sector</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their current role more than 5 years</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their current role less than 5 years</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In management roles</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In staff positions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In specialist roles</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Characteristics of research participants

Sixteen participants were members of the Skills Taskforce. Six were individuals who became involved in the *Career Development and Skills Service* project which was undertaken by the Skills Taskforce, whilst the remaining six of the total twenty-eight who
were interviewed were stakeholders who had experience in similar regional volunteer action groups.

There were fourteen members of the Skills Taskforce Executive and all were invited to complete a Social Network Analysis questionnaire. Two of these individuals elected not to participate in the interviews or the Social Network Analysis, so twelve people: eleven participants, as well as the researcher herself, completed the questionnaire. Of the twelve respondents to the questionnaire, one came from the vocational education and training sector and one from higher education, one operated her own commercial business, four were employed in community agencies, two came from industry associations, whilst two worked in state government and one in local government.

Fourteen of the interviewees were female and fourteen were male.

Eight respondents were aged 30-39, eleven were aged 40-49, six were aged 50-59, and three were between 60 and 69.

Six participants worked for community based organisations; four came from employer peak bodies; three were from Local Government; two worked for State Government Departments; one worked for a Federal Government Department; one was involved in Federal politics, seven came from industry, and four came from the vocational education and training sector.

Eleven had been in their current roles for more than five years, while the remaining seventeen had worked in that role for less than five years.

Twelve participants were in management roles, nine held staff positions, and the remaining seven held specialist individual roles.

In analysing the data collected during the interviews, the researcher looked for patterns of response from different categories of research participant, including age, sector, gender and level of position in their organisations to identify whether any themes emerged from these categories. However, the researcher was unable to find any such patterns.

4.9 The research questions and themes

In some kinds of research, it is impossible or unnecessary to set out with hypotheses. A much more useful procedure is to establish one or more research questions (Blaikie 2000, p. 59).
The primary research questions for this thesis were:

Which factors contributed to the G21 Skills Taskforce achieving its objectives and which factors impeded them in this process? How could these factors have been strengthened or mitigated? How relevant is the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model to the G21 Skills Taskforce?

In order to explore these questions, a series of subsidiary questions needed to be considered by the researcher when looking for themes from the literature, interviews, documents, field notes and journal. These included:

1. What are the characteristics of a successful regional development network? According to Blaikie (2000, p. 60), ‘what questions require a descriptive answer (and) are directed towards discovering and describing the characteristics of and patterns in some social phenomenon’. The purpose of question one was to ‘discover and describe’ those characteristics believed important by the Taskforce members themselves.

Blaikie (2000, p. 61) also defines “how” questions as those ‘concerned with bringing about change, with practical outcomes and intervention’.

2. How could the Skills Taskforce have worked more effectively with its stakeholders to address the regional skill shortage issue?

3. How could the Skills Taskforce have learnt from its experiences in order to improve its future capabilities?

Whilst these questions may appear to be quite specific, the author realised that, when the research commenced, it may have been necessary to modify the interviews. As stated by Blaikie (2000, p. 64), ‘[w]hat is discovered in the process of undertaking the research is likely to require a review of the research questions from time to time’.

During the interviews, the researcher also asked a number of questions relating to themes drawn from theory. These included:

- What has been your personal/organisational involvement with the Skills Taskforce and its work?
- What is your perception of the current effectiveness of the Skills Taskforce?
- Describe the relationship of the Skills Taskforce with other relevant stakeholders?
- Can you suggest any ideas in relation to how the Skills Taskforce could
become more effective?

- What information resources does the Skills Taskforce use?
- What additional information resources would make the Skills Taskforce more effective?
- How well does the Skills Taskforce work with other networks and how could this be done better?

4.10 Documents
The documents used included the vision, mission and structural establishment of the Skills Taskforce, a review of the processes in use by the Taskforce conducted by an external consultant, as well as minutes of meetings of the “executive group”. These documents were examined in relation to the perceptions of the interview participants to identify themes or anomalies which could be dissected further during the data analysis phase.

4.11 Field Notes and Personal Journal
As well as examining evidence from a range of sources, the researcher also recorded observations and personal notes, which Gillham (2000, p. 23) defined as ‘questions you need to reflect on; insights, hunches or ideas; a report you hear mentioned that you need to get a copy of; the name of someone you need to consult; statistics you need to check; and so on’.

Alvesson (2003, p. 24) discusses the process of reflexive interviewing, which he described as the researcher being ‘part of the social world that is studied, and this calls for exploration and self-examination’. Bryman and Cassell (2006, pp. 45-6) defined this process of reflexivity as ‘a sensitivity to the significance of the researcher for the research process, so that the researcher is seen as implicated in the data that are generated by virtue of his or her involvement in data collection and interpretation’. The researcher used the field notes and her personal journal as tools for this exploration.

Having completed the interviews, the researcher listened again to each audio recording whilst reading through the transcript. This enabled the researcher to reflect on what had been discussed and to identify themes and items for the next stage of analysis. As an insider talking to another member of the same group, the interview content included jargon, ‘short-hand’ language and acronyms. The use of personal notes and observations enabled the researcher to translate this jargon into everyday language in order to make
the themes from the interviews more meaningful to others. The researcher also made notes on the background of participants as well as drawing on her own knowledge of their organisations to highlight important items as a prompt for the more detailed data analysis which followed.

4.12 Ethics approval
The research conducted by the researcher involved human subjects and there were some ethical issues which needed to be addressed. The researcher detailed the methodology to be used and the processes which she had put in place to ensure that the rights of research participants were protected. These processes included providing a Plain Language Statement to potential interviewees which explained the research and informed them of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the research at any stage and to withdraw their permission for the researcher to use their material. The researcher sought ethics approval from RMIT University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and this approval was granted.

4.13 Social Network Analysis
According to Wasserman and Faust (2009, p. 4), social network analysis is a ‘distinct research perspective within the social and behavioural sciences; distinct because social network analysis is based on an assumption of the importance of relationships among interacting units’. Social network analysis is used to analyse a range of relationship characteristics. These might include how leadership is dispersed in a work group, trust levels between individuals, how information flows through a group and the “connectedness”, that is the closeness of the interrelationships. Wellman (1983, p. 157) stated that:

‘[t]he most direct way to study a social structure is to analyze the patterns of ties linking its members. Network analysts search for deep structures – regular network patterns beneath the often complex surface of social systems. They try to describe these patterns and use their descriptions to learn how network structures constrain social behavior and social change’.

Cross and Parker (2004, p. vii) discussed the importance of ‘appropriate connectivity in well-managed networks’. The Skills Taskforce was a large but loosely connected group of over 40 individuals with a shifting membership. The researcher therefore decided to assess the level of ‘connectivity’ within the Skills Taskforce Executive, which was the
direction setting group for the Skills Taskforce. As a result, the Social Network Analysis process was used to map the relationships of Skills Taskforce Executive members, who formed a smaller, more ‘manageable’ group which met regularly. Overall, there were fourteen members of the Skills Taskforce Executive. Two of those individuals elected not to take part in the research, resulting in a total of twelve respondents, including the researcher.

Gummesson (2007, pp. 238-9) examined some of the literature relating to network theory and concluded that ‘[n]etworks come in many shapes and are shaped by many forces’. In the case of the Skills Taskforce, the shape was initially an informal group which convened on a monthly basis and which was driven by the chairperson. Later, the large group met on a quarterly basis and was led by an executive group of 14 self-nominated individuals. The forces which shaped the group included government priorities involving addressing skill shortages; and local initiatives which included improving career pathways for young people and developing stronger relationships between the education sector and industry in the region.

The researcher also chose to use Social Network Analysis to examine some of the forces (see Appendices 1 – 6) which were relevant to the Skills Taskforce Executive. By examining the relationships of Skills Taskforce Executive members, both within and outside the Taskforce, the researcher gained insights into the ‘connectivity’ of the group with regard to these issues.

The researcher used the data gathered in the interviews to identify items which interview participants had discussed as being important to an effective network and the researcher used this information to develop five questions/statements which were designed to elicit responses from Taskforce members with regard to those items (the Social Network Analysis questionnaire which was developed by the researcher can be found at Appendix 1). Survey participants were asked to respond to five questions/statements:

1. How often would you go to each person for regional information on the skills issue? For yourself, how much would you rely on your own expert knowledge?
2. How often would you go to each person for global/national/State/other Regional information on the skills issue? For yourself, how much would you rely on your own expert knowledge?
3. This person acts as a ‘champion’/ I work hard to act as a ‘champion’ to influence powerful decision makers to advance the work of the Skills Taskforce.
4. This person uses their own networks/ I use my own networks effectively to promote the work of the Skills Taskforce.
5. This person/ I can clearly explain to ‘outsiders’ the purpose and goals of the Skills Taskforce.

In developing the Social Network Analysis questionnaire, the names of each Skills Taskforce Executive member were listed so that respondents could rate them. However, in order to ensure anonymity, the letters A – N have been used in the resulting sociograms and analysis (see Appendices 2-6 for sociograms).

The researcher asked each participant to rate themselves as well as other members of the Skills Taskforce Executive. This data then enabled the researcher to compare self-assessments against the assessments of others for that individual, and provided additional information to analyse the level of ‘connectivity’ within the group. The researcher used the UCINET® software platform and NETDRAW® social network analysis software to process the responses and produce the visual network maps.

4.14 Data analysis
According to Gillham (2000, p. 71), ‘[t]he essence of content analysis is identifying substantive statements – statements that really say something’. McMurray, Pace and Scott (2004, p. 248) state that ‘the quality of interpretations of data is probably the most critical feature of qualitative research’. One of the difficulties in using interviews as a research technique is the possibility of ambiguity in the responses (McMurray, Pace & Scott 2004, p. 242). The author sought clarification of many possible ambiguities during the interview process. The researcher also began analysis of the data as that data was collected. According to Robson (1993, p. 305), ‘[t]he traditional model is for (analysis and interpretation) to take place after all the data are safely gathered in. Sometimes, however, … it makes sense to start this analysis and interpretation when you are in the middle of the enquiry’.

Data produced by most methods of collection require some manipulation to get them into a suitable form for analysis, using what is commonly referred to as data reduction techniques (Blaikie 2000, p. 235).

Lancaster (2005, p. 170) describes data reduction as ‘the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming qualitative data by identifying and organising the data into clear patterns’. Each interview was audio recorded with the permission of the respondents to ensure that all data was captured. These audio recordings were transcribed and entered into the qualitative software program NVivo®. Analysis was
conducted through initial coding of the data into classifications based on the initial theories selected. The model developed by Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) contained three constructs, including knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capability. These were the initial classifications used by the researcher to sort the data. The second theory involved identifying the structures which might occur in regional development networks (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007). The researcher also used these structures to examine the Skills Taskforce. The use of these classifications enabled the author to conduct a first sort of the data. This was then refined by identifying additional or different themes and meanings constructed and ascribed by the respondents during the interviews. According to Blaikie (2000, p. 236) typological construction is an appropriate method for data reduction in an abductive research strategy. He states that ‘in these cases, it is impossible to separate data reduction, and analysis; in fact, data collection, data reduction and data analysis can blend into one another’ (2000, p. 236).

In synthesis and analysis of the data, the researcher extracted themes of the respondents’ perceptions and descriptions from the interview transcripts. This synthesis of the data was compared with the literature to look for patterns of similarity and difference with existing models of community responsiveness.

From this, the researcher was able to draw some conclusions about how the identified principles and motivating factors of stakeholders affected the ability of the Skills Taskforce to respond to the skills shortage issue in the region. The researcher also identified factors which differentiated the response strategies of the network and stakeholder groups and developed a framework of community responsiveness which can be used to address other problems. The researcher also identified areas for further research.

4.15 Conclusion
This research was undertaken using a realist approach which involved the identification of an existing theory (Healey et al 1999) and the testing of that theory to ascertain its relevance to the work of the G21 Skills Taskforce. Data collection methods included interviews with twenty-eight individuals. Some of these were members of the Taskforce or stakeholders who were members of other regional development networks. The researcher also invited members of the Taskforce Executive group to completed a social network analysis questionnaire with twelve individuals responding. As well; the researcher drew on her observations in her role as a member of the Taskforce. The
researcher’s analysis of the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model and an initial examination of the literature led to the development of the research questions which were used during the interviews. The resulting data, which is presented in the Findings chapter, was analysed and the outcomes used to inform the Discussion and Recommendations chapter.
5. Findings

5.1 Introduction
As stated in the introductory chapter to this thesis, the researcher has chosen this topic due to her personal involvement with a number of regional development networks through both her labour market research consultancy business, as well as through her voluntary membership of several such groups. In both of these roles, the researcher has noted some groups which have been successful in achieving their objectives and other groups which have floundered and ‘died’. At the same time, the researcher herself has run the gamut of feelings from intense satisfaction to utter frustration. This led the researcher to ask why this occurred and what could be done to assist such networks to successfully establish themselves and contribute effectively to their local labour markets. The researcher has an aim that the framework developed through this research project will assist such groups to achieve their visions and goals.

This chapter discusses the findings from the data collection undertaken as part of this thesis, and examines the data gathered through the interviews and Social Network Analysis questionnaire, as well as through examination of supporting documents such as minutes of meetings of the Skills Taskforce and the researcher’s own reflections through her journal and field notes. The chapter also examines the operations of the Skills Taskforce in the context of the government political environment.

5.2 The G21 Skills Taskforce
In 2005, the researcher was contracted by the City of Greater Geelong and Colac Otway Shire to undertake a qualitative research project with regard to skill shortages within the two municipalities. Like the research undertaken by Green and Orton (2009), this project was designed to examine the importance of the skills issue in addressing imbalances in the labour market. The project involved conducting interviews with employment agencies, peak industry bodies and training providers (project recommendations can be found at Appendix 9) (Walker 2005).

As a result of this project, a decision was made to take a regional approach to the skills shortage issue and a conference entitled Taking Action – Skilling the Region was conducted in Geelong on 8 March 2006 in order to gauge the interest of stakeholders in becoming involved in this ongoing process. The process recognised the issue that a range of stakeholders have a role in enacting labour market social policies (Bessant et al. 2006). The conference was designed to gather local information on current skill
shortages and gaps facing the region and the nation; raise awareness of future skills gaps and workforce development challenges, such as skills imbalances and skills shortages in the region; gather a range of ideas and strategies to address the region’s skills gaps; and form a taskforce to ‘take action’ and progress the ideas suggested at the forum. The G21 Skills Taskforce, of which the researcher was a member, resulted from that event, with a membership of approximately forty people.

Before analysing the effectiveness of the G21 Skills Taskforce, it is useful to first discuss how the group was formed and operated, and some of the projects which it undertook.

5.2.1 Strategic versus project emphasis

There were two main reasons for setting up the G21 Skills Taskforce. The first reason was to address a particular set of issues through specific project work. For example, the group identified a shortage of women in the traditional building trade occupations and decided to establish a small working group to promote the take up of apprenticeships by young women. These projects were usually identified on the basis of their ability to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the region. As Lorentzen (2008, p. 533) identified, competitive advantage will be driven from the local level as ‘the source of growth and competitiveness is to be found in the local environment’. The second reason to establish this regional development network was to identify and work towards a desired strategic direction for the G21 region. Regions need to build capabilities in the area of being visionary and to develop a strong sense of common purpose (Harmaakorpi 2006, p. 1086).

As discussed in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis, Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 89) believe that leadership needs to occur at the strategic, tactical and operational levels of the network. The founders of the Skills Taskforce were ‘big picture’ thinkers who saw the long term possibilities for the future. The quandary faced by this group was to then get the balance right between that long term strategic view and the achievement of short to medium term outcomes through projects, and to ensure that the group consisted of both strategically focused and project focused members. The researcher defines a strategic focus as concerned with ten to twenty years into the future and a project focus as working on a one to two year horizon. The researcher’s journal notes reflect how, over time, subtle tensions began to grow within the group between the need to focus on a specific aim and move to project outcomes, and the role of the network in contributing to the strategic direction of the region. During the interviews, a number of Skills Taskforce members and other interviewees expressed strong views on this subject.
One person from an Industry association stated:

_It was somewhat frustrating for me because I had a project mentality and it was very difficult to identify clear projects within which to sort of galvanise a lot of the interests and energy and experiences that were around the table. When you get a group of people together, and there is no work for them to do, and that is project work, ... it just becomes a bit nebulous._

Another Taskforce member from the Community sector, who was more strategically focussed, stated:

_We need to suggest timeframes, so asking people to take a longer view of this network and how we developed the work rather than a short term problem solving yesterday's issues. We need to focus on what is tomorrow's work. So that was a frustration for some to be honest._

Over the life of the Skills Taskforce, the balance varied between representation of strategically focused and project focused members. When the network had an overly strong representation of project focused individuals it ran the risk of getting caught up in the day to day workings of those projects and lost sight of the overarching strategic vision. When it was over-represented by strategic thinkers, it was sometimes accused of simply ‘navel gazing’ and not achieving any results at all. As stated by Jarvenpaa and Wernick (2011, p. 525), network leadership needs to manage the tension between ‘the combination of inward/outward and present/future focuses’. The leaders of the G21 Skills Taskforce attempted to do this by ensuring that members had the opportunity to suggest and participate in specific projects, whilst at the same time ensuring that those projects were congruent with the long term vision of the network. This was not always successful as some members sought to implement projects which were important to their own organisation, but which did not necessarily contribute to achieving the aims of the Taskforce. One of the strategies which could have improved this process would have been to be more targeted with regard to the desirable attributes for members of the Taskforce.

### 5.2.2 Network membership

Taskforce members felt that the success of the various regional development networks to which they belonged was related to the composition of their memberships. An interviewee who was a member of another network which dealt with the Taskforce described that network as having brought together _the key players who live inside the_
One of the requirements of boundary spanning leaders, that is those people who operate across organisational boundaries, as described by Miller (2008) is the capability to bring diverse partners to the table. The leader of the Skills Taskforce had a very credible reputation within the region, as well as a very good appreciation of the local environment, and so was able to bring diverse partners into the network.

All of the Skills Taskforce members were also members of a variety of other networks as well, often with each other. Dovey (2009) asserts that the ongoing interactions resulting from membership of various networks will build shared frames of reference which facilitate knowledge sharing, which are inhibited by the siloed nature of some functional structures. Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) see network leadership as often an indirect process in which network members are influenced to become champions of the network within their own organisations. A number of Taskforce members wondered whether the Skills Taskforce had included individuals with the influence and capabilities needed to drive forward the work of the group. As stated by one Taskforce Executive member from Local Government:

the Skills Taskforce was effective in bringing people together. Whether they were the right people or not, I am not sure.

Several others felt that the Skills Taskforce had been effective in getting the member mix right for achieving the group’s vision and objectives. According to a Taskforce Executive member, who leads a Community organisation:

I think it has been very effective in gathering together the players and setting up the network and that is the key to it.

The researcher questions why this difference in the views of Taskforce members occurred. It may be because the group did not have a clear understanding of the purpose and objectives of the network and was therefore unsure as to what the right membership mix might be. The researcher’s journal and field notes and minutes of the network meetings do not record any formal discussion being held amongst the group as to who should be around the table, what experience they should bring to the work, why each of them was there and what they could contribute to the work of the group. As with a number of the other issues which are discussed in this chapter, the Skills Taskforce did not have any processes in place to facilitate these types of conversations and, as a result, they usually did not take place at all. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from an Educational institution, perhaps the network needed to ask itself ’who do we need and
why and how can they bring value to the table?

Another Taskforce member from the Local Government sector remarked that the network needs to:

really look at the structure of what you want to achieve, then who are the right people to get there to achieve that?

The Skills Taskforce had some trouble in engaging influential people from stakeholder organisations. Sotaarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 19) state that ‘the key actors should ... be regionally well-known and respected individuals, because the combination of enthusiasm and authority that they embody is likely to transmit a positive and regionally anchored view ... to the general public’. One interviewee from the Government sector, and a member of another network with which the Taskforce tried to form a relationship, felt that:

It is about having the old cliché, having the right people on the bus. It is absolutely true because, if we just reflect on shared and individual interests, and also the capacity to commit resources and make decisions, the ideal person on a network group is someone who is at least in a management or senior management role, that has the capacity to spend money and make decisions pretty much on the spot, and if they are able to, or with a short consultation with other staff, that has a good shared understanding of individual and mixed interests and not just my win is your loss type scenario, or your loss is my win, you know how it goes. It really has to be a win-win view of the world, so you need senior resourced decision makers that are able to work within a mutual gain framework.

One of the things which somewhat surprised the researcher in undertaking the interviews with members of the Skills Taskforce was the strength of the sense of belongingness which was felt by some individuals for the network. As stated by one Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector when discussing how the group could have operated more effectively, ‘I feel a bit protective of the Skills Taskforce so I don’t like saying mean things about it’. According to Semlinger (2008, p. 548), ‘a mutually shared understanding of belonging to a corresponding endeavour ... is decisive for (a network’s) development’.

Several other Taskforce members also expressed a sense of defensiveness with regard to the group as well as some affection for the network as an entity rather than for specific members. The researcher has reflected on why this might be and considers that often, when people feel passionate about an issue and are then given an opportunity to do something about that issue, they feel strongly connected to the vehicle which enables
them to take that action, in this case the G21 Skills Taskforce. In considering who amongst the Taskforce members did express this sense of defending the group, the researcher has noted that they are also the members who were most engaged with the work of the Taskforce. Having this strong sense of connection to the network and its purpose would therefore appear to be an important membership factor in the effectiveness of the Taskforce.

In order for the Skills Taskforce to be successful, members realised that there needed to be some unifying purpose which would act as the cement which bound the group together. Network documents show that the initial vision for the Skills Taskforce was defined after the conference which resulted in its formation. According to Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 90), ‘the strategic questions, such as reasons for the network-based approach, goals of the network, and values of the network, (are) considered to be the most essential questions for any network cooperation’. It would have been very useful if the Taskforce members had articulated these questions in order to ensure that everyone had a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of the network.

5.2.3 Vision and objectives

The initial vision which was adopted by the G21 Skills Taskforce was to ‘Build a strong coordinated network that addresses the skill shortages in the G21 region’ (Walker 2007). Mawson (2010) indicated that a strong sense of identity and a cohesive vision are necessary for effective stakeholder engagement.

Kantabutra (2009) discussed the need to articulate a vision in a way that organisational members can understand and with which they can identify. The need to articulate a clear and compelling vision for both members and stakeholders was highlighted by Taskforce members during the interviews. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member who is a specialist operator in the Education sector:

that gets back to being really clear about what your mission is, and what your values are, and what outcomes you want to achieve, doesn’t it? So it’s about getting that planning right in the first place.

Another Taskforce member from the Industry sector said that:

shared collaboration and interest is really what drives the success of the group. That waxes and wanes depending on the issue but is something that we constantly have to maintain. But what helps us hang a hat on it is that overarching vision.
Henry, Lubell and McCoy (2010, p. 441) found that ‘bonding forms of social capital are critical (if) like-minded agents are to work together effectively’. That is, networks need to find the common ground, vision, values and goals if they are to engage successfully with their own members and other stakeholders.

Taskforce members indicated that the vision and objectives need to be the ‘property’ of the network itself. A Taskforce member from Local Government commented that ‘having a clear vision will give a strong sense of purpose to the group’. Another member from the Education sector felt that ‘those objectives have to be signed off by everybody as their agreed objectives. They have got to have agreed shared ownership of it’.

Sacco and Blessi (2009) discussed the importance of having common goals. Interestingly, there was a discrepancy amongst the Taskforce members about whether the group actually had a clear understanding of its vision and goals. An individual from Local Government commented:

*I think it (the understanding of the vision) would be reasonably uniform* whilst another stated ‘people would think they were probably sure but you would get a lot of different answers.

Despite having articulated the initial vision as described earlier, there was some concern from Taskforce members that the Skills Taskforce had not truly teased out what it meant by this statement. A Taskforce Executive member from an Industry association stated that ‘I think we struggled a lot to establish the core business of the Skills Taskforce’.

Others concentrated on how the vision was developed. A Federal Government representative stated that:

*The goal was the big picture, the big vision, but what was achieved along the way was probably little steps which is probably a good way to go if you are looking at a twenty year out vision;*

Another Taskforce member from the Education sector said:

*I think various ones of us failed to understand the centrality of the skills agenda and so I think what we were really doing was grappling with some concepts and trying to build up some kind of shared perspective about what it was we were really on about. There is something about having to struggle and then something whether it is clarity gets born out of that.*

In trying to articulate the vision, a Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector commented that:
The other day, at our last meeting, I think we actually stumbled over a bit of what this is all about. So I think, from where we sat in this sort of group, we were still grappling with what is the purpose? Why do we need it? I think that is the key. We need to have an identity.

A Taskforce member from a Commercial organisation felt that ‘from the outset, it is a sense of getting who we are, what are we doing and why’.

Taskforce members commented on the need to have clearly defined goals established when developing the vision. As stated by a Local Government representative:

You need to have some direction and if you haven’t got something you are not going to go anywhere. I think that is vital and that is the first thing, what is our objective and how are we going to achieve it? What are the goals going to be? What are our activities?

Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999, p. 119) discussed the importance of ‘a strong sense of common purpose’. The nature of the network membership and its impact on developing a common understanding of the group’s purpose was also mentioned by some interviewees.

The researcher’s journal notes that a common understanding of the Taskforce vision and objectives was not achieved and has considered why this occurred. On reflection, it seems to the researcher that, for some of the members, there was a sense of impatience with this phase of network development. It was almost as if these individuals did not see the time spent on developing a common understanding of the group’s purpose as “real” work and that they felt that the purpose did not need to be clearly articulated as they themselves felt that they understood what they wanted to gain from the network. This may be due to the voluntary nature of the regional development network and the possibility that some members may only have been there to advance the work of their own organisations. Capó-Vicedo, Mula and Capó’s research (2011) indicated the importance of network members working together for mutual gain rather than just for their own purposes.

The researcher’s field notes and journal do not contain evidence of any work being done within the Skills Taskforce to establish the individual motivation for members to be part of the group so that those areas of shared and individual interest could be explored and dealt with appropriately and ethically. The work done within the group did not focus on bonding the members into a team with a common vision and goals. As a result, the researcher believes that the network tended to remain a group of individuals who were there for their own purposes and not necessarily to forward the vision and objectives of
the regional development network.

Meeting minutes show that the vision and objectives were again discussed at the final meeting of the Taskforce Executive which was conducted on 27 May 2009. The impetus for this was the resignation of the chairperson due to a change in their role. Discussion occurred during the meeting about the focus of the Taskforce and its purpose. Whilst some members felt that the focus needed to change to more broadly include an examination of the regional labour market as a whole, others believed that it would be preferable to remain focused on the skills issue. This issue was not resolved before the Skills Taskforce was dissolved in 2010.

From the above analysis of the interviews and background documents, together with the researcher’s own experience as a Taskforce member, it would appear that, to be effective, the regional development network needed to consider the development of a robust and meaningful vision and range of clear objectives which would bring the network members together for a common purpose, and which had synergies with the aims and objectives of the member and stakeholder organisations. The process of developing the vision and objectives would have been improved if they had been formulated substantially and reviewed periodically. However, the network also needed to consider how much time it allocated to this process to establish clear priorities and avoid being impeded in its overall goals. Having clearly established the internal sense of identity provided by a cohesive, common vision, the Taskforce would have then been better placed to express that vision to external stakeholders with whom the group needed to interact.

5.2.4 External perception of identity

The comments discussed above identify the difficulty which the group had in being able to clearly articulate what they wanted to achieve. The researcher believes that this lack of real clarity had an adverse effect on the later operations of the network and its ability to engage fully with stakeholders, and this was a particular weakness of the Skills Taskforce. Meeting minutes and the researcher’s journal notes show that, whilst the group spent some time in discussing its vision and objectives internally, no explicit work was done on how best to present the network identity to those outside the group. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from an Industry association:

\[
\text{we didn't actually have a clear objective ourselves so I don't think we were really conveying that further than the actual group.}
\]

Mawson (2010) discusses the importance of a strong sense of identity and a cohesive
vision for effective stakeholder engagement. The inability to define the group’s identity to stakeholders had an adverse impact on the network’s effectiveness. A Taskforce member from the Community sector stated:

*I think it would have a fairly huge impact if people don’t know that you are there and what you need to do. They are certainly not going to see you as a resource or somebody who has power and influence to do anything or make changes.*

There was also a sense amongst a number of Taskforce Executive members that having better communication processes in place would have facilitated the ability of network members to promote the identity of the group to external stakeholders. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from a Commercial organisation:

*we hadn’t made a purpose, an intentional effort to go and make sure they were in the loop and I think that’s where, again I think if we had been more structured from the beginning maybe things like that may not have happened. Like I said, with all good intentions, the group came together on a voluntary basis to put some action around some things. But I am not quite sure that we really got there. So maybe that engagement, that external engagement was probably something we didn’t do extremely well.*

The researcher’s journal and field notes comment that, without the discussion necessary to develop a common vision and objectives, it was difficult for Taskforce members to clearly articulate the purpose and aims of the network to external stakeholders and this caused problems in gaining commitment from exterior individuals, groups, bodies and organisations that could be useful to effective policy change and amenable to the identified vision and goals of the Taskforce. This in turn affected the credibility of the group and its work.

5.2.5 Credibility and reputation of group

Aula and Harmaakorpi (2008, p. 524) note that ‘good reputation (is) seen to be (an) important source of regional competitiveness’. In a regional setting, the credibility and reputation of both the regional development network and its members can be very important. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the G21 Alliance, which is a partnership between five municipalities and over 150 community and industry organisations, has been highly influential with State Government and, increasingly, with the Federal Government, in achieving outcomes for the region in a variety of areas.
including transport, the environment, health and wellbeing, education and the economy. As such, the G21 Alliance has high credibility and a strong reputation both within and outside the region. The connection between the Skills Taskforce and the G21 organisation was a factor in the success that the group achieved in trying to address the skill shortages and skills imbalances within the Region.

Taskforce members stated that they had joined the network due to the credibility of the network leader and other inaugural members. As the Taskforce began to work on projects with stakeholders, the reputation of the network itself began to grow. Interviewees expressed their belief that this strong reputation of the Skills Taskforce was a contributing factor to the success it achieved. A Taskforce member from Local Government mentioned the importance of reputation in gaining commitment from stakeholders when they said that:

*maybe the legitimacy of the group needed to be established before it could begin to achieve anything.*

A Taskforce member from the Industry sector stated that the group’s credibility was dependent on the network achieving outcomes and demonstrating that it could successfully deliver on its promises. One of the Taskforce members from Local Government commented that:

‘*you actually have to get a track record*’.

A senior manager from the Business sector, who had dealings with the Taskforce, discussed their perceptions of network credibility and stated that, when approached by networks which were not seen by that person to be credible:

*I see a lot of financial resources poured into those networks and I think they are useless and I don't see any outcomes.*

A number of Taskforce members noted credibility and reputation as a factor in the effectiveness of the Taskforce. A Taskforce member from the education sector believed that:

*they (regional development networks) have to deliver and get some runs on the board and show that they are who they say they are.*

An individual from another regional development network discussed the difficulty in building that initial credibility in order to get buy-in from stakeholders, when they stated that:

*y you actually have to get a track record and until you get it running it is hard to get
a track record. So maybe you point to what has happened elsewhere, and this worked there, and this is what they got out of it. You have got to have some way of getting people to start that process and contributing.

A Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector talked about how the process of building credibility can take some time and commented that ‘it has taken four years to really become active’.

Taskforce members also discussed strategies which the Skills Taskforce might have used to build credibility and a strong reputation. A Taskforce member from a Commercial organisation stated that

if we want to get any credibility or legitimacy, or if we want to get the government to support us, we need to then be in line with what their policy is. We need to work with them along the lines of their policy. Otherwise we won’t have so much clout.

The Taskforce members did not implement this strategy, despite having members who could have presented some of those policies to the group for discussion. Had the network been able to present its objectives and project proposals in terms of how they would contribute to the funding body’s policies, then it may have been more successful in accessing funding. This indicated a flaw in the Taskforce’s strategic planning process. The next section of this chapter examines that process.

5.2.6 Strategy planning

Having done some work to determine the vision and goals of the Skills Taskforce and identified and engaged with network members, the next step for the Taskforce was to develop strategies designed to lead towards achievement of the group’s vision. An examination of the minutes of the inaugural meeting held by the Skills Taskforce in April 2006, shows that nine initial strategies were identified. These key themes formed the strategic planning which was undertaken in the early days of the Skills Taskforce and included an Action Plan containing the group’s aspirations, strategies and activities’ (Walker 2007).

In doing this, the network considered the range of planning horizons which were relevant to its work. Three of the strategies included short term goals, two had a medium horizon and four were long term strategies. Taskforce members believed that these strategies would contribute to the macro level vision and strategic objectives of the Taskforce.

However, whilst this early process was undertaken by the group, the researcher’s journal
and her examination of documents shows no overt process in place to take these actions forward in a structured, meaningful way. It seemed that, having spent a little bit of time on developing a strategic plan, the members adopted a position where they saw no further need to do anything particular with regard to the agreed goals. The result of this was a vision devoid of an implementation plan, and this sometimes led to strategies failing. Bessant et al (2006) identified this as a common fault in policy planning.

Having the plan written down seemed to be an end in itself. The researcher believes that this was one of the major weaknesses with the Skills Taskforce – that the members seemed to understand that, to be effective, these things needed to be in place, but that there was no commitment to then bring some rigour to bear to ensure that the strategic plan was, in fact, implemented. As a result, the network seemed to lose focus and structure with few of the members actively contributing towards achieving the strategic goals. An examination of the minutes of Skills Taskforce meetings show that none of the strategic actions mentioned above were specifically referred to and no attempt was made to develop and assess strategies to achieve these actions.

Taskforce members made a number of comments with regard to how the Skills Taskforce could better have approached strategic planning. These included:

- *look at the big contracts which were coming out, look at the skills and capabilities and capacity that was needed and then identify the key players, get them to work together* (State government agency)

- *talking about an agenda, prioritising a short list of projects or areas that the group wants to work on and doing some really hard work on that prioritising so that it is not ten areas, it's maybe it is one or two and they can do that really well* (Commercial organisation)

- *try and be consistent with our direct strategic directions and put those as a starting point in any discussion* (Educational institution)

- *I think in your strategic plan, with the strategic data, you break it up into manageable, maybe three or four ideas and then you align possible sub-committees to those that they then focus on, then you are covering people who do want to get stuff done. It just means they are more focussed and you know, ok these are the three strategic steps, these are the three areas we are focussing on, everyone is aware of it but they can concentrate on the one thing that they are actually aligned to* (Industry association).

Taskforce members felt that it was also very important for the Skills Taskforce to achieve
and evaluate outcomes to demonstrate the effectiveness of the group and to maintain the ongoing commitment of its members and stakeholders. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector:

*people have to see that it is useful and they see it's useful when they see it gets runs on the board.*

In analysing the operations of the Skills Taskforce, the researcher's journal and the meeting minutes do not note any specific key performance indicators being set with regard to the overall Taskforce achievements. Whilst some measures were established for specific projects, these were usually not connected back to the overarching vision and objectives of the Taskforce. This lack of a robust strategic planning process within the network made it very difficult to assess how effective the group was in trying to achieve its goals and probably accounted for and contributed to some of the frustration felt by members. This was an area where network leadership needed to be more active and proactive.

### 5.2.7 Leadership

The Literature Review identified that there is very limited research available on how leadership is enacted within a voluntary regional development network. The gap in the research appears to be the complexity of the role a leader faces in circumstances where members are not paid by the organisation, but a level of subtle compulsion is needed to achieve the goals of the voluntary group. The issue of network leadership was the subject of discussion during the research interviews and was seen as a factor in gaining commitment from members and stakeholders. Ayuso et al. (2011, p. 1411) found that the ability to ‘establish strong and interactive relationships with … stakeholders [and] the capacity to manage the acquired stakeholder knowledge and transform it into socially and environmentally sustainable innovations’ are key capabilities’. A Taskforce Executive member from Local Government commented that:

*the effectiveness of the network often comes down to the local leader and the people you have got in the group.*

In the early days of the Skills Taskforce, the leadership was in the hands of a single chairperson with voluntary secretariat support being provided by the researcher. In reflecting on their own experience with the group, the chairperson stated that:

*the other thing that I did was probably attempted to raise the bar pretty early so I had to be thinking at the level. I expected them to produce work that*
suggested this is what you need to be able to do.

The chairperson also felt that ‘trying to bring everyone on that journey is a challenge’.

As both individuals also had their own work commitments, coordinating and managing the operations of the Skills Taskforce became difficult to manage. In 2007, the researcher suggested that the group should form a small executive group which would meet regularly, whilst the full Taskforce would only come together four times per year. In this way, the chairperson could share some of the leadership and management functions and workload with others and encourage stronger membership of the full Taskforce due to a lessened imposition on time and resources for members. As identified by Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 14), ‘in networks shared power and leadership should be accepted’. Taskforce members were surveyed to gauge their response to the suggestion and this new leadership structure was approved. A Taskforce member who is a senior manager with a Commercial organisation and who volunteered to be part of the Executive group commented about:

*it being three or four or five people getting their heads together and actually making it happen again.*

However, as with the role of network members, no specific work was done with the Executive group to identify any personal agendas or to bond the group into a cohesive team. Henry, Lubell and McCoy (2010, p. 441) found that ‘bonding forms of social capital are critical [if] like-minded agents are to work together effectively’; that is, networks need to find the common ground, vision, values and goals if they are to engage successfully with their own members and other stakeholders. This accords with a statement made by a Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector, who stated that:

*I think some of these elements we’ve been talking about in a network structure, I don’t know how you foster and facilitate them, but perhaps it is the role for the board or the chairperson to have a good clear understanding of what they are seeking for the people that they are going to work with. So you can, at least in some sort of informal way, you can filter who is going to help and who is going to hinder. And it would be good to ultimately get to a point where you can have a conversation about those values because I know that would resolve it. It would be great to be able to pull people up and say, hang on, we are all here because of these reasons, and these are the values and behaviours we know make (the network) tick, and I am not sure where we are going here is going to be in alignment with that, so what do you have to say? At the end of the day that could*
be a useful thing. You have to be careful how you do it, not to get people offside.

Despite the new Executive structure, a number of interviewees commented on a lack of real outcomes from the group. McMurray et al. (2009, p. 451) stated that ‘more research is required on the complexities of enacting leadership in non-profit environments that arguably rely on different leadership approaches to private enterprises in order to achieve outcomes’. A Taskforce member from a Community organisation stated:

*I struggle to kind of put my hand up at these meetings to say, uh actually (name of organisation) is working on that one or the (name of organisation) is working on that one, because I don’t see it as being my role, but that said I am not sure whose role it is to do that.*

In both discussions and more formal interviews with the researcher, Taskforce members identified a number of leadership capabilities which were either already present in the Skills Taskforce, or which would have made the network more effective. These included negotiation and facilitation skills, dealing with people who are seeking power for themselves or their organisations, assertiveness, the ability to build confidence in network members and stakeholders, the ability to engage others in a compelling vision, lateral thinking and entrepreneurship, and communication skills. These are consistent with the types of leadership capabilities identified by Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007).

Many of the Taskforce members discussed the need for network leadership to have open, two-way communication with network members, stakeholders and the broader community. According to Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen’s research (2007), the importance of communications and networking skills in regional development networks were highly emphasised.

Communication was considered to be important for a number of reasons. With regard to internal communication, a Taskforce member from an Education institute commented that:

*you feel a bit out of that loop. So I think once we have had something happen, we have had a forum perhaps, it is worth really having a discussion about how that went and evaluating that as a group and looking at what was great looking at what worked, what didn’t, what was the feedback and then maybe revisiting that.*

Another Taskforce member from a Community organisation noted that:

*to identify the flows of communication, often you sit in these meetings and there might be two way flow of conversations between particular people at the*
Both of these problems were apparent in the Skills Taskforce. The larger Skills Taskforce did not meet regularly and there was no system in place to keep members informed about the direction being taken by the Skills Taskforce Executive and the progress being made on the various projects which were being undertaken by the project teams. This may have been partially due to the lack of dedicated resources to ensure that appropriate communication was being undertaken with members. Unless the members were also involved in one, or both, of these groups, they were unaware of how the network was operating. As a result, over time, many of these members disengaged from the Skills Taskforce and stopped attending meetings. There were no processes in place to assist members to get to know each other better and to form a strong team culture. The issue of outliers mentioned by one of the Taskforce members was noticeable even in the Skills Taskforce Executive which only had fourteen members. Social capital involves development of a shared value system, which includes trust and reciprocity, and manifests itself in formal social interaction through entities such as networks (Lizzaralde 2009). The researcher considered whether the Skills Taskforce would have been more effective if the network leadership had commitment more time and effort to building social capital and shared values within the group, through some form of team building in the early stages of the group’s development. Would this have resulted in members finding it easier to identify a common purpose and goals?

As well as internal communication, some of the Taskforce members discussed the need to have robust communication processes in place with stakeholders. As identified by a Taskforce member from a Commercial organisation:

> they could tell people how they work, so that when people were connecting with them, they had an understanding of it. Because if they don’t have understanding, then they’ll probably just stay away.

When discussing aspects of the leadership theories mentioned by the researcher during the interviews, a number of the Taskforce members considered that leading a voluntary network was different to leading a work team, with the leader relying more on personal and professional capabilities than on the authority of a paid position. Having assisted the Skills Taskforce chairperson and been a member of the Executive group, the researcher agrees with this viewpoint and believes that network leadership in this group relied more on the ability of the leader to negotiate and communicate well than on the authority vested in an organisational management position.
The above sections have discussed the various capabilities which either did, or could have, assisted the Taskforce to achieve its goals. The next section will reflect on the achievements of the Taskforce through its project work.

5.3 The project work

In reflecting on the research question about the effectiveness of the Skills Taskforce, one of the rewarding memories relates to the way in which the network tackled the almost impossible job of addressing skill shortages in a large, diverse and highly complex labour market with no dedicated resources. The approach taken by the group was to identify and work on specific projects. Where those projects were successful, it was because the project teams had a clear vision for what they wanted to achieve and were successful in building relationships and gaining commitment from stakeholders.

Rather than bringing the entire Skills Taskforce together every month, the network members made the decision in June 2007 to form an Executive team which would meet monthly, whilst the full Taskforce would come together quarterly. This decision was prompted by the concerns of some members that the network was “meeting for meeting’s sake”. As mentioned earlier, this strategy was also useful as, until then, the work of network leadership had fallen on the Chairperson and the researcher in her capacity as network secretary. The researcher developed a survey which was distributed to all Taskforce members asking for them to express their interest in becoming members of the Executive group, as well as to identify specific projects which they thought were important for the Taskforce to implement. At this time, thirteen individuals nominated to become part of the Executive.

An examination of the agendas and minutes of the Skills Taskforce Executive meetings show that reports were presented on six different projects at each meeting. Three of these projects were being undertaken by individual agencies and were simply being presented to provide information to the Taskforce. These projects included a Skilled Migration program being delivered by a Local Government Council, a Structured Workplace Learning program run by a Community agency and an industry engagement program conducted by a peak Industry body.

Another project, titled the Accelerated Apprenticeships Project was a response to a Federal Government program of funding. The local Technical And Further Education (TAFE) College indicated to the Skills Taskforce Executive that they intended to apply to be a part of this program, which was designed to develop processes which would enable competent apprentices to complete their training in a faster time through allowing students
to work at their own pace, rather than a whole apprenticeship class moving forward together. Taskforce members were invited to be part of the team developing the program submission. The group met on four occasions and developed the brief. However, this project was not successful in attracting funding and did not proceed. The other two projects, which were more fully developed, will be discussed here in more detail.

5.3.1 Women in Trades project

Minutes show that the Women in Trades project was raised as a concept at the May 2007 Skills Taskforce meeting. This project was designed to encourage young women in secondary school to consider traditional trades in the building and construction industry as a strategy for addressing skill shortages in that industry sector. The group had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve. The impetus for the project was based on anecdotal evidence and the experiences of particular agencies in working in the trade areas, rather than on a more structured, rigorous research process.

Interested agencies nominated members for inclusion in the project team and negotiated how each agency would support the project. As with the larger Skills Taskforce, one of the important factors in the success of this project was having the ‘right’ people around the table. A Taskforce Executive member from an Industry association indicated that these groups were:

> going to deliver better because of the way they are set up and the skills sets that the people have got versus another one.

Taskforce members identified the importance of group members and stakeholders being committed to act as champions who could progress the work of the Skills Taskforce. In publicly representing the group to other individuals and organisations, usually through project work such as this, they were sometimes able to secure funding and other resources and to engage with potential stakeholders who could further the work of the group.

A Taskforce Executive member from Local Government who has had experience in trying to initiate this process, discussed their experiences as the chair of a regional development network:

> It is not just the external, it is the internal people as well. This is a very good example. If you want the city sitting around the table at a senior level and putting some effort into it, and putting some resources on the table, you had better either understand what the priorities of the council are or find some
sympathetic influential people within it who will help you with that or, in the longer sense, you have an educational role in initially getting them to understand that something really is an important issue and they really need to do something about it.

The Geelong Trades and Labour Council were informed about the Women in Trades project and also became part of the project team. A Taskforce member from an Industry association recognised that this was an important factor in the success of the project team as:

*the model is only as effective as the people who sit around the table and understanding that they will actually get more out of it by working together than by fighting with each other.*

Sotaarauta and Viljamaa (2002) discussed the need for distributed leadership in a network and this was how the leadership role was enacted in the project team. No specific leader was appointed for the group; rather leadership was disbursed within the team, with particular individuals nominating and taking responsibility for different parts of the project. The Skills Taskforce was kept informed about the progress of the project and this enabled advice and support to be offered to the project team in a timely manner. Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 81) discussed how the availability of timely and focused information allows local ‘actors’ to become involved in policy and decision making. This two-way flow of information also ensured that the project remained on track and that problems were identified and addressed at the earliest possible time.

The project team needed to be innovative about how to resource the project as there were no funds available. According to Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 84), network leadership is ‘an action which directs all the operations and resources of the network to the desired direction’. The project team therefore worked to build strong relationships with other networks and relevant stakeholders who could contribute resources. For example, the graphic design department of the local newspaper designed the network logo free of charge and the Geelong Area Consultative Committee donated money for a formal launch of the new network. Another of the strategies which they implemented involved working with multi-media students from the local TAFE College to develop a website and an electronic brochure which would provide young women with information about non-traditional trades and the opportunities available through this type of work. This brochure was distributed by industry peak bodies within the region to their members to promote the take-up of females into the trades and to disseminate information about the project, thus saving the group the cost of a mail-out of this
Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002, pp. 16-17) proposed that regions which can develop programs involving a strong vision and community cooperation result in the development of new regional processes and turn sentiment into action. In talking about the Skills Taskforce projects, some of the Taskforce members discussed the importance of the regional development network having some connection to the community within which it operates. This may be because, in regional areas, the community may be more engaged and concerned with what is happening in the local environment. In analysing the importance of communities in undertaking regional planning, Amdam (2004) discussed the importance of trust and cooperation between public and private organisations, as well as with the community if that community is to be mobilised effectively to meet regional challenges. Amdam (2004) concluded that, whilst external stakeholders can stimulate this process, only the community and its members can effect proactive change.

As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from a Community agency who has previously chaired a regional development network:

> possibly because governments haven’t been intervening, the communities have realised that, well hell, we’re going to have to do something about this ourselves, and there’s nothing wrong with that, because that actually motivates people to head in the right direction. The part the government have failed to do is to support it. Rather than intervening, they should be saying, well let’s help you. But they haven’t been doing that.

The use of the brochure was one way in which to engage the community with this project. Agencies which worked with young women identified the fact that many of them felt isolated as the only females in a highly male dominated industry. As a result, the project included the formation of a network of women tradespeople who came together to share their stories and offer support to each other. Some of these women also agreed to mentor young women who were beginning their apprenticeships. The local TAFE College, which was a partner in the project, offered free mentoring training for these women. Minutes of the Skills Taskforce Executive show that twelve women attended the inaugural meeting of the group which went on to become independent of the Skills Taskforce.

This project is noteworthy because it demonstrated that, despite the lack of funding, the group was able to identify an issue which needed to be addressed; build relationships with other stakeholders to access the necessary resources and to disseminate information about the project; operate effectively without a hierarchical leadership
structure; and take the project through to a successful completion.

5.3.2 *Career Development and Skill Service project*

The second project was the ‘flagship’ project for the Skills Taskforce due to its comprehensive nature with regard to addressing the local skills shortage issue. The concept originated with another network, of which the researcher, the Chairperson and three other Taskforce members had been members. That network, the G21 Lifelong Learning Pillar, handed the project over to the Skills Taskforce when the group was reformed. The project arose from the recommendations from the skills shortage research project, mentioned earlier, undertaken by the researcher in 2005. This research involved collecting anecdotal evidence from employment agencies, education/training providers and industry peak bodies with regard to the skills shortage issues in the Geelong and Colac regions.

The report noted that all participating agencies believed that there was a significant problem with the provision of local labour market and career pathway information to young people, those considering a career change, employers, careers counsellors and governments at all levels. The collection and provision of information was seen by participants to be a critical issue in addressing skill shortages.

Taskforce members discussed the need to identify the information which would be needed by the regional development network in order to achieve its vision and objectives, and then to source that information. As stated by a Taskforce member from a Community network:

*We need to have the skills to identify key data. The way to think about it is we are swamped by data, and then we have to identify information, if you want to make that distinction, and the information is stuff that comes up on our radar and it is meaningful because we have an agenda, a problem or project, and we see in that stream of data, particular bits of information that we can pull out. If you haven't got that agenda then you are just lost. How do you respond to it? You can't because you have no point of reference.*

Four of the Skills Taskforce member organisations recognised the value of the project concept, and so provided funding for a feasibility study and business case to be prepared by the researcher. The project went through a number of names and research phases, with its final title being the *Career Development and Skills Service*. Over a period of approximately twelve months, the feasibility study involved examining labour markets and
career information from a global, national, State and local perspective to gain a deeper understanding of the issues involved. The research team felt that it was vital to learn from the external as well as the internal regional environment.

The concept also involved the development of a business plan, involving the proposal to create a physical organisation to provide a range of labour market and career information services to various clients, including an outreach service into the more remote regional areas and a web based service. These services were fully costed, and staffing and management structures were developed. The outreach service was seen as particularly important in a municipality like Golden Plains Shire. This area contains fourteen primary schools, but no secondary or adult learning facilities anywhere within the Shire. Golden Plains Shire is seen as being mainly a ‘feeder’ area for people to work in Melbourne, Geelong or Ballarat. The researcher’s journal reflects on the concern expressed by a number of residents about the loss of sense of community as people commute out of the Shire for both education/training and work.

The Skills Taskforce established a working group to take the project forward. This involved identifying and working with other relevant networks in the region. Regions are often very highly networked and it is through these networks that much of the work within regions may occur. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member who is involved in Federal Government:

To get it across the line, it needs a whole host of networks and it depends on how. If I have learnt anything from what I am doing now, most of the people who are in the business that I am in get there through networks and achieve through networks.

For the Skills Taskforce to be effective in implementing this project, it was therefore necessary to consider how best to identify and build relationships with other networks operating in congruent areas within the region and, sometimes, from the external environment. As well as sectors of the community and other networks, there were also a range of other stakeholders with whom the regional development network needed to interact if it was to achieve its aims and objectives. These included powerful and influential individuals and organisations which can act as champions to further the work of the group.

Taskforce members identified this as an important strategy for the Skills Taskforce to consider. A Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector suggested that it was important to:
target your people…you work out who the stake holders are, there are lots of stakeholders who could have an interest but it is the ones who have an impact on what you are doing and have a say in how it can be formed and how it can evolve.

In order to achieve this, a number of those interviewed discussed the need to find the ‘mutual gain’ which would encourage stakeholders to engage with the project.

Given the voluntary nature of such groups, the Taskforce Executive group may have benefited from building a stronger understanding of how individual and group behaviour manifested itself in a regional development network and an awareness of the motivating factors for the network membership and stakeholders. This was particularly important in a group which was comprised of volunteers and in which salary and promotion prospects were not factors in motivation.

Taskforce members identified the need to find motivators to engage members and stakeholders as an important factor in the success of the Skills Taskforce. In discussing how stakeholders could act as champions for the project, a Taskforce member from Federal Government commented that:

They have no vested interests in it from a personal perspective. It is about their commitment to Geelong and this region.

Successful regions have been defined as being characterised by four factors: ‘a plethora of civic associations, a high level of interaction between social groups, coalitions which crossed individual interests, and a strong sense of common purpose’ (Healey, de Magalhaes & Madanipour 1999, p. 119). The region in which the researcher’s Skills Taskforce is situated is a highly complex city region with a diverse population and community. Given that much of the work done in this regional area occurs through networks, this has meant that there is a plethora of networks within the region, many of which are operating in similar development ‘spaces’. Some of these networks are funded from within the community itself, whilst others are financed by State and/or Federal Governments.

One of the great difficulties encountered by the Skills Taskforce was the issue of being able to identify those various other networks and to define how the work of the Skills Taskforce related to their own work. Discussion occurred on this issue during a number of Skills Taskforce Executive meetings and members were encouraged to advise the researcher, in her role as network secretary, of any networks with which they were involved or of which they were aware. The intention was to begin to build a database of regional networks which had been identified by the group. Whilst there was general
agreement that this was an important task to undertake, the voluntary nature of the group meant that there were no dedicated resources to drive the information gathering forward and this process was therefore not completed at the time of the dissolution of the Skills Taskforce.

Successful implementation of the project also involved identifying potential champions for the Career Development and Skills Service and approaching them to lobby on behalf of the project. These champions included business and education leaders, as well as Federal, State and local politicians. In identifying how best to engage these people, a Taskforce Executive member who works for State Government commented that:

*I would suspect they would see the agenda through the prism of what their regular job. 'What's in it for me? And I think you have to pitch it to them in the sense that this is a way of achieving their goals, what's in their KPIs, what's in their goals, which means you have to understand what the organisations are about and then put together something where they can see a place for them that they can't afford not to be there.*

The use of these champions enabled the working group to present the feasibility plan and business case to three Federal Ministers and two State Ministers. In each case, the Ministers and their senior advisors commented on how innovative and well developed the concept was. However, the requests for funding were not approved, with one of the reasons offered by one Minister being due to the potential impact if the concept was successful, and other regions also sought funding to implement the service. This tension between a local initiative and the rhetoric of Government social policy will be explored in more depth in the next chapter of this thesis.

The issue of resources was a particular problem in trying to successfully implement projects such as the Career Development and Skill Store, and was identified by Taskforce members during the interviews as a factor in gaining and keeping the commitment of members. The lack of adequate resources was considered to be a major problem for the Skills Taskforce and a critical issue in its perceived lack of ability to deliver successful projects. The researcher’s journal records the frustration felt by herself and other members when the group was unable to achieve its desired outcomes due to lack of both financial and human resources. According to Clunies-Ross (2005, p. 334), allocation of resources for community mobilisation may be made available ‘if an initial vision and trust can be created and structures set up which ensure that contributions are not wasted, that all participants are likely to benefit, and that there is universal participation by contributor-beneficiaries’. The Skills Taskforce had some difficulty in articulating its vision for the
Career Development and Skills Service to Government representatives, and so was not able to secure the required funding.

This viewpoint that sufficient resources are needed by the regional development network was reinforced when, as part of the 2008 review conducted by the Skills Taskforce, the group set up a schedule of activities which included a session in which they could reflect on the resources available and needed to achieve the network’s objectives. This process was intended to include an examination of programs, materials and funding and the plan was for the group to then identify the roles which would be played by various network members in providing, sourcing and managing resources. However, the group did not continue with this process. This may have been partly due to the fact that there was no dedicated person driving the work of the group forward, but that the Taskforce was reliant on the willingness of volunteers with their own full-time jobs to get the work done, again reinforcing the problems which can occur for such groups when inadequate resources are available.

As stated earlier, Taskforce members identified the issue of resources as a significant problem which was faced by the Skills Taskforce. In discussing the Career Development and Skill Store, a Taskforce Executive member who also heads up another large regional development network stated:

*That takes a degree of resourcing to do that and it is always a challenge which you have got at a regional level. We have made this point to various government agencies from Premier to ministers down. It is fine gathering the data, it is fine looking at a local level and telling what’s happening but when you want to take that and do some proper work on it, and turn it into a going project that can deliver on an outcome, identify clearly what the outcome is and deliver on it, you have got to have resources to do that. It doesn’t happen for nothing.*

Whilst the project did not move from the planning to the implementation phase, it was not considered a failure. The project demonstrated that the Skills Taskforce was able to examine an enormously complex issue, such as regional skill shortages, and develop a strategy which would contribute towards addressing this issue. It achieved this by understanding its own group dynamics and behaviours sufficiently well to gain commitment from the members to establish an effective working group. Despite the lack of external resources, the Taskforce members were able to fund the conceptual phase. This was possible due to the way in which the group sourced, used and disseminated information about the project. The Taskforce leadership used the resulting knowledge, as well as an understanding of the shared vision, as a mechanism to gain buy-in from both
members and other stakeholders. They did this by finding the benefits for them in being involved; and ensured that there were strong lines of communication as the project progressed.

Although the Skills Taskforce disbanded in 2010, the concept of the Careers Development and Skills Service as a key goal and focus survived, and at the time of writing (March 2013), various regional stakeholders are working through a range of networks to bring this project to fruition.

5.4 Skills shortages

As well as discussing the formation and operations of the Skills Taskforce, participants in the research conducted for this thesis were asked for their views on the skills issue more generally. The following is a sample of the comments which came out of these interviews.

Comments by a Taskforce member who also leads another regional development network included the constraints imposed when individuals and groups see the skills issue as somebody else’s responsibility; the need to identify the skills required in the region and bring together the key people to work together to address them; the importance of addressing skill shortages for the economic and social prosperity of the region; understanding the skills issue in terms of the global economic environment; the need to work with employers so that they understand their own organisation’s skill needs; and the need to context the skills question in terms of the changing nature of industry and occupations.

Another Taskforce Executive member from Local Government commented about the need to work closely with those who are directly affected by the skills issue; that is, employers and those seeking work. They also discussed the importance of engaging governments in the skills conversation, and in providing information on the skills issue to relevant stakeholders.

A State Government representative believed that timely and relevant information was a critical component of addressing skill shortages. On the other hand, a Taskforce member from a Commercial organisation felt that it was important to identify whether skill shortages really existed or whether it was simply a matter of short term recruitment difficulties due to fluctuations in industry needs. A peak Industry body manager felt that the skills issue needed to be contextualised in the changing nature of the regional labour market; whilst a Community agency representative discussed the role of regional
leadership in addressing skill shortages. A Taskforce member from the Education sector was concerned about the impact of skill shortages on the ability of young people to find work and discussed the disadvantage faced by those from low socio-economic areas. They also felt that the issue needed to be considered in terms of employability skills as well as technical and vocational skills.

The comments presented by these, and other, Taskforce members demonstrated to the researcher that skill shortages do not just impact on local industry, but have wider societal impacts from both an economic and social aspect; and that this requires some political will to facilitate regional solutions to local issues. It also confirms to the researcher the importance of ensuring that other regional development networks which might take over the work of the Skills Taskforce in the future have the best chance of making a difference in this area.

As can be seen, the G21 Skills Taskforce was established to address a specific regional need. There were a number of factors which impeded the Taskforce from being as effective as it could have been. These included a lack of process to bond the group into a cohesive whole with a common, shared vision; and a limited ability to clearly articulate the work of the Taskforce to external stakeholders.

However, there were also highly positive characteristics including strong network leadership, a willingness by many members to act as champions for the work of the group, and the development of important regional projects. The Skills Taskforce may no longer exist in name, but key aspects of its vision continue in other voluntary community structures such as the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network which has taken up some of the work, including the ongoing advocacy for a Career Development and Skills Service.

5.5 Social network analysis

As discussed in the Research Methodology chapter of this thesis, one of the data gathering techniques used by the researcher was a social network analysis questionnaire which was completed by twelve of the fourteen members of the Skills Taskforce Executive, including the researcher herself. This section of the thesis will examine the findings of the analysis.

The first two questions of the questionnaire (copy at Appendix 2) related to the availability of information within the Executive group, with the first question being:
How often would you go to each person for regional information on the skills issue? For yourself, how often would you rely on your own expert knowledge?

The second question was:

How often would you go to each person for global/national/state/other regional information on the skills issue? For yourself, how often would you rely on your own expert knowledge?

Responses to both questions indicated that members of the Taskforce Executive would approach other Executive members for needed information. With regard to question 1 (see Appendix 3), one person was identified as not being someone whom they would approach, whilst responses to question 2 (see Appendix 4) showed that members believed that all other Taskforce members were approachable. However, with a few exceptions, the ratings for these questions were very low. This would indicate that Executive members would approach other members for information, but it appears that they were often not able to source the information they needed from within the group and needed to seek that information from others. The researcher finds this to be an issue of concern. If the Taskforce members themselves were not well informed, then the capability of the group to make sound strategic decisions would, in some cases, be compromised. It would have been useful if members had shared the information they obtained from people outside the network in order to build the knowledge capability of the Taskforce Executive members.

The third item presented in the social network analysis questionnaire was:

This person acts as a ‘champion’/I work hard to act as a ‘champion’ to influence powerful decision makers to advance the work of the Skills Taskforce.

The results, which appear at Appendix 5, indicate that Executive members believed that most other members did act as champions for the work of the Taskforce. The researcher believes that this was an important factor in furthering the work of the Taskforce. In a voluntary group with no resources, the willingness of the Executive members to represent the Taskforce to other stakeholders was an important communication tool in gaining commitment from those stakeholders to the work of the Taskforce, and this contributed to the effectiveness of the group in achieving its objectives.

The researcher’s field notes and journal also examine the relationships built by the group with other networks operating within the region and the impact these might have had on the success of the Taskforce in achieving its vision and objectives. To gain the Taskforce Executive members’ perspectives on how successful the Skills Taskforce had been in
achieving this through its own members’ networks, an item was included in the Social Network Analysis questionnaire about this. The item read:

This person uses their own networks/I use my own networks effectively to promote the work of the Skills Taskforce

Results (see Appendix 6) indicate that the capability of only five Skills Taskforce Executive members to use their own networks to promote the work of the group was considered to be well known. The discrepancies between ratings for some other individuals, as well as the thirty-seven instances of a 0 rating, indicate that the potential of members to influence their own networks had not been well articulated as a specific strategy by the Skills Taskforce Executive. This is an interesting contrast to the results of the previous question. It would appear that Executive members often acted as champions of the Taskforce work with other stakeholders, but sometimes neglected to take advantage of their other networks to forward Taskforce objectives.

The final item in the social network analysis questionnaire was:

This person/I can clearly explain to ‘outsiders’ the purpose and goals of the Skills Taskforce

The resulting ratings spreadsheet and sociogram can be seen at Appendix 7.

Thirty-seven responses indicated that the participants were unsure or did not know the person being assessed well enough to score them. In a group of only fourteen members, the fact that so many respondents were unsure of whether the person they were rating was able to clearly explain to outsiders about the work of the Skills Taskforce demonstrates to the researcher that this issue had never been clearly examined by the Executive members. The variations in consistency of ratings across different individuals indicate that only five members of the Skills Taskforce Executive appeared to be well known by the group as a whole.

When the Executive group was formed, it would have been useful to spend some time with members getting to know each other through a conversation about each person’s reasons for joining the group and through open discussion about what each person wanted to gain by being a member, as well as what they believed they could contribute to the work.

5.6 The Skills Taskforce and the political environment

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, the effectiveness of the Skills Taskforce was examined within the context of how labour market policy was applied by Federal, State
and Local Government agencies. One of the areas with which the Skills Taskforce battled was in how to effectively engage with the political system in order to source funding and find political champions who would support the work of the group.

5.6.1 Regional skill shortages

The issues raised by the project participants, and described below, established the environment and the imperative for change within which the G21 Skills Taskforce was formed.

In 2005, the skills shortage issue was being seen by Governments as an impediment to further economic growth, and the researcher was funded by State and Local Government to undertake a project to gather anecdotal evidence on skill shortages in the region in order to identify strategies for addressing these (Walker 2005). The participants came from public and private employment agencies, peak industry bodies and education/training providers in the municipalities of City of Greater Geelong and Colac Otway Shire.

Agency representatives were asked to comment on changes observed over the past one to five years within the organisations or industries they serviced. The surface issues identified by respondents included jobseekers looking for work with a recognised career path; decrease in manufacturing, with less need for unskilled staff and higher demand for trained and technically experienced staff; a reduction in the need for trades offset by less apprenticeships being taken up; an increase in accredited training; and an increase in casual/temporary recruitment (Walker 2005, pp. 20-21).

When asked to identify any changes they could foresee in the organisations or industries they serviced over the next one to five years participants identified projected decreases in manufacturing employment, reflecting technological advances in this sector; an increase in the tourism, food, entertainment and accommodation industries; a trend towards employing more mature age workers; an increase in service industries, particularly aged care; a continuing increase in casual and part-time employment; and increasing problems for employers to find appropriately qualified staff (Walker 2005, p. 21).

When asked what employers and jobseekers needed to do to successfully adapt to these changes, the responses included the need to re-examine the retraining process for unemployed people to ensure that the training being undertaken was appropriate for the skill shortages being identified; the need to identify options to deal with the increasing number of mature age people being made redundant; the need to improve the
understanding of parents, young people and teachers about the changes which have happened within the manufacturing industry; the need to improve the "life skills" of jobseekers, including work ethic, self-confidence, communication and interpersonal skills, presentation and interview skills; and employers needing to make a cultural shift in their mindsets with regard to their criteria for employing; for example, being willing to look at older age groups (Walker 2005, pp. 21-22).

Finally, respondents were asked what additional assistance employers and jobseekers needed from Government and other agencies to assist them. Comments included the need for employers to be educated to deal with recruitment issues before skill shortages occur; employers needing to plan more strategically; parents and young people needing to be educated more effectively about career opportunities; the need to push mature age apprenticeships and traineeships harder, with a recommendation for a review of the length of apprenticeships; and the need for career advice in schools to start much earlier and with accurate advice (Walker 2005, p 22).

Participants also identified the need for Government to refocus the way it dealt with unemployed people, with a change from punitive language and a change in policy and focus around encouraging and empowering jobseekers in order to reduce fear. The focus was considered to be like “the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff" rather than "the fence at the top". Respondents considered that Job Network agencies should be able to intervene earlier before the habits of unemployment became entrenched. There was also the suggestion that Government should refocus where money was being spent. At the time, the emphasis was on the long term unemployed. It was felt that if Job Network providers could intervene earlier, and if more work was done on career education in the schools, jobseekers may not become long term unemployed (Walker 2005, p. 22).

5.7 Regional labour market policy

The Literature Review examined how labour market policy is developed and implemented and some of the factors which influence this process. This section will consider the creation and operations of the Skills Taskforce in the context of this labour market policy.

Australian politics have traditionally been contested by two major parties with specific ‘objectives or societal goals’ (Curtain 2000, p. 35). The Labor Party has campaigned on a political centre-left platform of social justice which includes the intent to ‘improve the lives of ordinary workers and their families, giving them fair shares in a growing economy and
supporting the vulnerable’ (Australian Labor Party 2012); whilst the Liberal Party, in coalition with the National Party, has worked on the centre-right of politics, with a doctrinal perspective that ‘wherever possible, government should not compete with an efficient private sector; and that businesses and individuals - not government - are the true creators of wealth and employment’ (Liberal Party 2012).

The G21 Skills Taskforce came into being in April 2006, following a regional forum which was conducted to consider the skills issue in the region. At this time, Australia was governed by the Liberal/National Party Coalition Government. This Government operated from an economic rationalist paradigm in which the free market was expected to control supply and demand of labour. At the State level, Victoria was governed by a Labor Government which had been in office since 1999. This meant that the Skills Taskforce was operating in an environment of political tension between Federal Coalition and State Labor Governments. As stated by Gates and Steane (2009, p. 90) ‘(d)ebates motivated by economic rationalist policies have tended to polarize Australian society’.

In these early days of the Skills Taskforce, the focus was on establishing the network and gaining commitment from potential members and stakeholders. The emphasis was very much on local issues and the internal regional environment. The G21 Alliance, under whose banner the Skills Taskforce was created, had a strong relationship with the Victorian State Government, particularly with Premier Steve Bracks and then treasurer John Brumby who had a close connection to Geelong, having officially launched the G21 Alliance in 2003 (G21 2010), and who later became Premier. The Skills Taskforce was therefore established in a somewhat benign political atmosphere.

According to Wiseman (2006, p. 95):

> Since its election in 1999, the Bracks Labor government’s approach to community strengthening has evolved from experimental piloting to a more coherent strategy employing community strengthening as a way of exploring more engaged, ‘joined up’ and networked approaches to governance and policy making. Rhetorical support for community strengthening is beginning to be backed by scaled up actions and investments which engage and link citizens, community organizations, public and private sector organisations at local and regional levels.

Wiseman (2006, p. 96) goes on to contrast the resurgence of community strengthening initiatives under the Bracks government with the ‘dramatic decline in the language and
practice of community development in Victoria’ under the previous Kennett Liberal State Government.

In 2000, the Victorian Labor Government held a Summit which resulted in the *Growing Victorian Together* policy in 2001. This was followed by a range of community capacity and neighbourhood renewal initiatives. However, these programs had strict regulatory guidelines and eligibility criteria and innovative projects which fell outside of these guidelines were rarely approved. In other words, the rhetoric about the importance of community engagement was different from the practice of social policy implementation which was still strongly controlled by Government. A similar situation existed at the Federal Level under both the Coalition and Labor Governments. This indicates that whilst *promoting* policy through a range of mechanisms including public advocacy, capacity building and training programs (Bendell, Miller & Wortmann 2011, pp. 278-279), these governments were actually more intent on *prescribing* through the development of regulatory systems (2011, pp. 279-280).

This was demonstrated by the inability of the Skills Taskforce to gain support from Federal or State Governments to provide funding for the *Career Development and Skills Service* project discussed in the previous chapter. Taskforce members presented briefings on the project to Ministers from both Federal Coalition and Labor Governments, as well as the Labor State Government. At the time of the briefings, each Government had policies in place with regard to the skills issue, as well as with regard to regional development, and the rhetoric was very strongly presented about the importance of regional engagement. However, in practice, the control and implementation of social policy was still vested solely in the hands of government with minimal regard for local initiatives which fell outside of the prescribed guidelines.

In 2010, the State Labor Government was defeated and a new Liberal State Government was formed. In 2012, the *Career Development and Skills Service* project concept was tabled with the G21 Education and Training Pillar which had, de facto, become the successor to the Skills Taskforce. This group declined to proceed with the project on the basis that successive governments had refused to support the project with funding despite it receiving significant regional support.

In trying to understand how the G21 Skills Taskforce operated in terms of labour market policy, the researcher has examined several media releases issued by Government or other agencies.
One article presents a news story on several case studies which have been released by Skills Australia ‘which showcase 11 organisations in industries as diverse as health, finance, resources and manufacturing who have put in place tailor made strategies to ensure that the skills and talents of their workforce are fully utilised’ (Skills Australia 2012). This article focuses on the relationship between skills acquisition and industry productivity.

The second article presented by a political agency involves a trade union using the skills issue as a way to pressure government. According to the union spokesperson:

“We agree with the former Deputy Prime Minister that education and skills development must be at the core of how we shape our economy and workforce and how we deal with the problems caused by insecure employment,” said Jeannie Rea, NTEU President. “This requires a lot more than the shallow debate we are currently having around ‘productivity’ and whether or not we can compete with China or India on flexibility and wages. The growing divide between the employed and under employed necessitates more fundamental changes, including how we structure and fund deep, life-long education and skills development.” (National Tertiary Education Union 2012).

The third and fourth articles found in the researcher’s search for labour market related media relate to the skills issue being used for political purposes. The third media article, released by the Victorian Premier’s office states that ‘Higher Education and Skills Minister Peter Hall today called on the Gillard Government to put more money not less into the Victorian training sector. The Prime Minister’s release of Skills for All Australians flags a huge decrease in funding to Victoria’ (Department of the Premier of Victoria 2012). This article brings the skill issue into the political arena in a tug-of-war between State and Commonwealth Governments over education funding.

The fourth media article was released by the Federal Government’s Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research. The release states that:

A national report, tabled in the House of Representatives yesterday, confirms strong growth in the total number of VET students. "The Annual National Report of the Australian VET system shows there were 1.8 million VET students in 2010 - that's an increase of 5.4 per cent on the previous year," Minister for Tertiary Education and Skills, Chris Evans, said. “We have
invested almost $4 billion more in VET than the Howard Government did in its last three years - and it is paying off. “For too long, too many Australians have been locked out of the workforce because they do not have the skills they need. "Our investment has resulted in more Australians than ever before undertaking VET studies and, importantly, we are seeing an increase in those finishing their studies and getting the qualification and skills they need to enter the workforce” (Evans 2012).

This media release presents the skills issue in terms of the contest between the Federal Labor and Liberal parties.

5.8 Worldview

According to Inayatullah (2002, p. 62), when examining important issues, it is important to consider the worldview of those involved. This includes the deeper, often unquestioned, civilization level assumptions. These are what Anthony calls ‘prevailing methods and paradigms’. Anthony (2009, p. 64) states that ‘the critical/rational and mystical/spiritual worldviews have played significant roles in the development of western civilisation since the time of the ancient Greeks’.

In reflecting on her journal and field notes, and the transcripts of the research interviews, it seems to the researcher that the members of the Skills Taskforce approached their work from the worldview of interdependence and empowerment, in which a region should have the capability and opportunity to address its own local issues and that it should be supported in this work by governments as presented by the rhetoric of government policies. In a number of meetings held by the Taskforce Executive, there was discussion about the various government policies and programs which could be accessed in order to achieve the vision and objectives, as well as the specific project goals, identified by Taskforce members.

However, when reflecting on the interactions which occurred with various government representatives, it appears to the researcher that the worldview of government is much more paternalistic in nature, with power being held by those individuals and agencies, and little consideration being shown for local initiatives.

It was the constant tension between these worldviews, expressed in the rhetoric and actual behaviour of government agencies which impeded the Skills Taskforce in being able to achieve more significant outcomes.
5.9 Myth/Metaphor

Inayatullah's (2002) also discusses the myths/metaphors which involve the ‘deep stories, the collective archetypes, the unconscious, often emotive, dimensions of the problem or paradox’ (2002, p. 7). Movva (2004, p. 43) states that ‘we basically understand the world through narratives, [so] the connection between myths and sense making becomes clearer’.

It is difficult to determine with any accuracy what myths or metaphors are represented in the range of human and organisational interactions which have been played out in the story of the G21 Skills Taskforce. However, one metaphor which may apply is that of the family; in this case, the family whose children are growing up and seeking some autonomy and independence to deal with their own issues. The Skills Taskforce formed a type of extended family, with some members being close to each other through strong network ties as well as, in some cases, ties of friendship; whilst other members moved in and out of the family circle. Like many families, the Taskforce members built alliances and developed cliques. Even when there were differences of opinion, there was always a sense of goodwill towards other “family” members, and all members were united in believing that they knew what they needed better than their parents did.

In the case of the Skills Taskforce, there was a frequent sense of frustration as the group identified how local issues could be addressed if only paternalism or maternalism, in the form of government, would support its children in taking action, as opposed to an insistence on maintaining a strong hold on the power and the allocations (or misallocation) of resources.

On reflection, this analysis has made the researcher aware of the naivety of the Skills Taskforce members as they attempted to navigate the political minefield of seeking funding and support for projects. They did this without recognising that the skills issue was as much a political issue as it was a labour market problem. This appears to the researcher to demonstrate the problems which can occur when different worldviews are brought to bear on an issue, which is played out in the context of our subconscious myths and metaphors.

5.10 Conclusion

This research used a realist paradigm to identify an existing model which could be applied to regional development effectiveness (Healey, de Magalhaes & Madanipour 1999) and to examine and adapt that model to more effectively assist regional developments to achieve their objectives. To do this, the researcher used social network analysis,
interviews, examination of documents and her own membership of the Skills Taskforce to make observations of the effectiveness of the group.

In undertaking the research, the researcher identified three primary questions which she believed needed to be answered. The first question was:

*Which factors contributed to the G21 Skills Taskforce achieving its objectives and which factors impeded them in this process?*

Discussions with those interviewed indicated that the main factor which contributed to the achievement of goals was the capability of the network leader to develop relationships with stakeholders and other groups, and to gain commitment from them to work more cooperatively together. Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) viewed network leadership as an indirect process in which network members are influenced to become champions of the network within their own organisations. The way in which the network Chairperson engaged stakeholders in the *Career Development and Skills Service* project was an example of this. As stated by a Local Government representative:

*the effectiveness of the network often comes down to the local leader and the people you have got in the group*

Examination of the documents plus the researcher’s own observations indicated that, whilst there was some good work done in achieving goals, the key areas in which the Taskforce could have improved included having better communication processes in place to inform Taskforce members and stakeholders in order to maintain their connection with, and commitment to, the work of the group; keeping the work of the Taskforce members and project teams more clearly aligned to the vision and strategic objectives of the group; identifying and working with powerful champions who could represent the aims of the network with the political decision makers; and trying to attract members who could bring specific skills and experience to the work. The social network analysis indicated that members needed to know each other, and their capabilities, better to maximise the availability of their skills and experience. The interviews identified the need to find the common ground in order to work together. This was reflected in the comment made by an industry representative, who said that:

*the model is only as effective as the people who sit around the table and understanding that they will actually get more out of it by working together than by fighting with each other*
The interviews brought to light a number of issues including the need for a strong sense of identity and external credibility; the importance of knowledge to regional development networks; and the need for well developed relationships and connections to stakeholders. The lack of resources was also identified as a factor which significantly impacted on the group’s ability to achieve its goals. As stated by a Taskforce member from another regional development network:

*that takes a degree of resourcing to do that and it is always a challenge which you have got at a regional level*

The final area which was problematic for the Taskforce was its inability to successfully gain commitment from political representatives to its work, particularly to the *Career Development and Skills Service* project. Curtain (2000) identified the key elements which he believed comprise good public policy. These include the need for policy to be framed in the long term, rather than in the shorter electoral cycles. It should also be developed in such a way as to enable the recipients of the policy to be involved. He stated that ‘*good policy also needs to be outcome-focused by identifying carefully how the policy will deliver desired changes in the real world*’ (2000, p. 36). The Taskforce might have been more successful if it had been more sophisticated in its understanding of how the political system worked with relation to the development of labour market policy and been able to use the political processes more effectively to achieve its goals.

The second question was:

*How could these factors have been strengthened or mitigated?*

The factors identified above fall into two categories: those related to the work undertaken by the Taskforce, and those related to the workings of the Taskforce itself. Whilst the Taskforce worked towards achieving project outcomes, little attention was paid to the group processes of the network itself. This meant that the group did not discuss how they could work together more effectively. As stated by one Taskforce Executive member from the community sector:

*I think some of these elements we’ve been talking about in a network structure, I don’t know how you foster and facilitate them, but perhaps it is the role for the board or the chairperson to have a good clear understanding of what they are seeking for the people that they are going to work with. So you can, at least in some sort of informal way, you can filter who is going to help and who is going to hinder. And it would be good to ultimately get to a point*
where you can have a conversation about those values because I know that would resolve it. It would be great to be able to pull people up and say, hang on, we are all here because of these reasons, and these are the values and behaviours we know make (the network) tick, and I am not sure where we are going here is going to be in alignment with that, so what do you have to say?

It would have been useful for a conversation about values and desired behaviours to have occurred in the early stages of the Taskforce development so that all members clearly understood what was expected of them.

Had the researcher been asked after completing this research to work with the Taskforce, she would have recommended that the group:

1. Clearly articulate its goals and objectives, and how it intended to achieve them;
2. Identify the skills, knowledge and experience which would be needed within the group to achieve its goals; determine who within the network had the necessary skills, knowledge and experience available; and discuss how these would be harnessed to successfully achieve its goals;
3. Openly discuss the behaviours and network processes which would be necessary for the group to work together successfully;
4. Identify those network capabilities which needed additional focus to assist the group. These could include building a stronger sense of internal or external identity, developing relationships with stakeholders, gaining commitment from members and stakeholders, sourcing and using information more effectively, and developing the leadership capabilities within the network.

The third primary question was:

*How relevant is the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model to the G21 Skills Taskforce?*

The Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model was seen to be a very useful construct, but one which needed more development in the case of the Skills Taskforce. The three components of the model; namely knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capability have therefore been developed into a new framework which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The G21 Skills Taskforce was established to address a specific regional need. There were a number of factors which impeded the Taskforce from being as effective as it could have been. These included a lack of process to bond the group into a cohesive whole
with a common, shared vision; and a limited ability to clearly articulate the work of the Taskforce to external stakeholders.

The Skills Taskforce may no longer exist in name, but key aspects of its vision continue in other voluntary community structures such as the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network which has taken up some of the work, including the ongoing advocacy for a *Career Development and Skills Service*.

The next chapter will analyse the various factors which have been identified in light of the data gathered through this research as well as through the lens of the literature review to identify some recommendations for further research and to develop a framework which would have been useful for the Skills Taskforce to improve its effectiveness.
6. Discussion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

An aim of this thesis was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the G21 Skills Taskforce in order to improve the practice of that group, and to use that knowledge to develop a framework of capabilities to assist and improve the effectiveness of the group in achieving its vision and objectives. The research objectives included identifying areas which were problematic for the network and developing strategies of use to both this and other such groups to address weaknesses and take advantage of regional opportunities.

The primary research questions were: ‘Which factors contributed to the G21 Skills Taskforce achieving its objectives and which factors impeded them in this process? How could these factors have been strengthened or mitigated?’ A series of subsidiary questions were also considered. These included:

1. What were the main characteristics of the G21 Skills Taskforce?
2. How did the network undertake to achieve its goals?
3. What were the perceptions of Taskforce members about how the G21 Skills Taskforce could have responded more effectively to the skills shortage problem?
4. Can the lessons learnt from the G21 Skills Taskforce response be used to improve regional development network responsiveness to other local issues?

This chapter covers a number of key issues. Firstly, it comments on the data obtained from G21 Skills Taskforce members and other Taskforce members and the extent to which it resonated with the literature. Secondly, the commentary extends to the key issues and themes which emerged from research in the field and the literature. These include leadership, network structure, including the numbers of people involved, membership, political context/environment, the Healy, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) framework, and future applications of the framework. These areas have been selected for specific focus by the researcher as they contributed the most useful insights with regard to understanding how the G21 Skills Taskforce operated and how it could have been made even more effective in achieving the group’s goals of addressing the region’s skills shortage issues. The literature, findings, and the researcher’s own reflections, are used to examine what the researcher has learnt from her research, and what contribution the outcomes may have for practice and theory.
6.2 Network structure

When considering the network structure, the researcher examined factors including the size of the group and its impact on communication processes; network membership; the skills and capabilities of members; and the ability of the group to find a common purpose. The researcher explored ‘the origin, size, structure and objective of the network’ (Pekkarinen & Harmaakorpi 2006, p. 402) in order to examine whether these factors contributed to, or detract from the network’s ability to achieve its goals.

6.2.1 Size of group

Taskforce members discussed the size of the G21 Skills Taskforce, making comments such as:

‘I know the group at one stage was probably too big’ (Local Government representative and Taskforce Executive member);

‘When we had twenty or thirty around a table, well that is not a working group; it is a talkfest’ (Community agency Taskforce member); and

‘the range of participants around the table was too large and so it was very difficult to identify a particular objective in which they can all participate as equals’ (Industry association representative and Taskforce Executive member).

According to Pekkarinen and Harmaakorpi, (2006, p. 410), ‘although clustering and networking are important factors in creating regional competitive advantage, the real competitive advantage of regional innovation networks is based on their ability to create knowledge in a collective and interactive learning process’. The size of the Skills Taskforce meant that this collective learning process did not take place as deeply as it could have with a smaller group. The question then is whether the Taskforce could have been structured to be inclusive without losing the ‘intimacy’ necessary for this collective learning to occur. Would it have been better if the Taskforce had started with a smaller number and grown more slowly over time as indicated by informants? A Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector stated:

‘I was thinking more towards the end we had a structure that would have been able to get us access to the right people; but maybe at the beginning it was too big and therefore too unruly to be effective. So maybe like I said, if it had started out perhaps the other way around’. 
As outlined in the Findings Chapter, in its early stages the Taskforce involved approximately forty members. Its structure aimed to ensure that there was strong representation from a wide range of sectors. As described by one Education representative:

‘You get a much better buy in I think because there are more representatives from more communities who can contribute’.

There was also a conscious intent to develop an inclusive culture in which the group considered ‘the extent to which the range of stakeholders ... expands beyond traditional power elites’ (Healey, de Magalhaes & Madanipour 1999, p. 118).

However, although this was done with good intent, the large size of the group meant that it was difficult for people to get to know each other and to develop the level of trust needed to enable the work of the Taskforce to proceed more effectively. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from the Education sector:

‘my concern with a larger group is that when I have forty or more people sitting around a table there is no way I am going to establish relationships with every one of them’.

That person went on to say that:

‘up to about 10 people it was quite manageable for me to have individual relationships with those people such that I would feel confident to contribute openly in that environment’.

The large size of the group influenced network members’ willingness to share their organisational information with others as they were often in the presence of competitors. During one meeting, the Taskforce chairperson raised the opportunity for members to become involved in a consortium bid for a Government tender. When asked if any of the member organisations were considering applying for the tender, none responded, even though three members were actually preparing bids. The researcher speculated on what could have been done to build the levels of trust so that members would have been willing to share such information. While some members knew that other members were involved in particular pieces of work, why did nobody choose to share that information with the wider group? Did the unwillingness of some members to share information mean that others were less willing to share in return? What impact does this have on the ability of a network to achieve its objectives? Why did some members hold themselves apart?

Perhaps a formal network policy with regard to conflict of interest and how it would be handled by the group may have addressed the concerns of some members. Another
possible option would have been for the Taskforce leader to initiate a discussion at the inception of the Taskforce to encourage members to explore how they would prefer to handle such situations, given that this could arise.

Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999, p. 125) discussed the importance of knowledge resources to a network and examine ‘the difficulties and misunderstandings that can arise through failure to reflect on the different assumptions embodied in ... tacit knowledge’. As outlined in the Literature Review, trust is a vital component of establishing and maintaining an effective regional network. According to Lorentzen (2008, p. 536), ‘trust among actors and personal networks are prerequisites for sharing tacit knowledge’. The size of the Taskforce meant that members did not get to know each other well enough to build the social capital necessary for trust to develop in the competitive environment within which they operated. According to Christoforou (2011, p. 699), ‘[s]ocial capital refers to norms and networks of reciprocity, trust and cooperation that facilitate coordinated action for a mutual benefit’. She goes on to state that the development of social capital and trust are ‘influenced by more institutional and systemic factors that characterize the social, political and cultural context in which individuals interact’ (Christoforou 2011, p. 700). The researcher’s field notes describe information about another context in which one member organisation undertook a significant piece of research into what was happening in the regional labour market for its own students, but was not prepared to share this information because they felt that it sometimes revealed weaknesses in the organisation’s internal service delivery. Even when encouraged to leave out anything too sensitive, they still chose not to share what may have been valuable information from their research with the wider group.

The researcher has reflected on the impact of this on the Taskforce and whether there was anything else members could have done to encourage greater sharing. Was the network’s credibility an issue in the willingness of others to provide information? Would higher credibility and a stronger network reputation have built more trust? A Taskforce Executive member from the Education sector commented that:

‘if I go along to one of these meetings and there's someone I don't know I will think twice about what I say within that meeting; but once I actually know that person and have some sort of working relationship with that person I will lay my cards on the table just like anyone else. It is about getting that level of trust right’.
Would starting off with a smaller group and different group dynamics have enabled trust to develop over time as the group grew? As stated by an interviewee who was a member of another network:

‘It takes time and it takes effort and it needs development of those relationships and that underpins the whole regional model that we operate’.

That person went on to say that:

‘it is only as effective as the people who sit around the table and understanding that they will actually get more out of it by working together’.

Over time, the researcher recognised the problems being caused by the large size of the network and made a suggestion that a smaller Executive group should be formed which would meet on a monthly basis, with the full membership meeting quarterly. All members were canvassed for their interest in become members of the Executive and fourteen indicated their interest. For a while, this appeared to assist with more effective operation of the Taskforce. A Taskforce Executive member from an Industry association commented that:

‘we were able to establish a lot more while we had a smaller group’. However, the unintended consequence of this strategy was the gradual disengagement of many from the larger group.

Another Executive member from Federal Government noted that:

‘We couldn’t run it with a very large group. It was impossible. We had to go back to an executive, and people sort of dropped away. So we’re back to a core, and I don’t think we had that wider ring, and that’s something that we’ve probably got to look at’.

Whilst the formation of the Executive group improved the efficiency of the Taskforce, did it also improve the effectiveness given that many of the larger group disengaged? As stated by Sotaaraauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 15), ‘sometimes actors outside of a coalition may question the objectives coalitions see as self-evident’. How could the communication process have been improved to ensure that the wider membership still felt engaged and valued?

The importance of good communication was highlighted by one Education representative who commented that:

‘we need to talk about it openly and don’t assume that everyone is on the same page in their conceptualisation of what the entity is and what it is
supposed to do. *We sit around these tables and there is that assumption that everyone is on the same page. Not the case*

Another Taskforce member from an Employer group suggested that more could have been done to keep the membership informed through weekly email updates or through a newsletter:

‘*just to keep those communication channels open so that you aren’t closing yourself off to all of the expertise in the group*’.

A Taskforce member from Federal Government stated that:

‘*generally, people aren’t going to be responsive to receiving the minutes of a meeting. One of the things that we’re talking about at the Taskforce is the idea of running a breakfast that’s around information and running it to the wider group. But it’ll be interesting to see how many turn up because, when we ran it the last time, a year ago, I think we only ended up with about 30 people out of the 100 we invited*’.

Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 84) identified network capabilities such as ‘negotiation, communication (and) persuasion’ as important. McMullen and Adobor (2010, p. 724) proposed the importance of behaviours such as championing, building relational capital, communication skills, managing expectations and the ability to recognise and celebrate others’ efforts. These skills are important, not only between groups such as the Executive and the wider Taskforce membership, but also within the Taskforce and the Executive group themselves. A Taskforce member from the Education sector noted that:

‘*to identify the flows of communication, you sit in these meetings and there might be a two way flow of conversations between particular people at the table but often you see the outliers sitting there and I would identify myself in the Skills Taskforce as being an outlier*’.

Based on both comments from Taskforce members and suggestions from the literature would, it would seem to indicate that the members of the Executive group needed to do more work to maintain strong communication lines with the other members of the Taskforce to keep them engaged and to ensure that the necessary expertise was available when projects were being undertaken.
6.2.2 Network membership

When considering issues of membership of the G21 Skills Taskforce, the researcher is cognisant of the type of network which was in place - what Harmaakorpi and Niukkenen (2007, p. 86) referred to as a:

‘large loose regional network’, in which ‘the members of the network have many different value systems which are not necessarily overlapping; the members have quite different ideas about the aims and methods of the network; and the network is formed by many different coalitions’.

Whilst these factors brought diversity to the Taskforce, they also made it difficult to facilitate, with some members having conflicting ideas about what they wanted the network to achieve and how best to go about it. Oprime, Tristáo and Pimenta (2011, p. 119) discussed the importance to network relationships of understanding network characteristics. The differences in perception between members meant that relationships which were already tenuous due to the large size of the group became even more fragile. The researcher’s journal reflects on how these relationships could have been strengthened. Perhaps if more time had been spent with members articulating why they had joined the network and what they hoped to achieve for their own organisations, then this greater awareness could have been used to find common goals. As stated by one Taskforce member from the Community sector:

‘The initial steps are very much first listening and being clear if there is anything much in common that can be shared and putting that back to people’.

Another member from Local Government commented that:

‘You sit next to them, you hear them talking and again you start to identify areas of common interest that you may not otherwise have thought of; and you are also forming personal relationships at a very limited level, but you are still doing it and that network starts to create its own opportunity which then plays out in issues that are important to the Taskforce’.

According to Sacco and Blessi (2009, p. 1120):

‘Essentially, we may think of social capital (SC) as consisting of a shared pool of norms, informal rules, conventions and practices connecting members of a group and allowing them to co-ordinate their actions in order to reach common interest goals’.

In finding such a common purpose, a Community representative felt that this could be achieved through engagement with specific projects when they stated that:
'the Taskforce did become galvanised around the development of the Career Development and Skills Service and that became a guiding sort of light in the last couple of years'.

According to a Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector:

‘It is a network that brings together the key players who live inside the space for the core business'.

They went on to identify the problems which faced the Taskforce in seeking membership and stated that:

‘whether or not one maintains a kind of open and inclusive approach to having people join things or whether you need to have more targeted approaches to getting the so called right people at the table; but the danger is that you define “right” narrowly. You know certain people have an ideological agenda and they will drive it that way, so the inclusive process would probably catch people that you would not ordinarily think about'.

In describing another regional development network, Allen and Cochrane (2007, p. 1168) commented on the domination by ‘representatives of public sector agencies of one sort or another’. This was also reflected in the membership of the G21 Skills Taskforce. However, there was some disagreement about the level of authority and decision making at which members should operate. One member from the Education sector stated that:

‘one of the things that is important if you are looking at building a committee, building a structure, the people who need to be on the committee need to have a sense of the issues that are significantly lower than CEOs, and who can reflect the needs of the community. Have they got the knowledge, the understanding of the issues or are they flying at a different level? So if they are flying at a different or a higher level, maybe they are not the people we need. Maybe they are too removed from the real issues’.

However, others disagreed with this viewpoint. A Local Government representative commented that:

‘the ideal person is someone who is at least in a management or senior management role, that has the capacity to spend money and make decisions pretty much on the spot’.

This view was also reflected by a member from the Education sector who said:
‘you should have the decision makers here because they are the ones that can allocate resources and give the yay or nay immediately’;

A Taskforce Executive member from Local Government stated that:‘

‘If you want to get high level strategic commitment, then you have to have people around the table who are providing that. I just don’t think it works to have passionate people working independently within each of their organisations trying to influence their high level decision makers. The passionate people need to be driving the project but the strategic thinkers have got to be the decision makers’.

These differences of opinion may reflect how members were unclear about whether the role of the Taskforce was to engage with industry directly by having business owners and senior managers as members of the Taskforce itself, or whether the Taskforce should be a ‘persuading’ body like the Federal Government’s Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) and Victorian State Government’s Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), which were designed to influence decision makers through the use of members who could act as champions with senior managers. If the decision makers are to be engaged then, according to an Education representative who made the following statement and unwittingly illustrated the complexity of the Taskforce in doing so:

‘To get our CEO involved, he would want to see that it actually fitted our own vision and mission’.

This statement was a real concern as it presumes that an education body has all the answers and it would seem that community bodies had no role in shaping policy.

For other Taskforce members, the main issue with regard to network membership was having good cross-sector representation. A Federal Government representative and a Community agency member both commented on the lack of industry representation, and an Industry association member felt there was over-representation of:

‘all the levels of education, both private and public sector’, and she went on to say that ‘If you look around the table, we had no major employers there, let alone their general managers, directors, CEOs’.

As well as the sectoral representation and level of authority of members, there was also some comment from Taskforce members and other interviewees about the types of change capabilities needed within the Taskforce if it was to mobilise effectively to achieve its goals.
Mobilisation capability has ‘both an “agency” perspective and a “structural” one’ (Healy, de Magalhaes & Madanipour 1999, p. 131). Agency relates to the processes which are in place to ‘accelerate learning, release creativity, develop trust and generate a capacity to act collectively’ (1999, p. 131); whilst structure relates to the way in which existing power structures and dynamics can be used to initiate change. Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour identified the “change agent”, leader or “broker” (1999, p. 131) as particularly important in this process. Four components are identified for this element of their theory: opportunity structure – how the network stakeholders perceive the potential change and around which aspects of it they decide to mobilise; arenas – the targets identified for institutional change; repertoires – the mobilisation techniques on which the network will draw; and change agents – the people who are critical to the mobilisation effort and the characteristics which are required to drive different stages of change.

The Taskforce members had some difficulty in deciding on the aspects of change around which they wished to mobilise. A Community organisation member stated that:

‘You need to be clear about what the purpose is but you also need to be realistic in what you can achieve in a group like that’.

A Taskforce member from Local Government commented on the need for the Taskforce to ‘galvanise around a purpose’. Another person from a different regional development network described that network as ‘fluid and dynamic’. They commented on the mobilisation process within the Taskforce:

‘The one thing that comes to mind is the experiential process of networks and that it can be cycles within cycles; and I think networks are usually formed for the longer term if you like. It is not a project team. There is a bigger picture involved. I think nurturing a network is important but that can be a shared responsibility’.

Another Taskforce member from the Community sector stated that:

‘you could also take it from the point of do we need people who can see the day to day things; but do we also need people in there who can see things from a completely out there perspective and who come up with completely different ways of doing things?’

Innes and Booher (1999, p. 412) commented that ‘[c]onsensus building and other forms of collaborative planning are increasingly used for dealing with social and political fragmentation, shared power and conflicting values’. If the Taskforce was to facilitate the social and economic changes which were embodied in its vision, then these capabilities
were very important for members. In the case of the Career Development and Skills Service project, Taskforce members worked collaboratively to plan and implement the project. If the Taskforce was to mobilise to make the changes described by Healy, de Magalhaes and Madanipou (1999) above, then the members needed to work on their existing strengths with regard to agency to improve trust and accelerate learning. This, in turn, could have enabled them to use power structures and dynamics more effectively by harnessing the group’s creativity and ability to act cooperatively. Had this been done then they may have been able to progress the Career Development and Skills Service project by acting more collectively and providing a consistent, targeted message to senior decision makers and politicians.

A Taskforce member from the Community sector stated that:

“When you are setting up an innovation, ok, it is an innovation because it sits outside the normal paradigm; so it is outside the normal institutional cultures that are in place. To maintain the difference, the innovation, you need to have enthusiastic people involved and you need to have people who are involved to constantly commit energy to the difference to keep the thing alive and well’.

The improvements made to both agency and structure could have contributed to building stronger commitment and higher energy amongst members and manifested in improvements to their approach to initiating and implementing projects.

Some of the capabilities which are important for effective knowledge creation include the need for collaboration for mutual gain, reciprocated confidence, the ability to see things from the ‘global’ perspective, strong communication and innovation (Capó-Vicedo, Mula & Capó 2011, p. 379). Semlinger (2008) contended that close cooperation and mutual dependency in regional development networks ‘stimulate and control cooperative collaboration and ensures ... commitment’ (2008, p. 558). According to Semlinger (2008, p. 548), having a common understanding of the goals of the group builds a sense of belongingness and this is essential for the success of the group. However, he goes on to state that this requires robust communication processes to be in place (Semlinger 2008, p. 549). Despite the evolutionary issues faced by the Taskforce, the members of the G21 Skills Taskforce worked to implement these capabilities in their work on the Career Development and Skills Service project through the development of a feasibility study and business plan which provided the structure and common language necessary for the group to take the project forward in a coordinated, cohesive manner. The framework developed by the researcher identified capabilities important for the Skills Taskforce, with ‘collaboration for mutual gain’ part of the process for building commitment and having a
‘shared understanding of belonging to a corresponding endeavour’ included in the process for building identity.

In developing social capital and building a unified approach to regional development within the Skills Taskforce, it was important to articulate the values and skills necessary within the group. Wilson (1997, p. 746) stated:

‘[w]hether the focus is community economic development, community social development or strengthening local democracy, productive social capital rests on the values of trust and openness. The role of the professional as technical expert, master planner or manager will be embedded in the larger role as catalyst, facilitator, communicator, team-player’.

At various times, the core group who had started the Skills Taskforce took on these roles. For example, one Taskforce member who was not the formal leader took on the role of informal leader in driving forward the Career Development and Skills Service project, providing direction to the group and undertaking the planning necessary for connecting with the senior bureaucrats and politicians. At other times, that person took a back seat and became a team member, whilst other people moved into the roles of technical expert or facilitator.

This network membership section has examined the G21 Skills Taskforce in terms of the network structure, including the size of the group and some of the characteristics of its members. The intent of the Taskforce chairperson was to undertake an inclusive process whereby stakeholders who felt that they had an interest in the local skills issues could come together to form a network which would develop and implement a vision and goals to improve local labour market opportunities. A Taskforce member from a community agency commented that:

‘when people feel left out, it is not going to work because it is the small group of people managing things and already deciding agendas or issues before we get to the table, and that is not inclusive’.

The researcher considered this need to be inclusive throughout the life of the Skills Taskforce with consensus being the norm. The Taskforce chairperson stated that he believed that inclusivity was the optimum strategy with regard to the formation and operations of the Taskforce in order to ensure a diverse representation of viewpoints. However, this strategy became counter-productive to some extent. The researcher’s field notes and journal note a number of occasions, including the Taskforce review outlined in the Findings Chapter, as well as some of the meetings of the Executive group, during which the striving for consensus resulted in a ‘paralysis’ with regard to decision making
and action due to the differing agendas of members. In some instances, this was not resolved as those agendas had not been openly discussed.

It could be argued that the G21 Skills Taskforce was dependent on Governments and other agencies for funding to undertake its projects, competing against many other agencies and groups for limited support. Some of those other groups, such as another regional network, used professional lobbyists and invested network funds in producing project marketing material. This raises the issue of how different the outcomes might have been had the Taskforce members been more strategic and directive in the early days of the group's formation. Would this have enabled the network to be more focused in how it interacted with potential funding bodies such as Government Departments, and ensuring that a strong message was provided about the importance of the project and the potential benefits which it would provide? In describing with which groups a particular Local Government agency would be prepared to partner, a Taskforce member from Local Government stated that:

‘The ones who are easiest to deal with are the ones who have a very clearly defined goal. They have done their homework and they have their organisational governance sorted out. Now that doesn't have to be formal governance; it can be informal but they know who the leaders are, who is doing what; they have a clear expectation; they have defined the outputs; they come to the council and say we want x, this is what we can bring to the table, here are the people who are going to do it, we want to work in partnership with you’.

Funding bodies may have been looking for networks such as the Skills Taskforce to operate and present themselves in a more business-like manner. However, the processes used by the Taskforce chairperson were often more related to ensuring that everyone had a say and that consensus was reached. Rather than inviting all interested parties to join the Taskforce, the chairperson and initial network members could have developed a clear initial vision and then been strategic about who would be best placed to assist in achieving that vision, and specifically targeted those people to become members of a smaller initial network. Once the group was established and had been able to develop a business plan which could be presented to funding bodies, then others could have been invited to join the group. The question remains whether the Taskforce would have been more effective in sourcing funding had this model of operation been instigated. Had that been the case, would the Taskforce have been able to undertake and complete more projects? Would this, in turn, have improved their credibility and reputation and therefore led to more funding? If so, over time, a move to a more inclusive model could
then have developed, by promoting the Taskforce to other potential members, as trust and strong relationships were forged by the success of the various projects.

However, whilst this might seem like a sound alternative strategy, there were also practical problems given influential decision makers are invited to participate in numerous groups and networks. These individuals are often time poor with many competing claims on their time and energy. They therefore need to prioritise which networks they will join, depending on the benefit to their own organisation. Whilst the Skills Taskforce did sometimes target a particular influential decision maker, unless that person could see some specific benefit to their organisation by their personal participation, they were more likely to send someone further down the hierarchy as their representative. The researcher’s journal notes a number of instances in which this occurred. The network was then often not in a position to take decisive action as its members had to report back and seek permission from their own leaders before committing to action.

6.3 Leadership

The Literature Review examined research relating to leadership in networks (Sotarauta & Viljamaa 2002; Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007); the education sector (Sendjaya & Pekerti 2010); the health industry (Marinelli-Poole, McGilvray & Lynes 2011); volunteer organisations (Schneider & George 2010); and not-for-profits (Githens 2009; McMurray et al. 2009; Sarros, Cooper & Santora 2010). These studies indicated that interpersonal skills such as communication, facilitation and negotiation skills are extremely important for leaders in these environments.

(Researchers) examined the question of whether network leadership is actually different from leadership in hierarchical/single-agency structures. They focused on the leadership behaviors used by people who were leaders in both government agencies and networks .... They found that when these leaders were in their networks, they focused more on people-oriented behaviors and less on task-oriented behaviors than when they were leading in their agencies. This is a valuable finding which seems to ... underline the importance of leadership within networks' (Baker & Kan 2011, p. 855).

As stated by Miller (2008, p. 357), leaders are ‘effective collectors and disseminators of information, have the trust of stakeholders, understand the complexities involved in networks with a range of constituents, have excellent interpersonal skills, are able to bring diverse partners to the table, can unite ‘disparate groups around a common cause’ and are able to ‘move freely and flexibly within and between organisations and communities’
(2008, p. 358) to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. These behaviours were exhibited by the Chairperson of the G21 Skills Taskforce. The researcher’s journal and comments made by Taskforce members interviewed as part of the data collection, note the Chairperson’s capabilities with regard to interpersonal skills, such as negotiation, listening, group facilitation and trust building. Sometimes, however, they also said that he needed to focus more on the task behaviours necessary to move projects forward, including establishing role responsibilities and establishing project milestones and reporting processes.

McMullen and Adobor (2010, p. 715) discussed ‘the emergence of new and unconventional forms of intermediary organizations dedicated to fostering multiparty or cross-sector collaboration’. This is an apt description of the G21 Skills Taskforce which attempted to bring together stakeholders from industry, the community sector, education, and governments at national, state and local levels to identify local skills shortage issues and to develop and implement strategies and projects to address these. McMullen and Adobor (2010, p. 716) stated that leaders in such groups operate in very complex environments which ‘place multiple, conflicting and significant pressures on such leaders’ and in which ‘a bridge leader needs to navigate the conflicting expectations of different stakeholders without the usual sources of power’.

In order to achieve this goal, the Chairperson of the Skills Taskforce began by taking on a more direct leadership role in the early days of the Taskforce establishment. As described by Cope, Kempster and Parry (2011, p. 276), ‘vertical leadership may be especially important during the early stages of the new venture as it is the entrepreneur who formulates an initial vision and has to effectively influence others ... to buy into and help realize this vision’. A Taskforce member from Federal Government discussed this when they said that:

‘the facilitator, or the leader, or the manager, or whoever is invoking the discussion is probably the key to it’.

As time went by, the Chairperson moved to a more indirect or distributed style of leadership – what one interviewee from another network called ‘a different sort of leadership dynamic’ - in which network members are influenced to become champions of the network within their own organisations (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007), and in which the leader ‘supports the engagement of more people in decisions, enabling collaboration and designing institutionalizing structures and practices’ (Cope, Kempster & Parry 2011, p. 272). According to Sotaarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 4), a new, more indirect form of facilitative leadership is required in a regional network than in the corporate environment,
relying more on social skills and the ability of the leader to interact effectively with network members. In terms of the Skills Taskforce, this was important as the leader had no specific formal power. Sotarauta (2005, p. 58) described leadership as an activity in which ‘leadership does not accomplish the mission. It is rather the force that causes the mission to be accomplished’. To do this, the social skills needed to facilitate group cohesion were very important. The Chairperson of the Skills Taskforce had very strong social skills and was highly respected by the Taskforce members and other stakeholders. As the Chairperson commented:

‘I play a sort of brokerage role, so I can go and talk to anyone’. A Taskforce member from the Community sector highlighted this issue when they said that ‘that leadership position, it is going to have to be first of all somebody that people like and respect’. This person went on to state that ‘you need a good leader to facilitate; to get some communication going’.

Whilst the Taskforce leader spent a lot of time focusing on promoting communication, sometimes this resulted in the group getting bogged down in discussion without moving forward to action. For some members of the network, this resulted in a sense of frustration that nothing appeared to be happening, and they began to disengage. The researcher’s field notes and journal reflect on what might have happened had the Chairperson been a bit more directive on certain tasks. Would members have accepted this type of leadership behaviour and moved into action, or would they have resisted and would this then have caused schisms within the group? What was the balance necessary for the leader to find between people and task orientation and how could the leader have managed the ‘moving feast’ of this tension? How does this fit with the concept of distributed leadership in which ‘desired leadership characteristics are distributed among team members’ (Berber & Rofcanin 2012, p. 57)?

Sotaarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 2) stated that, in a network, leadership and followership may be interchangeable depending on the issue or project at hand, resulting in a more collaborative form of leadership. A Taskforce member from Local Government described this as a useful strategy to gain buy in as:

‘trying to bring everyone on that journey is a challenge’ and ‘if you get a Chairperson who charges off on their own and leaves everyone behind, you lose that’. They felt that ‘the flat structure is really critical, you still need strong leadership and the right people on the bus’.

If leadership had been distributed amongst the members of the group, could the group have managed this tension, especially when there were differences of opinion as to the
The best way forward? There was the potential for the group to fracture had leadership been distributed too widely. More work needed to be done on building a common purpose and vision so that network members were working towards the same goals, rather than more individualistic goals which were important to only some members. To achieve this, a better understanding of some of the leadership capabilities which have been identified as important in a network would have been useful; for example, the strategic, interpretive, networking, absorptive and excitement capabilities described by Sotarauta (2005) and the Personal Construct Theory components of individuality, experience, sociality and commonality defined by Kelly (1991). Conscious implementation of these capabilities might have provided a stronger group process and contributed to reinforcement of the Taskforce vision, goals and purpose.

Another Local Government representative stated that:

‘network leaders need to have a good clear understanding of what they are seeking for the people that they are going to work with. So you can at least, in some sort of informal way, you can filter who is going to help and who is going to hinder’.

Cope, Kempster and Parry (2011, p. 277) stated that ‘employees may not necessarily comply with the (leader’s) conception or may pursue their own agenda at the expense of the firm’. Again, this was sometimes the case in the Skills Taskforce where the goals of individual members and their organisations were not congruent with those of the Taskforce. Harmakorpi, (2006, p. 1088) stated that ‘leadership capability in a networked regional development environment can be defined as a regional innovation system’s ability to effectuate actions steering the processes and resources of the system in the desired direction’. By focusing very much on a distributed style of leadership, the Chairperson sometimes failed to steer the group in the desired direction the group became sidetracked by their diverse agendas. This was particularly the case when it came to selecting project priorities, with some of the projects which were undertaken being important to particular individuals or organisations rather than to the Taskforce as a whole. These individuals were able to impose their own ideas on other network members due to their dominant personalities, the positions that they held in their own organisations and the level of authority that they were perceived to hold.

When considering Thorpe, Gold and Lawler’s (2011, p. 244) model of distributed leadership, the work of the Skills Taskforce contained elements of both Emergent Distributed Leadership (DL) and Chaotic DL. The Emergent DL tended to occur where communication was not well maintained within the group, with members only coming
together occasionally and not knowing what others were doing in the meantime. The Chaotic DL was particularly noticeable with regard to the projects, with project teams not keeping each other informed about what was happening. This sometimes resulted in the groups working at cross-purposes or straying from the overall vision and objectives of the Taskforce and moving into areas which were of importance to only some members.

‘[A] critical ingredient in effective mobilisation is the “change agent”, leader or “broker” who can both “carry” the collective force for change and position it in significant arenas in order to widen the “cracks” of opportunity’ (Healey, de Magalhaes & Madanipour 1999, p. 131). The Taskforce Chairperson, as well as some key members of the Taskforce Executive, took on this role to attempt to bring the work of the various project teams back into alignment by articulating the changes which were necessary if the group’s vision was to be achieved and by engaging the group in discussion of how best to achieve those goals. In some instances, Taskforce Executive meetings were dedicated to these tasks and these tended to refocus the group’s efforts for a while.

‘[T]ransparency and consistency are important process features for attracting external actors into the regional development network’ (Sotarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 14). The Skills Taskforce needed to have some process in place to keep important stakeholders, such as government representatives, informed about the work being undertaken by the Skills Taskforce and how that work could contribute to the goals and objectives of the stakeholder organisation. This could have been done by weaving the aims of the Career Development and Skills Service project into a compelling “story” about the future of the region (Sotarauta 2005, p. 57). This “story” could have incorporated the vision and objectives of the Taskforce through the sense of urgency provided by the practical mechanism of the project itself.

6.4 The political environment

‘(G)ood policy ... needs to be outcome-focused by identifying carefully how the policy will deliver desired changes in the real world’ (Curtain 2000, p. 36).

Scott, Russell and Redmond (2009) discussed the role of people in the development and implementation of policy and identify the importance of what they call active citizenship. The G21 Skills Taskforce was established as a vehicle for active local citizenship to take a role in delivering ‘desired changes’ within the G21 Region. One of the areas in which the Taskforce could have become more effective was in the way it navigated the political landscape in order to promote its projects to politicians and senior Government public
servants in order to attract funding. This occurred at a time when both State and Federal Governments were beginning to cut spending on education and to expect schools and other training institutions to focus on education for the purpose of labour market outcomes (Kell 2012). The Taskforce found itself in the position of having to deal with this expectation from Governments whilst:

‘(t)here are profound conflicts emerging from the shifts in VET policy where altruism and traditional notions of vocations are challenged by the values of the market competition and flexibility and these suggest some important tensions around the values and norms associated with work and learning’ (Kell 2012, p. 77).

The Taskforce found navigating the political environment in these circumstances to be a difficult process as it was trying to introduce innovative projects which were hard for Governments to categorise into particular funding ‘buckets’. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from Federal Government:

‘our capacity to influence isn’t good. But it’s because we’re in a whole lot of new territory’.

Social policy can be defined as ‘guidelines and interventions for the changing, maintenance or creation of living conditions that are conducive to human welfare’ (Vargas-Hernández, Noruzi & Ali Irani 2011, p. 287). Social policy can also be discussed in terms of regional differences where ‘regional policy is necessary’ for targeted responses to local issues (Kilijoniene & Simanaviciene 2009, p. 826). The G21 Skills Taskforce was established by local representatives to develop strategies and projects which would contribute to addressing the skills shortage problems faced by the Region. This was in response to other work done within the G21 organisation which connected economic prosperity to the social health of the region and which therefore contributed to improved human welfare at a local, regional level.

In trying to identify how the Skills Taskforce could have been more successful at engaging with senior policy and decision makers so that they would also make this connection, a Taskforce Executive member who is also the leader of another local network stated that:

‘It is not just the external, it is the internal people as well. If you want Government sitting around the table at a senior level and putting some resources on the table, you had better either understand what the priorities of the council are or find some sympathetic influential people within it who will help you with that; or in the longer sense, you have an educational role in getting them to understand that something really is an important issue and
they really need to do something about it’.

In discussing how the Taskforce could have worked with State and Federal levels of Government, they went on to say that:

‘getting them to understand that each region is different and their role therefore is to get the input from those regions and then consolidate that, and work out how they respond to that; a sort of top down, bottom up process and in doing that I think it sometimes takes you a while to get their heads around it’.

The Skills Taskforce was not very successful in this educative process with Governments and other potential funding bodies. This arguably was because the network members were so immersed in the issues themselves that they failed to realise that others were not as knowledgeable about what was happening in the region, and therefore found it more complex to engage with the issues.

Members worked hard to gain access to senior government decision makers in both State and Federal Departments from both major political parties. Having achieved this, Taskforce members presented what they considered to be a compelling case, providing evidence of the regional need and outlining the strategy concept which had been developed as a response to this need, which was the Career Development and Skills Service project. Whilst strong verbal support for the concept was provided by Ministers and senior Government representatives during the briefings, no further support was provided to take the project from concept to implementation.

The skills issue is important to addressing imbalances in the labour market, but this is situated in ‘a series of policy tensions around issues of marketisation, centralisation and localisation’ (Green & Orton 2009, p. 615). It was this issue of localisation and the need for local solutions to local labour market problems that the Taskforce members struggled to put across to Government representatives, who appeared to want a ‘one size fits all’ strategy with regard to skill shortages. The researcher’s journal noted an instance in which a Federal Government Minister was briefed about the Career Development and Skills Service project. His response was that the project was an innovative and impressive strategy but that, if they funded such a centre in the G21 Region, then they would also have to fund similar centres in other regions around the country. The Taskforce members were not able to demonstrate to him that this was a local response which was not necessarily meant to be translated into other labour markets with their own specific issues. The question is what the outcome might have been had the Taskforce
members been able to anticipate such an objection and provide a compelling argument about the need for targeted local responses.

Had the Taskforce members been more politically savvy, they may have been able to present their case in a way which was more politically palatable. Perhaps this could have been couched in language which was attractive with regard to the political credit which might result from Government supporting the initiative. An added question is what might have happened had Taskforce members, including the researcher herself, spent more time anticipating the concerns of the Government representatives, and presenting the case in terms of national or state outcomes rather than regional ones. Why was it that the Taskforce did not have such a strategy in place? Were the members politically naive? Was it because there were no senior policy makers on the Taskforce to guide the group? What role would more robust leadership have played? What could have been done to address this?

In trying to identify a strategy which would facilitate engagement with senior Government stakeholders, an interviewee from another regional development network commented that:

‘We could be going into the state government and saying “we have a deal for you, we can deliver on this part of your agenda”; so that means that you have to be close enough to them to understand what the agenda is and that is a bit challenging because of changing Governments and changing structures and so on; but as we move forward that is what we have to do, is to work out what their agenda is and then work with them to put it together, if you like, a value proposition for them, you know “this is what we can do for you”; and if you can do that they will turn up and they will be around the table because that is what they want out of it’.

This approach was taken with one local Federal politician with regard to the Career Development and Skills Service project; however, it was not maintained. It was not sufficient to simply make first contact; the Taskforce members needed to persist if they were to gain “buy-in”. Do networks need to have “thick skins” and try not to take no, or apparent disinterest, for an answer? A Taskforce Executive member from Federal Government stated that:

‘you have to keep on putting up propositions, not just once or twice, but twelve or thirteen times. You don’t give up the first time. That is not how it works in politics, you know that’.

With projects such as the Career Development and Skills Service, the Taskforce members would give a presentation to particular Government representatives, but then
did not follow up with a continuing dialogue with those people in order to keep them engaged with the project proposal. One of the problems identified by a Taskforce member from the Community sector is the perception by members that:

‘things like government agendas aren’t clear’.

The Taskforce had no process in place to gain an awareness and understanding of those Government agendas so that proposals and presentations could be couched in terms which would resonate with the audience. Had the Taskforce members undertaken such a process, then it may have been more successful in gaining support from Governments.

‘Policy-making can be complex because of the numerous layers of government that Australians have developed. With three “levels” of local, state and federal government, there is plenty of scope for complications and problems about who does what or who gets the money to pay for various policies or programs’ (Bessant et al. 2006, pp. 203-4).

The complexity of dealing with these various layers of Government was another barrier for the Taskforce members to overcome. An Industry association representative felt that the best way to do this was:

‘[a]s far as how to get to the politicians; it is a case of they love the fact of partnerships, look we are working together we have all the people involved, we are unified on this front, we can see it being of great value to the region, sell it as value to the region’. Another Taskforce member from Federal Government stated that ‘if the group identifies a project that they believe is significant and important, there needs to be a process in place to say who do we think the likely interest groups and champions would be for this project and how do we engage with them to take this on’.

According to Wiseman (2006, p. 97):

‘One of the abiding themes in recent policy debates about community strengthening priorities in Victoria has been about the balance between ‘core’ social policy investments such as health, housing and education and investments in programs explicitly badged as “community strengthening” initiatives’.

The work of the G21 Skills Taskforce was specifically designed to work in this community strengthening area. However, the Taskforce needed to develop more robust strategies for how it could engage Governments and other important stakeholders in partnering with the network to implement its projects.
6.5 The Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model

This research began with the researcher asking the question as to whether it was possible to apply the institutional capacity building model developed by Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) to the operations of the G21 Skills Taskforce. The original model was developed in the context of urban planning and defined institutional capacity building as having three components: knowledge resources, relational resources, and community mobilisation. The framework described in the Findings Chapter has been developed from this model, other relevant available literature and the findings arising from the interviews, field notes and reflective journal collected during the research period.

Other researchers have also used the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model in different contexts and, like this researcher, have drawn from that model to develop their own frameworks and examinations of practice. These include broadening understanding of empowerment planning in regional development (Amdam 2010), regional capacity building (Khakee 2001), regional learning and innovation (Amdam 2003), and dynamic capabilities for regional economic development (Sotarauta 2003).

In examining the role of local empowerment in regional development, Amdam (2010, p. 1806) used the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model to examine the way in which local community ‘social’ power is transformed into political power. The issue of building social power into political power was also a factor in this researcher’s framework and an area with which the G21 Skills Taskforce grappled, particularly with ‘mobilizing’. The diverse agendas of the network members meant that the G21 Skills Taskforce battled with the process of cohesive ‘internal mobilization’ and so, despite having developed a powerful concept for the Career Development and Skills Service project, failed to gain the ‘external support’ necessary to take the project forward. Perhaps, if the Taskforce members had built a more robust learning process into its operations (as suggested by Amdam 2010), it would have been able to modify its responses to the numerous failures to attract funding and to organise and implement different strategies for accessing and working with key decision makers. This is reflected in the current research framework through the capabilities of developing the network’s identity, particularly having a cohesive vision, gaining commitment from members and other stakeholders, identifying champions and accessing the decision and policy makers.

Amdam (2003, p. 441) applied the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model to regional learning and described ‘dialogue, trust and partnership’ as ‘strategies for the development of regional competence’ (2003, p. 452), as well as discussing the importance of Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour’s (1999) three components in
building regional capacity. The importance of trust and partnerships was raised by Taskforce members as extremely important to the successes of the G21 Skills Taskforce. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector:

‘We do a lot of work in partnerships and everything needs to demonstrate a collaborative partnership’.

The need to develop trust and to find a common purpose, as well as the importance of using a learning process to transform information into knowledge, form part of the framework developed during this research.

Learning was also seen as important to sustainable regional development by Khakee (2001) who focused on the knowledge resources of the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model. He identified four criteria to ‘identify and evaluate the generation of intellectual capital, including the range and frames of knowledge needed by a group, as well as the need to link knowledge from different areas and to be open to new ideas (2001, p. 368). Knowledge and its application were also seen as important by Taskforce members. An industry association member stated that:

‘different levels of what people know about will inform the level of understanding that people have around a project or in this case, a network’.

The importance of knowledge and how it is sourced, accessed, used and disseminated are reflected in the set of enabling capabilities in the framework which has arisen from this research.

The Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model has also contributed towards Sotarauta’s (2003) capacity model for city-regions. In examining the inter-linkages necessary for effective city-region operations, Sotarauta (2003, p. 11) stated that ‘one of the main tasks of the managers engaged in promotion of urban economic development is to create functioning development networks and to mobilize resources and expertise both internal and external to the city-region in question’.

The inter-linkages between agencies, and the way in which relational resources were developed and used, was an important aspect of the G21 Skills Taskforce. In describing how the TAFE system developed, Kell (2010, p. 98) described the vocational education system (VET) as ‘having a social responsibility and as functioning for the benefit of the broader community to ameliorate a broad range of social and economic disadvantage’. The Taskforce attempted to engage with agencies and organisations from a range of sectors to develop strategies which used vehicles such as the VET system to address local skills shortage and the economic and social problems which can result from such
shortages. These problems include inequality, poverty and a lack of inclusivity. The G21 Skills Taskforce *Women in Trades* project was one such strategy designed to address these issues using the VET sector. However, the Taskforce also had to deal with a range of problems relating to the VET sector, including problems with low literacy levels of many students, the poor reputation of the VET sector in some parts of the community, a lack of professional qualifications amongst many teachers and the low levels of research being conducted within, and on, the sector (Kell 2011; 2012). A Taskforce Executive member from the education sector commented that:

> ‘community networks tend to develop around projects involving research work etc., and I have always had a strong belief in research that is connected at a community level. Now to do that, you have to spend time within networks’.

These issues highlighted the importance of Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour’s (1999) knowledge resources and relational resources, and the importance of community mobilisation to maximise the use of these. These areas have been addressed in the current framework through the set of enabling capabilities relating to relationships, commitment and knowledge.

The research examined above used Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour’s (1999) urban planning model applied to various aspects of regional development. The three components of the model, namely knowledge resources, relational resources and community mobilisation are important factors and their application has been adapted by those researchers for the particular aspects of regional development under consideration. In examining the operations of the G21 Skills Taskforce, this research adapted, and added to, the three components of the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999) model to provide a framework of inter-connected capabilities which could have improved the practice of the Taskforce.

### 6.6 Future applications of the framework

The purpose of this thesis was to examine a particular regional development network, namely the G21 Skills Taskforce, and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the group which contributed to, or detracted from, its effectiveness. The framework presented in this thesis has been developed as a resource that could have improved that effectiveness. Unfortunately, the G21 Skills Taskforce was disbanded before the researcher could apply some of these concepts further with that particular network.

There is, however, scope to test the framework further through analysis of its applicability...
to other similar regional development networks in the G21 Region. The primary network with which the researcher is currently working is the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (GRLLEN).

‘The LLENs are a Victorian Government initiative established during 2001. LLENs connect employers, education and training providers, government groups, agencies and individuals and use local data to broker strategic, sustainable partnerships that support improved education and transition outcomes for young people, including increasing year 12 or equivalent attainment rates’ (GRLLEN, 2011).

The GRLLEN has a paid staff of seven and a large network of over one hundred members from the education, community, government and industry sectors. It also covers a similar geographic area as the G21 Skills Taskforce. Five of the GRLLEN members had also been members of the Skills Taskforce and there is some synergy between the work undertaken by the GRLLEN and that of the Skills Taskforce. Although the GRLLEN’s charter is to improve education and employment outcomes for young people, the Executive Officer operates from the viewpoint that this work should be relate to lifelong learning rather than being age limited.

This concept is being further developed through some recent work which is being undertaken by the GRLLEN in partnership with Deakin University, the Regional Office of the State Government’s Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the University of Winchester in the UK. These partners have created the Expansive Learning Network (ELN) based in Geelong.

‘Based on an initiative developed by the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester in the UK, the new Expansive Learning Network is a forum where Principals and aspiring leaders, other educators and community, government and industry partners who are passionate about learning for the real world can work together to make the necessary changes.

- Engage with thought leaders in tackling provocative propositions.
- Collaborate to deliver world class 21st Century education.
- Reap the benefits of closer connections between education providers and industry to increase local and regional economic success.
- Create the conditions for innovation.
- Contribute to best practice through action research.
- Share the fruits of our enquiries’ (Expansive Learning Network, 2012).
The ELN will work with education, industry, community and government agencies to challenge some of the conservative paradigms with regard to the interface of education, training and employment held in many parts of the region and to work towards implementing innovative education and employment practices. Whilst this network is still in its infancy, there is already discussion underway about how the *Career Development and Skills Service* project concept can be advanced by this group.

In her work with the GRLLEN, the researcher is using the framework developed as part of this thesis to initiate strategies which are designed to improve the effectiveness of the GRLLEN network. This involves having a clear view of the purpose of the work; sourcing, using and disseminating information to build regional knowledge; working with a range of stakeholder individuals and organisations to gain commitment to the work of the GRLLEN; and building relationships with other networks and stakeholders. The researcher will continue to analyse and refine the framework as new data comes to light.

The researcher is also interested in using the framework with other types of regional networks. To this end, the framework was used as part of a regional project in which the researcher was involved, funded through the Victorian State Government and auspiced by the City of Greater Geelong. The research team was charged with examining how the education, health and community services sector could work more effectively together to provide services to residents of a new Geelong suburb which has recently received planning approval. In the final report, the researcher’s framework was used as a basis for identifying strategies for how a more integrated service delivery could occur (Henry et al. 2011).

Whilst the development of the framework has been contextualised in a regional setting, further research is required to explore whether the same issues apply to networks in metropolitan, State and national arenas. Further research is also necessary to examine how the framework might be applied to internal organisational project teams and work groups.

### 6.7 Summary

This Discussion Chapter has identified three areas which provided particular insights for the researcher with regard to the effectiveness of the G21 Skills Taskforce: (i) Network structure, (ii) Network leadership and (iii) Interaction with the political environment. Both the literature and the researcher’s own findings have highlighted facets of network structure and operations which can be addressed. These include taking a more conscious approach with regard to determining the optimum initial size and membership of the network, ensuring that there is balance between the long term strategic and short
term project orientation of the work, and having strategies in place to identify, and gain
support from, key politicians and senior Government representatives in order to secure
project funding. Had the Taskforce been able to address these issues, then the
researcher believes that more projects could have been initiated and implemented, with
the resulting success encouraging other stakeholders to engage with the network.

6.8 Contribution to practice – the Framework
Throughout the research undertaken by the researcher, she has been cognisant of her
role as a labour market analyst and regional development network consultant. Foremost
in her mind during the research was her intent to contribute to her own practice, as well as
to the practice of others who work with regional development networks. This section sets
out the framework which has resulted from the researcher’s reading of the literature, the
findings from her own data collection and the synthesis of these through this Discussion
chapter.

6.8.1 Introduction
This section of the Findings chapter describes in detail the framework which has been
developed as a result of the data collection and analysis discussed in the previous
sections of this chapter, as well as through an examination of the relevant literature
discussed in the Literature Review chapter.

The researcher began this research by reflecting on her own experiences as part of her
consultancy work and her membership of a number of regional development networks.
She combined this with her initial reading of the literature in the field to identify the
research questions described in the Research Methodology chapter. The framework
focuses on a regional network because ‘in modern regional policy … networks and
networking are assumed to be the key to success’ (Semlinger 2008, p. 547).

6.8.2 Development of the framework
At a fairly early stage in the examination of the data, supported by some reading of the
literature (Healey, de Magalhaes & Madanipour 1999; Amdam 2000; Cameron & Gibson
2005), the researcher identified four major sets of inter-related capabilities, ‘woven’
together by leadership, which appeared to be important in the successes and failures of
the Skills Taskforce. The development of these capabilities went through a number of
iterations as the analysis proceeded.
At one stage, the researcher attempted to prioritise the capabilities into a hierarchical order of importance for this group. However, upon reflection, this did not seem to be a useful strategy as the need for different types of capabilities shifted as the work of the Taskforce progressed. The researcher was cognizant of the fact that regional development networks come in all ‘shapes and sizes’. They vary in number of members, structure and purpose, so it did not seem realistic for the researcher to design a ‘one size fits all’ framework. If this framework is to be useful for other regional development networks, then the researcher realised that she could limit its applicability by building a specific hierarchy into the framework. Whilst all sets of capabilities were important in contributing to the effectiveness of the G21 Skills Taskforce, the members of other networks would need to determine the more important areas for them to address, and these are likely to vary depending on the specific circumstances of each group.

From examining the way in which the G21 Skills Taskforce was initiated and established, as well as in analysing the projects which it undertook, the researcher identified factors which contributed to the effectiveness of the network, as well as factors which could have further strengthened its operations had they only been considered. These factors have been organised into four “building blocks”, or sets of capabilities, as shown in the diagram below, with leadership being the factor which links them.

Figure 11 - Framework for improving the effectiveness of the G21 Skills Taskforce
The diagram shows the interconnectedness of the four sets of capabilities, which were seen to be important for improving the effectiveness of the Skills Taskforce. The sets of capabilities are presented below.

6.8.3 Build Identity
The first set of capabilities involved the need for the Taskforce to build a strong sense of identity. Whilst it had a compelling vision and goals, the Skills Taskforce was not able to clearly articulate these and, as a result, had some difficulty in engaging effectively with stakeholders in order to achieve its aims. This capability set includes the need for the network to balance its short term (1-2 years) project and long term strategic (10-20 years) focus; as well as developing processes for identifying and implementing relevant strategies. When the group identity was understood and clearly articulated, the Taskforce was able to engage its members and stakeholders in working towards addressing specific skill shortage issues. The success of the Taskforce in doing this was related to having the ‘right’ people involved in the network; that is those people with the necessary skills and experience to add value to the work of the group; and in building the credibility and reputation of the group with external stakeholders.

- Strategic or project emphasis
- Vision and objectives
- Who should be around the table?
- Strategy planning
- Credibility and reputation of group
- External perceptions of identity

Figure 12 - Build identity
When these capabilities were not present, the network was unlikely to engage effectively with their stakeholders, gain the commitment of members, or use knowledge fully to achieve the group's goals. As stated by Semlinger (2008, p. 548), ‘a mutually shared understanding of belonging to a corresponding endeavour and an ... understanding of the basic processes, structures, requirements and advantages of such a network is decisive for its development’.

Harmaakorpi and Melkas (2005, p. 647) stated that ‘a network needs a vision to synchronize the network’. The group initially identified its purpose, and this defined the vision and objectives for both the network and the stakeholders with whom the network needed to interact. According to Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 90), ‘the strategic questions, such as reasons for the network-based approach, goals of the network, and values of the network, [are] considered to be the most essential questions for any network cooperation’. In other words, in order for the Skills Taskforce to be effective, members needed to first have a very clear understanding of what they wished to achieve.

Analysis of the research interviews and supporting documents shows that the Skills Taskforce worked to clarify why it had formed and what it wished to achieve. However, the members sometimes seemed to get so caught up in this process that they forgot the importance of also explicating their identity to their external stakeholders and the community sectors which were relevant to their work. They ‘lacked a collective professional identity’ (Githens 2009, p. 417). As a result, they had difficulty in engaging effectively with those stakeholders. This was particularly noticeable with other networks which operated under the auspice of the G21 Alliance, including the G21 Economic Development Network, which was an important stakeholder group for the Taskforce due to the relationship between skill shortage and economic impacts on the region.

This was a particular weakness of the Skills Taskforce. Meeting minutes and the researcher’s field notes and journal show that, whilst the group spent some time in discussing its vision and objectives internally, no explicit work was done on how best to present the network identity to those outside the group. This lack of external identity made it difficult for the Taskforce to gain commitment from important stakeholders such as local politicians and senior Government officials.

According to Aula and Harmaakorpi (2008, p. 524) ‘innovation and good reputation are seen to be important sources of regional competitiveness’. In her journal, the researcher reflects that, in order for the Skills Taskforce to be successful in achieving its aims and objectives, it was necessary for potential members and other stakeholders to want to engage with the group. As stated by a Taskforce member from Local Government:
‘maybe the legitimacy of the group needed to be established before it could begin to achieve anything’.

The network members needed to consider the credibility and reputation they wished to build. Much of this credibility was dependent on the network achieving outcomes and demonstrating that it could be successful in delivering on its promises. One of the Taskforce Executive members from the Community sector commented that:

‘you actually have to get a track record’.

Another Taskforce Executive member from Local Government noted that:

‘that’s were that credibility stuff comes back. If you say you’re going to do something then you’ve got to do it’.

The researcher’s journal notes her reflection that nothing was more likely to disengage important stakeholders, particularly funding bodies, than a group which promised to achieve something significant and then failed to deliver.

An examination of the minutes of the inaugural meeting held by the Skills Taskforce shows that nine initial strategies were identified with an action plan for their implementation. In doing this, the network considered the range of planning horizons which were relevant to its work. Three of the strategies included what the researcher defines as short term (6 months-1 year) goals, two had a medium (1-5 years) horizon and four were long term (10-20 years) strategies. Taskforce members believed that these strategies would contribute to the macro level vision and strategic objectives of the Taskforce. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from Local Government, ‘[we] try to be consistent with our strategic directions and put those as a starting point in any discussion’.

According to Florida (1995, p. 535), sustainable advantage is as important at the regional level as it is at the national level. The G21 Skills Taskforce struggled with defining what ‘sustainable advantage’ meant. For some, it meant taking a long-term approach to developing and implementing regional strategies whilst, for others, it meant identifying and implementing specific short to medium term projects; and the tension between these two viewpoints was never fully resolved, particularly as members tried to work towards both. Possible reasons why such a dichotomy occurred include a lack of discussion about the importance of identifying and implementing projects which contributed to a longer term vision for the region; the need for some members to achieve specific outcomes for their own organisations where these may have conflicted with the objectives of the Skills Taskforce; and the tendency to “jump” into projects when potential funding
sources were identified. Both the long and short term approaches were necessary for sustainable advantage, with the issue being the need to have processes in place to ensure a balance between the approaches.

Taskforce members commented that, in an ideal world when seeking network members, the network would identify and invite those regional champions who have the most capability to promote the group. However, in the case of the Skills Taskforce, many network members were appointed by their organisations because they happened to be in a specific role within that organisation. Some of those people had no particular interest in the work of the group and no real capability or desire to commit fully to participation, with the result that the work of the group was mainly carried out by those who were committed to the vision, whilst the others attended meetings without really contributing anything. Over time, this led to some resentment by those who were doing the work, whilst those who were contributing less became more and more disengaged. Taskforce members sometimes obliquely commented on the need for members to be “team players” who contributed fully to achieving the Taskforce objectives. However, this discussion was never brought into the open and, so, the issue was never really resolved. Instead, some Taskforce members began to concentrate on the work which was relevant and meaningful to them as individuals or to their organisations. This resulted in a loss of impetus in the group towards achieving the overall Taskforce vision and objectives. What might have happened had an open and honest discussion taken place? Might the members have been refocused on finding the areas of mutual gain and common purpose, and might this have resulted in a more concerted approach to the work?

6.8.4 Build Knowledge

The next set of capabilities which was important for the Taskforce was for the group to have access to labour market information from within and outside the region and to be able to use this effectively. Without robust data and information from both within the region and from the external environment, the group would have been operating “blind” and been unable to make considered decisions; nor would they have been able to defend those decisions to others. It was relatively easy for the network to source and access some local information, as well as publicly available information such as that provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

However, in other instances, the researcher and other network members found this more difficult. Some regional stakeholders worked from a paradigm of “knowledge is power” and were unwilling to share the data. The credibility and reputation of the Taskforce
therefore became increasingly important in building effective relationships where reciprocal trust led to more open sharing and use of information. This self-reflective capability of the group to learn from the information and its own network performance resulted in information transforming into valuable regional knowledge which could be disseminated to other parts of the region as well as to governments and organisations, such as other regional networks, outside the region. One of the difficulties faced by the Taskforce was that, without dedicated resources, it became increasingly difficult to store and manage the information.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 13 - Build knowledge**

Sotaarauta & Viljamaa (2002, p. 4) believed that regions which can source and access knowledge successfully ‘are able to adapt, learn and innovate’ and are able to ‘constantly create knowledge in an interactive process’. They stated that ‘those who have participated in the creation of information will be capable of utilising it’ (2002, p. 4).

The G21 Taskforce was concerned with labour market, economic and infrastructure issues within the region. This included consideration of land use; how capital was
invested; employment, education and training provision; dealing with the discrepancies caused by pockets of advantage and disadvantage within the region; transport, technology and service infrastructure; and community mobility and activism. Given the complexity of the work with which the network engaged, it could be difficult to determine the most useful data and information as Taskforce members had not established any particular criteria for the type of data it required. Information was available from a wide variety of sources from both within and outside the region, and the network members needed to identify that information which was most relevant and useful to them. Members sometimes ran the risk of “drowning” in data where they did not have some process in place to determine how to sift out what they really needed. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from Local Government:

'The information you are going to use is going to be multi sourced and there is no single source of data and so you start by having to identify what pieces of data will be decision determinants'.

It was important for network members to form relationships within the region in order to source important information, and equally important to seek that information from outside the region. As stated by Semlinger (2008, p. 548), ‘regional confinement more than ever will become a threat to regional development’. In discussing the sources of information, Lorentzen (2008, p. 541) warned of the danger of regions which focus on internal ties which offer ‘a great depth of knowledge but little diversity of knowledge’. She believed that greater sources of information will assist the region to become more innovative and competitive, but warns that sourcing this information can be ‘costly and takes time’ (2008, p. 539). Harmaakorpi and Melkas (2005, p. 644) examined the ‘crucial importance of accessing essential information from the outside world to enhance the collective learning process of the network’. Semlinger (2008, p. 548) discussed the danger to those networks which have ‘denied seeking access to and using external sources of knowledge’. The same danger sometimes impacted on the Skills Taskforce when it became too insular. This meant that sometimes the Taskforce Executive members did not consider strategies which were being implemented in other regions and which may have been applicable in the G21 Region.

It was of no use for Taskforce members to source and access data if they did not have the skills needed to analyse and use the resulting information. This included the ability to read and understand complex statistical data and to be able to disaggregate data to the regional level. Members also needed skills in reading and comprehending complicated and lengthy reports as well as the capability to conduct and analyse structured and
unstructured interviews with a range of stakeholders from different sectors and at different levels. Information also needed to be mapped back against the group’s objectives and project parameters to inform the development of appropriate strategies and tools to address local issues. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector who also belonged to another regional development network:

‘if you understand what the game is about, you can then identify what are the things that you actually want to look at and we want to achieve; then you can go out and collect your information and analyse it and put it out in a meaningful fashion that people might find useful’.

This was demonstrated by the research reports which were produced as part of the Career Development and Skill Service project. These reports were the mechanism which provided the sophisticated analysis which attracted the attention of both Federal and State Government representatives.

One of the critical issues faced by Taskforce members when embarking on a data collection and analysis exercise was the transient nature of a lot of information. Information was often already out of date by the time statistics became available and data collected was sometimes of no use when an event such as the global financial crisis suddenly took place. Working with information was often highly resource intensive and the Skills Taskforce Executive group needed to consider the cost in terms of money, time and expertise to ensure that the investment was made wisely. Sometimes the group got caught up in the excitement of gathering data without really considering how useful the resulting information would actually be, and ran the risk of producing expensive research reports which would simply be put on shelves and never opened.

Lorentzen (2008, p. 536) described the region as a milieu and states that, ‘personal relations and networks serve to distribute knowledge in the milieu’. One of the issues which members needed to consider related to identifying the recipient audiences for the data which had been collected and to ensure that this was presented in such a way that it was meaningful and useful. The group needed to establish processes for disseminating information to network members as well as to external stakeholders. The interconnectedness of regional networks meant that many of the Taskforce members were also members of other networks and could informally distribute information. However, there was no formal process in place and this sometimes meant that important stakeholders did not receive the information.

One of the problems faced by the Taskforce Executive group was how to store
information. Where it was determined that information was likely to become out of date, the group needed to consider not only how to source and use information, but whether it should take on the role of maintaining the currency of that information and, if so, what processes would be needed to manage this ongoing responsibility. The lack of network resources meant that this function was not handled well by the Taskforce Executive group and this meant that, when needed again, it was sometimes difficult to find the required information.

As discussed in the Literature Review, there is a significant body of research regarding learning regions and the importance of the learning process to innovation and economic prosperity. The importance of learning from how the network had performed was discussed by several Taskforce members. A Taskforce member from Local Government commented that:

‘you have to learn from what you have done before’.

Another Taskforce Executive member from the Private sector felt that:

‘we just need to learn from what we have done and ways we could improve it’.

The Skills Taskforce operated in a highly complex and adaptive regional system and needed to have the flexibility and capacity not only to respond to regional issues, but to anticipate and prepare for them. As such, the network needed to constantly evolve and to learn from its experiences as well as the experiences of its stakeholders. In doing this, the network attempted to include a mix of members with extensive experience in their various sectors, including education, industry, government and community agencies, and members who were new to the region or sector but had innovative and lateral perspectives and could challenge the group’s thinking. A Taskforce member from the Community sector commented that:

‘you want some of the old hands who were there to come along and talk about what they did and what they learnt and to a degree, what didn’t work and what did? And then you want some new people to say hear that, I am not going to fall for that sort of trap and move on and make that decision’.

When the “older hands” were open to those new ideas, then the group was able to explore new ways of thinking which resulted in innovative projects such as the Career Development and Skill Service project.

One area in which members did not perform well was in being open to, and proactively seeking out, feedback on the network’s performance from both members and
stakeholders; nor did it build a sense of inquiry and ongoing evaluation into its processes or use an action learning model as well as measurements of success in project management. The Taskforce Executive group needed to regularly reflect on what it had achieved and the lessons learnt. These could have been captured in some formal way so that they were available to all network members as well as to the wider community where appropriate. This process of evaluation of project success would also have provided a springboard for the network to launch itself into the next series of projects from a stronger base.

6.8.5 Build Commitment
The third set of capabilities involves gaining a strong sense of commitment from the members of the group and from external stakeholders. As the Taskforce was made up of voluntary members, there needed to be some compelling reason for them to be involved, so understanding the shared interests of members and using this to identify the areas of mutual gain was important. The size, structure and governance of the group was an issue at various times. The size meant that communication and decision making could become a problem. Taskforce members elected to establish an Executive group which would manage overall governance and operations with general members being engaged in specific project working groups. This was seen as a way to maximise the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes, using members and stakeholders as champions in order to access policy and decision makers.
The concept of the network as a sociological entity (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2009) is particularly relevant for this thesis as the researcher was interested in examining her regional development network from a humanistic point of view rather than an economic one. The sociological aspect of how such groups interact with their own members as well as other stakeholders forms the basis for the framework which has been developed as a result of this research.

As mentioned earlier, part of the initial discussion which needed to be conducted when the vision and objectives were being defined, was to clarify the values of the network and its members. Sotaarauta and Viljamaa (2002, pp. 9-10) discussed the conflict which can arise when network members are operating out of differing values and thinking patterns. Alternatively, they also believe that, where members’ views are too similar, there is a danger of excluding different ways of thinking, in which ‘the dominant coalition does not listen to any critical arguments’ and ‘focuses on defending selected strategies’ (Sotaarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 10). The Taskforce Executive group therefore needed to work
actively to manage these viewpoints, before the network fell into what call a 'dialogue of the deaf' (Sotarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 10). This would have been a particular problem if the more experienced Taskforce members had not been willing to listen to the newer members. Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 15) also warned that 'sometimes actors outside of a coalition may question the objectives coalitions see as self-evident'. The network therefore needed to ensure that it clearly communicated its values as well as its goals and objectives to stakeholders.

In the G21 Region, there is an economic advantage to represented organisations working together and there are long standing relationships between those organisations. Dass and Kumar (2011) indicated that these networks started from a positive position in that members are likely to be predisposed towards trust, but that work needed to be done to build on that predisposition in order to develop reciprocity between members.

Creating trust within a network is particularly important (Harmaakorpi & Melkas 2005, p. 643). If the regional development network was to achieve its aims and objectives, then it was vital that network members felt that they could rely on each other to openly share information and consider the needs of each member organisation. Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 2) believed that 'cooperation is often organized in networks that are based on proximity, shared culture, reciprocity and trust'. They went on to state that trust is ‘built up through repeated personal contacts’. This accords with Woolcock and Narayan's (2000, p. 226) observation that 'important features of social capital, such as trust and reciprocity, are developed in an interactive process'.

As well as considering practical issues regarding frequency and structure of network meetings, the Taskforce Executive group needed to be more aware of pre-existing relationships within the group and their potential positive or negative impact on the network as a whole. They also needed to ensure that those members who were not known to the rest of the group were inducted into the network in such a way as to begin the trust building process. Wilson (1997, p. 745) discussed this role of development planners in ‘shaping levels of inter-personal trust, feelings of belonging and responsibility and the quality and efficacy of civic engagement in a community’. She examined generalised reciprocity, which she described as ‘I will help you with your needs now and trust that when I need help my needs will be met’ (1997, p. 747). This issue of reciprocity was one with which the Taskforce sometimes struggled due to the competitive market environment within which some member organisations, such as employment agencies, operated.

The concept of competition and potential conflicts of interest was written about in the
researcher’s field notes. Had a conversation about competition taken place, the network members might have been able to define the motivating factors which had led to them joining the group. What might the outcome of this conversation have been? If the trust levels were high, would the group have been more likely to be open about what they were really hoping to gain from being part of the regional development network? From the researcher’s own experience, this should usually occur early in the life of the group. However, it can take time for trust levels to build to the stage where people are willing to share sensitive information. How then could the network leadership have resolved this tension between having transparent processes in place from the beginning of the network with the need for people to feel safe in disclosing information to others who they might not yet know well?

Sotaarauta and Viljamaa (2002, p. 16) discussed the need to get alignment with the goals and strategies of the individual organisations represented in the group and state that this will require ‘communication, negotiation, strategic plans, programs, etc.’. It would have been useful for the group to explicitly identify those areas of individual and shared interest amongst members. In circumstances where conflict of interest may arise, the members could excuse themselves from participating in the decision making process. This did not occur and it could be argued that this represented an issue that may have impeded the evolutionary development of the Taskforce.

In building strong relationships between the group members, it was also important to clarify the needs and ability to contribute of each member. This could have occurred by ‘communicating needs and necessities on the one side and capacities and capabilities on the other’ (Semlinger 2008, p. 552). As Semlinger (2008, p. 553) further stated, ‘like in every other social relationship, in cooperative networks involvement and commitment – and, thus, behaviour and performance – are determined by the expectation of getting something in return’.

Despite the voluntary nature of the regional development network, some Taskforce members worked consistently and tirelessly to further the vision and objectives of the group. As a result, other members were able to contribute on a more ad hoc basis where the work was congruent with the aims and purpose of their own organisations. However, this did not result in an “us versus them” culture. Is it common within such regional development networks for there to be a core of individuals who are passionate about the work of the group and who take the power to drive that work forward. If so, what happens if some or all of these individuals leave the network through a change of job or through burn out. How does the network continue or, indeed, is it likely to continue without such a high level of commitment from that core? What strategies could be put in place to
anticipate this potential problem? In the case of the G21 Skills Taskforce, could network leadership have built a higher sense of commitment in other members of the group through effective coaching and inspiration (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007, p. 84)?

If network members are willing to articulate their own agenda for being part of the network, is this likely to identify how similar and different those purposes are? What would be the result of such disclosure? How could this process have been facilitated better in order to check members’ assumptions, and how does one manage that information once it has been elicited?

In the researcher’s experience in working with regional development networks, potential members of such groups are often likely to have some prior relationship, either through shared organisational work or through joint membership in other networks, and it can be easy for those individuals to make assumptions about what they believe others are wanting to achieve. How inaccurate might these assumptions be? What might happen if network members discussed openly and honestly what they wanted to gain from membership? What might network leadership need to do to create an environment in which such a conversation could occur? According to Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 83), the ‘communicative strategy of a multi-actor and multi-goal environment needs creative and goal searching leadership’. Based on this research, this was clearly an area where the Skills Taskforce faltered in a complex terrain.

Research has been undertaken into ‘network characteristics such as structure, governance and survival’ (Baker and Kan 2011, p. 854). In seeking to fulfil the vision and objectives of the network and to gain the enthusiastic commitment of network members, the Taskforce Executive members needed to consider the optimum size, structure and governance model for the group. ‘[I]f it is troublesome to arrange meetings, collaboration partners ... stay distant or completely unknown to each other’ and will not feel part of the network (Harmaakorpi & Melkas 2005, p. 646). Problems can be caused by lack of meetings, particularly in relation to the effect on information flow and the network’s ability to organise its operations and deal with change. Meetings are also a useful way to get buy in and commitment from members and to strategically plan the work of the group. Innes and Booher (1999, p. 412) discussed how collaborative planning ‘can be understood as part of the societal response to changing conditions in increasingly networked societies, where power and information are widely distributed, where differences in knowledge and values among individuals and communities are growing, and where accomplishing anything significant or innovative requires creating flexible linkages among many players’.
In the Skills Taskforce, there was some tension between wanting to have as many people and regional sectors involved as possible to ensure the widest range of consultation and contribution, and the problems of communication and interaction with a group which was too large and unwieldy. This was one of the factors which led to the creation of the Taskforce Executive group.

One of the major barriers to the success of the Skills Taskforce was the lack of both human and financial resources to drive the work forwards. This took the form of funding for projects as well as for dedicated project officers. The nature of the Skills Taskforce as a voluntary regional development network meant that there was nobody dedicated to providing network support such as coordination of meetings and dissemination of information. These tasks fell to the Chairperson and the researcher in her role as network secretary, and this sometimes had an adverse effect on the operations of the Taskforce when those two individuals were busy with their own work. The main focus for the day to day operations of the Taskforce was established around sourcing funding and identifying and delivering projects. Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007, p. 84) identified the problems which can occur if project teams have to work with ‘bad schedules, unclear plans of action, and lack of control’. Within the Skills Taskforce, there was a lack of oversight of the project teams by the Executive group. Whilst the project team representatives reported at the monthly meetings, there was little direction given by the Executive group and the project teams acted autonomously. This made it easy for projects to get sidetracked into the interests of particular project team members rather than working towards the Taskforce goals and objectives.

Resource allocation by funding bodies is dependent on the thinking patterns and prevailing values of those policy makers (Sotaarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 9), and the Skills Taskforce needed to be sensitive to these. To do this, one Taskforce Executive member from the Community sector felt that it was important to:

‘try to harness the political agenda and use the language if you like of that agenda to help us achieve what we wanted to do’.

The researcher has considered whether the Career Development and Skill Service project would have been more successful if the group had been able to couch its presentations in terms of what the project would do to meet the politicians’ needs, not just the needs of the region.

‘[T]hose authorities that themselves invest financial resources ... have had more success’ and are perceived as “serious players” by others’ (Sotaarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 9). A
Taskforce Executive member from Local Government discussed their experience with networks which sought funding and support from Council:

‘people come to you with a range of preparation. The ones who are easiest to deal with are the ones who have a very clearly defined goal, they have done their homework and they have their organisational governance sorted out. Now that doesn’t have to be formal governance it can be informal but they know who the leaders are, who is doing what, they have a clear expectation they have defined the outputs they come to the council and say we want x, this is what we can bring to the table, here are the people who are going to do it, we want to work in partnership with you’.

One of the greatest criticisms levelled at the Skills Taskforce by its own members was that it sometimes failed to deliver outcomes. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from the Education sector, ‘one of the things that is coming out very clearly is that the way to attract people is to get wins on the board’. The danger for the Skills Taskforce was that ‘a lack of measurable outcomes is likely to see the network flounder and eventually die, with members leaving in frustration and stakeholders disengaging and putting their energy into more effective groups’.

The Taskforce was reliant on policy and decision makers at all levels of Government. One of the difficulties faced was getting engagement from senior members of agencies or businesses. According to a Taskforce member from State Government:

‘The people that were round the table were the same faces, the same organisations. We didn’t engage new organisations. Now I don’t know whether that’s because they’re not interested and that is why they are not there anyway, or is it because they are not aware of it. I would say more so, they don’t see the need for it and it may not be their core business’.

When asked to consider why the Taskforce had not been more successful in gaining commitment from those senior decision makers, another Taskforce Executive member from Federal Government stated that:

‘I don’t think you had enough of the decision makers around the table at all’.

‘[A] tension exists in the public sector’s efforts to combine the need for political support and control with its desire to promote dynamic, competitive and economically successful new industries’ (Sotaarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 13). In working to improve regional innovation and effectiveness, the Taskforce Executive members needed to be aware of
this tension and try to address both components through the engagement of decision makers and by using its members as champions for the work of the group. This was often difficult as large institutions are ‘persistent by nature and therefore slow to change’ and ‘are in many cases deeply rooted in the ways of thinking, norms and values’ (Sotaarauta & Viljamaa 2002, p. 14).

Whether it was trying to engage with, and gain commitment from, network members, external stakeholders or the regional community, the communication processes adopted by the Skills Taskforce were very important. With regard to internal communication with network members, the Taskforce Executive group needed to foster ‘a good conversation culture’ (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007, p. 85). With regard to external stakeholders, the Taskforce Executive group needed to consider how best to communicate with each specific stakeholder individual or group.

Given the many comments made by Skills Taskforce Executive members and the fact that work was actually done by the group to develop a communication plan, the researcher has speculated about why the momentum of the network was lost. Was it because there was no dedicated resource to continue the work? Could it have been due to the lack of systems to organise the members in order to identify who would take responsibility for proceeding to implement the communication strategy? What happens in a regional development network when this sort of work is commenced and then not continued? Does it build cynicism in the members with regard to the overall effectiveness of the group? According to Kottila and Rönni (2008, p. 378),

‘[c]ommunication is an integral part of every relationship and plays a critical role in the development of exchange relationships as well as collaboration’.

If the network does not have robust communication processes in place, then how effective is it likely to be in engaging strongly with members, stakeholders and its community constituents in order to achieve its vision and objectives? The voluntary nature of the Skills Taskforce made it easy for members to forget about the needs of the network when they were caught up in the day to day work of their own organisations. This meant that, sometimes, information was not passed on to other members or stakeholders, and this impacted on the levels of trust and credibility within and outside the network.

6.8.6 Build Relationships
The final set of capabilities involved the Skills Taskforce working to build relationships with the community, as well as with other networks and stakeholders, particularly those who could act as champions for the work of the regional development network. The
Taskforce Executive members also needed to consider how best to engage with the political system on which it was dependent for much of its funding.

![Figure 15 - Build relationships]

It was important for the Skills Taskforce members to identify those stakeholders with whom they needed to interact and the level of engagement which was being sought. Potential stakeholders came from the education, community, government and industry sectors and included individuals, organisations and other networks. As the work of the Taskforce was designed to address the desired strategic direction for the region as a whole, it was important that the group engaged with as wide a cross-sector of the community as possible in order to achieve its aims. In the G21 Region, where much of the work is conducted through development networks of various types, many of these relationships already existed either through shared work, or through mutual membership of other networks or groups.

In single communities, it may be appropriate to consider the whole community as a stakeholder group and to engage with them on that basis. However, in the G21 region, the entire community is too large and too complex to be thought of as a stakeholder in its own right. Whilst it may have been useful for the Skills Taskforce members to promote...
their work to the general community through news reports, it was considered more useful to focus on specific sectors of the community as this enabled the Taskforce members to concentrate their efforts. In some cases, this involved targeting particular suburbs or towns where the group wished to be involved. In other cases, it was considered more appropriate to identify specific sectors of the community such as disadvantaged groups or the youth sector where the focus was on labour market issues such as employment and training. The diagram below shows the various sectors and sub-groups which were important to the work of the Skills Taskforce; for example the Community includes young people, people who have been out of employment and are seeking to return to the labourforce – that is, those who are in work or looking for work, as well as the agencies which assist such groups.

![G21 Skills Taskforce stakeholder map](Image)

**Figure 16 - G21 Skills Taskforce stakeholder map**
Whatever the focus, it was important for the voices of local people to be heard (Hodge 2008, p. 37). Network members needed to remember that, in many parts of the region, community members were active in identifying and addressing their local issues, and the capability to mobilise the community to take action could have built power and influence with other stakeholders, such as the various levels of Government. Therefore the Skills Taskforce could have been more effective if it had focused more on ensuring that its work met the needs of the local community. Community champions could have been identified and invited to participate in the work either through becoming network members themselves or through other activities such as spreading the news about the network to other parts of the community.

The Taskforce had no explicit strategies for engaging with the community, but rather relied on members to suggest who should be approached, which was done on an ad hoc basis. What type of more formalised process could have been implemented? During its review meeting in 2007, Taskforce members undertook a stakeholder mapping exercise (see Figure 14 above). Unfortunately, this work was not taken any further to develop strategies for engagement with these various stakeholders.

Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (1999, p. 129) discussed the ‘web of relations’ of those involved in networks. This is particularly relevant in the G21 region where numerous networks operate. It was important for network members to use these webs to reach members of other networks with which they were involved, in order to further the work of the Taskforce. Semlinger (2008, p. 548) discusses the ‘advantages of cooperative access to the specialised knowledge of strangers, that is of cooperative interaction with parties who act in another context and therefore have different knowledge, experiences, perceptions and interests, that might help to overcome the restrictions of one’s own horizon’.

These different perspectives could have helped the Taskforce to more effectively identify innovative solutions which had not previously been considered by the group members.

As well as other regional networks, there were a range of other stakeholders with whom the Skills Taskforce needed to interact. These other stakeholders included Government agencies at the Federal, State and Local levels as well as individual politicians such as local members and their staff, industry associations and specific businesses, education and training providers and community organisations. More effective relationships with these stakeholders could have assisted the Taskforce to more easily access project funding.
6.8.7 Leadership

The framework developed as a result of this research contains four inter-connected sets of capabilities with leadership as linking them.

According to Baker and Kan (2011, p. 855), leadership in a network requires more focus on ‘people-oriented behaviors and less on task-oriented behaviors’. Leadership in a voluntary group may bring with it a number of challenges. When the members are there on a voluntary basis, how hard can the leader push when things are not working well and how much can s/he challenge the group when it becomes complacent or despondent? How does the leader deal with conflict within the group when it is easy for people to walk away? How does the leader negotiate with members about commitment to provide resources or to participate in projects and working groups? How does the leader rationalise his or her time commitment if there is a conflict with their own work requirements? Should network leadership be vested in one individual or is it more effective if it is distributed amongst members at different times? A number of leadership capabilities are necessary if a regional development network is to be successful and the above questions are to be addressed. These capabilities include ‘negotiation, communication, persuasion, ... and visionary skills’ (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007, p. 83), as well as strategic, interpretive, networking, absorptive and excitement capabilities (Sotarauta 2005). These were demonstrated sometimes by network members over the life of the network, but there were no overt strategies in place to ensure that Taskforce members, particularly those in the Executive group, developed and used those capabilities.

Taskforce Executive members needed to find the mutual gain which would meet both the needs of the individual member and/or their organisation, and the vision and goals of the network itself. This ability to engage with diverse stakeholders required the Taskforce Executive group to have an understanding of individual and group behaviour, as well as being able to negotiate the shared interest. In doing this, an understanding of the components of Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1991; Ackermann & Eden 2001, p. 296) would have been useful, namely individuality, experience, sociality and commonality.

Comments made during the interviews, as well as the researcher’s own observations, indicated that the chairperson had excellent interpersonal skills. This enabled the group to understand and deal with some conflict and communication problems, deal with potential burn out of members and build trust within the network at the earliest opportunity. As stated by a Taskforce Executive member from Local Government, ‘there needs to be a
mechanism to deal with any disputes that occur within the group’. This was particularly important in a voluntary group where it was only the shared idea and desire to achieve common goals which cemented the network together, and in which some of the members belonged to organisations which are operating in a competitive environment. As a Taskforce member from the Education sector noted, ‘That is the downside of our so-called networked city is that we have direct competitors sitting at the table’.

There are a range of factors which motivate individuals to become involved in networks (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007, p. 82). These include the need for members to promote their own aims as well as those of the regional development network and the region as a whole. The Taskforce Executive group needed to have more overt processes in place to understand these factors in order to find the best ways to gain commitment from members.

‘[T]he success and effectiveness of a network project largely depends on the quality of its leadership. Representatives must take risks by accepting new ideas and being prepared to speak up for them in their organization’ (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen 2007, p. 83). In identifying and implementing projects which supported the aims and objectives of the group, network leadership needed to ensure that the project teams had the capacity to realise the required outcomes, as well as the ability to harness support and, where necessary, resources from within their own organisations.

6.9 Conclusion

The researcher identified two primary research questions with regard to the effectiveness of the Skills Taskforce. The first related to the factors which enhanced the ability of the group to achieve its goals and those factors which impeded them in this process. The second question asked how the positive factors could be reinforced and the negative factors mitigated. The researcher also worked with the research participants to examine the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (2009) model of institutional capacity building to identify its relevance to the work of the Skills Taskforce. The researcher used the responses of those interviewed, her own observations, a social network analysis questionnaire and an examination of the relevant literature to expand the Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (2009) model to develop the framework which has been presented in this thesis. The capabilities which are included in the framework are those which the research participants believed would assist the Skills Taskforce to achieve its goals and objectives.
The researcher has determined that the capabilities developed through the framework are interdependent and each of them is important, with some taking on more prominence than others at different times. For example, when projects were conceptualised, the project team worked to build relationships and commitment with relevant stakeholders through clearly articulating the Taskforce vision and objectives as they related to the project. When those projects were implemented, the focus moved to building knowledge relevant to the project requirements. In turn, when the Taskforce was operating in a truly effective manner, that effectiveness enabled it to continue to grow its vision and objectives; as well as attracting more useful information as its reputation grew and others saw the value in sharing their information with them. It also continued to build commitment as members and stakeholders saw outcomes being achieved; and had more success in building relationships as others saw the value in being involved or associated with their work. At various times, for example when projects were proposed which required specific experience and capabilities, different individuals within the Taskforce Executive took on the leadership role as required. Whilst further research needs to be undertaken in the applicability of the framework to other regional development networks, as well as other types of groups, the researcher now has a much clearer idea of which factors assisted the Skills Taskforce to achieve its goals and which factors impeded them in this process. The data collected during the research and the literature which has been examined, have also provided valuable information with regard to what the Skills Taskforce could have done differently. The Healey, de Magalhaes and Madanipour (2009) model has also now been adapted to be more useful to the Taskforce members in achieving the aim of becoming more effective.
7. Conclusion

Regional development networks operate in complex environments in which the needs of member organisations may not necessarily be aligned with the vision and objectives of the networks themselves; and in which such networks must navigate the changing focus of Government social policy as various levels of Governments themselves change. This is particularly complex when those networks are formed by voluntary members.

The purpose of this research was to examine the creation and operation of a voluntary regional development network, the G21 Skills Taskforce, with the intent of identifying those capabilities which contributed to achieving its vision and objectives and how the group’s effectiveness could have been improved.

The framework developed by the researcher is designed for use by new voluntary regional development networks to assist them in establishing relevant structures and processes to achieve their goals and objectives. It is also intended for use by existing regional development networks to assess and improve their own practice, and by those consultants or other advisors who work with such groups.

There are a number of key observations which the researcher would offer to those groups as a result of the insights gained through this research. The first involves the need to ensure that the network has the “right” people involved as members or key stakeholders. By “right”, the researcher means those people who can contribute resources, passion, ideas and relationships which the network can use to progress its work. The network also needs access to policy and decision makers if it is to achieve its goals.

The second insight relates to the need for a strong sense of identity within the group, based around a common purpose which meets the needs of members as well as those of the network. The network members need to determine whether their purpose is strategic and long term, more focused on achieving short term project outcomes, or some combination of both; and they will need to identify the right balance between these objectives. The group also needs to have robust communication processes in place to clearly articulate that identity and purpose to its stakeholders.

The third key observation involves developing an appropriate leadership structure. For some networks, this may be vested in a single leader, whilst for others a more distributed leadership model may be more appropriate. Whichever structure is selected, the leader or leadership group needs to have an understanding of individual and group behaviour and
be able to influence and negotiate with members and stakeholders to identify and implement appropriate strategies.

The final observation which the researcher would offer to networks and the consultants who work with them relates to the ability to navigate the often “murky” waters of the political process. By their very nature, regional development networks seek to make change within their local communities. To do this, they often need either funding or political support and, despite rhetoric about the importance of regions, Governments at all levels can sometimes be reluctant to provide that support. Regional development networks therefore need to be strategic in identifying how best to “sell” their ideas and project concepts to those stakeholders if they are to access their assistance.

In undertaking this research, the researcher has refined her own understanding of how the G21 Skills Taskforce operated in practice, in addition to creating the framework presented in this thesis. The examination of the literature, combined with the analysis of the data collected through interviews and supporting documents, as well as through the researcher’s own field notes and journal, have enabled her to reflect more deeply on what it means to be a member of a regional development network and for her professional role as a consultant with such groups. This reflection has implications for her consulting practice, enabling her to interact more effectively with the individuals and groups to whom she consults; to observe more deeply what works well and what could be improved within such groups; and to develop and implement more useful interventions to improve the operations of those networks.

As well as contributing to theory and practice relating to regional development, the researcher has also become a more effective practitioner in that field as a result of having undertaken this research.
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Appendix 1 – G21 Region (G21 2010)

The G21 region runs from the western shores of Corio and Port Phillip bays, along the Surf Coast and Great Ocean Road to Wattle Hill, past Cape Otway. The region then extends inland through the agricultural districts of Colac and takes in the Golden Plains Shire, with its northern boundary above Smythesdale.

The G21 region has a population of around 298,000 people and covers 8972 sq km. It includes five municipalities: Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliffe and Surf Coast.

Geelong is the largest city in the region and the second largest city in Victoria. It overlooks Corio Bay and is the principal centre in the region for industry and service organisations.

Geelong’s bulk-handling port and the nearby Avalon airport, together with the rapidly improving road and rail links, are significant infrastructure assets for the region.

These, together with an abundance of natural assets, make the region an attractive location for diverse business investment.

The south-east of the region - which comprises Geelong, Torquay, Jan Juc, Ocean Grove, Bannockburn, Lara, Clifton Springs, Drysdale, Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale - is significantly influenced by urban growth and development, partly aligned to Melbourne’s expansion.

Figure 17 - The G21 Region (G21 2013)
The region is increasingly sought after by people seeking a 'sea-change' or 'tree-change', and is a popular tourist and holiday destination. Communities on the Bellarine Peninsula and along the Surf Coast and Great Ocean Road grow significantly in population during the summer holiday season. The natural beauty of the Great Ocean Road and the Otway rain forests attract a significant international tourist trade throughout the year.

The region's population is the fastest growing in Victoria, outside of the Melbourne metropolitan area.

The region's central and western districts are highly productive agriculture areas and enjoy relatively high rainfall compared to many other parts of the State. The overall geography of the G21 region includes a unique blend of coast, mountain, farmland, rainforest and urban landscapes.

The region's economy is diverse, boasting manufacturing, agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, tourism, education, research, health and service sectors. Traditionally major heavy manufacturing has been the main employment sector, based around companies such as Ford, Shell and Alcoa. However as the international economic climate impacts on large-scale manufacturers the region has been gradually diversifying its employment base.

The G21 region is closely integrated with Melbourne and neighbouring regional economies. The close proximity to Melbourne and its improving transport connections mean that many parts of the region are now within easy commuter distance of Melbourne. Increasingly people are choosing the lifestyle advantages of living within the G21 region while regularly visiting Melbourne for business and pleasure.
Appendix 2 – Social Network Analysis Questionnaire

What is Social Network Analysis (SNA)?

SNA is a computer aided process for mapping the relationships in a network with regard to particular issues, eg. trust, leadership, information flow, etc.

Members of the network are asked to identify other members with whom they interact with regard to that particular issue, eg. ‘who would you go to for information about ....?’

The responses from each member are entered into a computer program which then produces a visual representation called a ‘sociogram’ which shows all of the identified connections (see example below).

These sociograms can be used to identify how ‘connected’ the network is with regard to that particular item. Some of the things which might show up include:

1. Is there one particular person to whom everyone is directly connected? If so, what would happen to the network if that person left?
2. Are there ‘cliques’ – groups of people within the network who are strongly connected to each other, but not strongly connected to the rest of the network?
3. Are there ‘outliers’ – people who are very weakly connected, or not connected at all, to the rest of the network?

Understanding what is happening within the network can help to identify problems and enable the development of relevant strategies to address these problems, and to improve the ‘connectedness’ and effectiveness of the network.

**Confidentiality**

When participating in this research, you can be assured of the confidentiality of your information. Whilst it is necessary to include network members’ real names in the question grids, no-one but myself and my supervisors will see the results. Individuals will not be identified in the resulting sociograms. Rather, alphabetical identifiers (A, B, C, etc.) will be used to protect the privacy of network members.

**Instructions**

Please enter your name on the next page.

As you will see, the list provided with the questions contains the names of members of the G21 Skills Taskforce Executive as well as space for a rating for that question. For each question, you are asked to select the relevant rating for each Taskforce member and enter it in the appropriate grid. You should also give yourself a rating for each item.

As well as identifying G21 Skills Taskforce Executive members, each question gives you the opportunity to also identify other people from outside the network who are relevant for that question/item. You may enter as many names here as you wish (space has been provided for up to five names, but feel free to add extras if necessary).
Below are five questions/statements as well as the response scale to use in answering that question/item.

Question 1: How often would you go to each person for regional information on the skills issue. For yourself, how much would you rely on your own expert knowledge?

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<th>0 = Never</th>
<th>1 = Seldom</th>
<th>2 = Sometimes</th>
<th>3 = Often</th>
<th>4 = Very often</th>
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Name/organisation

Name of respondent: ........................................................................................................................................
Question 2: How often would you go to each person for global/national/State/other Regional information on the skills issue. For yourself, how much would you rely on your own expert knowledge?

Ratings: 0 = Never 1 = Seldom 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Very often

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For the following statements, please rate your level of agreement.

Question 3: This person acts as a ‘champion’/ I work hard to act as a ‘champion’ to influence powerful decision makers to advance the work of the Skills Taskforce.

Ratings: 0 = Not sure/don’t know the person well enough  1 = Strongly disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Agree  4 = Strongly agree

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Question 4: This person uses their own networks/I use my own networks effectively to promote the work of the Skills Taskforce

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**Question 5:** This person/I can clearly explain to ‘outsiders’ the purpose and goals of the Skills Taskforce

**Ratings:**

- 0 = Not sure/don’t know the person well enough
- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Agree
- 4 = Strongly agree

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### Appendix 3 – Table & Sociogram for SNA Question 1

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Appendix 8 – Indicative Questions used in Semi-Structured Interviews

BACKGROUND

▪ What has been your personal/organisational involvement with the skills shortage problem?
▪ What has been your involvement with the G21 Skills Taskforce?

GENERAL

▪ How important do you think it is for communities to try to address their own problems? Why?
▪ What sort of things do you think that a community needs to do in order to attract Governments at any level to want to partner?

SKILLS TASKFORCE

▪ What is your perception of the current effectiveness of the G21 Skills Taskforce?
▪ Can you suggest any ideas for how the G21 Skills Taskforce could become more effective?
  ▪ What knowledge resources does the G21 Skills Taskforce use?
  ▪ What additional knowledge resources would make the G21 Skills Taskforce more effective?
  ▪ Describe the relationship of the G21 Skills Taskforce with other relevant stakeholders?
  ▪ What relational resources does the G21 Skills Taskforce use?
  ▪ What additional relational resources would make the G21 Skills Taskforce more effective?
  ▪ What processes/resources does the G21 Skills Taskforce use to assist it to mobilise the community to respond to the skills shortage issue?
  ▪ How effectively does it do this?
  ▪ What additional process/resources would make the G21 Skills Taskforce more effective in mobilising the community?
Appendix 9 – Recommendations from 2005 Skills Shortage Research project (pp. 45-47)

6.0 Strategic Issues
A number of strategic issues have emerged from the Geelong and Colac Region Skills Research Project requiring a range of actions. Importantly the Community, including Governments, Education and Training Providers, Business and Industry will need to work in partnership. The challenge is to identify resources and mechanisms that will support an ongoing supply of skilled labour, ensuring sustainable business growth across the Region. The following recommendations are made:

1. Strategies to address skill shortages and skill gaps
   - That the Region look at using a mix of the four options of retraining existing employees, retraining the existing pool of unemployed people, better preparing young people for the world of work and skilled migration to address identified skill shortages and skill gaps.
   - That occupations in the traditional building and construction trade areas be more closely examined to evaluate issues with regard to industry demands and workforce demographics.
   - That more highly qualified professions such as engineers and specialist nurses, and the metal trade areas, such as boilermakers, are considered for skilled migration strategies. This would need to be carefully managed with additional support to enable these skilled migrants to learn about Australian regulations and working environments for these occupations.

2. Career Reference Centre
   - That support is given to the establishment of an independent careers advisory organisation which can be used as a resource by schools, parents, young people, businesses, industry bodies, unemployed people of all ages, those wishing to make a career change, and the general community.
   - That the newly created Regional Industry Career Advisor (RICA) work out of this Centre and provides an outreach service to target educational providers across the region.
   - That this Centre maintains a careers library and offers advice on possible careers and the qualifications and experience needed to access those careers.
   - That some staff in this Centre be qualified to administer careers testing for those needing help in identifying their career preferences.

3. Assistance to Employers
   - That a strategy be put in place to assist small to medium businesses to improve their strategic planning process, so that they are better positioned to decide the skill mix which will be necessary for them to maximise their growth potential.
   - That funding be sought to assist small to medium businesses to conduct workforce demographic surveys so that they are better placed to identify skills which will be needed in the future in order for the business to remain sustainable.

4. Industry Forums
   - That a series of forums be held to bring together industry representatives and education/training providers to discuss how training programs could be improved to
better meet the needs of employers, and how industry representatives could be more active in becoming involved in the delivery of that training.

5. Assistance to the Unemployed

- That the Government considers allowing Job Network providers to intervene earlier to assist jobseekers before they become long term unemployed.
- That Government review Labour Market programs such as Work for the Dole, to ensure that they are being used to assist jobseekers to gain experience in some of the identified skill shortage and skill gap areas.
- That innovative use is made of Labour Market Programs to enable older unemployed, retired or semi-retired people to act as mentors to young people entering the workforce, in order to assist them to build their work skills.

6. Ongoing Research

- That the Region conduct ongoing annual surveys with industry, employment agencies and education/training providers to monitor progress towards addressing skill shortages, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies which have been implemented, including the impact of skilled migration.
- DEWR plans to use the research findings from this project as the basis to identify specific employers within the identified skill shortage industries in the Region. These employers will then be the subject of a telephone survey to assess their willingness to take on skilled migrants. This strategy is likely to only occur on this one occasion.
- The project author recommends ongoing annual surveys and that Local Governments work with identified peak industry bodies to target appropriate employers for follow-up interviews either individually or through focus groups, to enable appropriate strategies to be implemented.