

XV. Supporting the Mission

Animal protection society managers can have problems in managing support service departments. This can be due to a tendency to concentrate on programme areas, or because they have little or no expertise in service delivery areas. These problems can be remedied with commitment and application. However, another option is to investigate the possibility of ‘outsourcing’, in order to ‘stick to the knitting’ of mission achievement.

Background

Many animal protection managers neglect the ‘business support’ departments in their organisations. This is sometimes due to a tendency to concentrate on programme areas and sometimes because animal protection society managers have little or no expertise in service delivery areas such as finance and accounts, facilities management and IT (Information Technology). Yet these departments are vital to the smooth running of the organisation.

Problems that can occur with ineffective management of support services include: -

- Recruitment of ineffective staff
- Lack of training and development
- Demotivation of support service staff (especially feeling neglected or isolated from the main work of the organisation)
- Programme decision-making without due consideration and planning for impact upon support services
- Breakdown of certain support services, hampering programme work
- Overload and burn out in support service departments
- Development of bureaucratic systems in support services
- Recruitment of too many – or too few - staff in support services, due to lack of management understanding of their role

Support Service Management

The obvious problem alluded to above is that it is extremely difficult for managers to manage departments that they do not understand. If this is the problem in any organisation, then the solution is clear: the manager has to learn the basics of finance and account, facilities management and IT work. They also have to familiarise themselves with the support service departments under their control – both the staff and the services provided. In many ways, this is the simple part!

There are also complex problems of a ‘softer’ human resource management nature. The reality is that some support service staff will be ‘mission driven’, whereas others will be motivated by other factors, especially financial and social. As can be seen in the section on ‘Managing the ‘Mission-Driven’, different management styles will be needed for these very differently motivated staff. Actual needs can only be

determined by knowing the staff involved (and in effect their ‘psychological contract’).

There is also a real need to involve relevant support staff in organisational strategy and operational planning. This is for both practical and motivational reasons. On the practical side, both strategy and operational planning are strongly influenced by financial and technological factors. An organisation’s finances and IT capability are both vital resource considerations. As can be seen in the chapter on ‘Campaigning for Social Change’, IT is central to modern campaigning methods. It is also a vital part of networking and maintaining contact with national and international collaborators. On the motivational side, support service staff who are mission driven will gain enormous motivation from being involved in organisational strategy and operations (providing their involvement is more than tokenism). They also frequently have a different perspective and range of skills, which can be extremely useful in the process (with their involvement avoiding pitfalls like ‘group think’ (i.e. the common situation where members tend to agree, as they have similar perspectives, and do not want to be marginalised from the group)).

It may also be beneficial to involve key support staff in evaluations of major projects. Accounts can provide input/thought of costs and cost effectiveness, and IT staff can evaluate appropriate use of IT.

Streamlining Support Services

Most animal protection societies require their support services to be as effective as possible, with maximum service delivery at the lowest possible cost. Ideally, service delivery should not only meet every organisational need, but also be unobtrusive. If support services work, they are probably not given a second thought!

The problem can be that with poor management, support service departments can create their own ‘kingdoms and associated bureaucracies. Whilst a level of bureaucracy is probably necessary in a service delivery organisation, in order to ensure consistent standards, it is not desirable in a campaigning organisation. This is because the creativity needed in a campaigning organisation can be stifled by unnecessary bureaucracy. Ideally, bureaucracy should be minimised to facilitate the already difficult tasks of ‘front line’ staff.

The creation of an ‘Office Manual’ of procedures is an excellent discipline. This not only helps all staff – including new recruits and volunteers - to familiarise themselves with routine procedures, but it also provides an excellent opportunity for management to review all office procedures to ensure that all support services are effective and minimise bureaucracy.

Finance and Accounts

The Finance and Accounts department is responsible for a variety of functions including: -

- Budgeting and financial planning

- Payroll
- Payments and banking
- Credit control
- Investments and reserves
- Accounts (bookkeeping, financial reporting and management accounts)
- Audits

It is surprising how both standards and numbers of staff employed vary from organisation to organisation! Any manager would be well advised to look into this area, as it could lead to vast improvements in service and/or staff savings.

It is usually the responsibility of the Board to establish a reserves policy for the organisation and, as with fundraising, this should ensure a mixed and balanced portfolio to deliver both security and growth. However, investment income can also be affected greatly by the day-to-day management of funds by the Accounts Department. I have come across the situation where enormous amounts were held in a non-interest bearing account, in 'readiness to pay bills that did not transpire – missing significant amounts of interest or capital growth. I have also come across the equally annoying situation whereby insufficient funds were left in accessible/current accounts - necessitating the removal of long-term investments (with financial penalties) in order to meet running costs such as salaries! Such situations can be avoided with effective financial planning – including cash flow forecasting.

Managers can keep abreast of the organisations financial situation through a number of routine measures, which are not 'rocket science'! These include: -

- Phased budgets (breaking budgets into monthly forecasts)
- Formal budget review procedures for any changes to agreed budget, including likely overspend
- Regular (e.g. monthly) financial returns, including expenditure and income against budget and comparison with previous year
- Regular (e.g. monthly) investment reviews, including cash forecasts (cursory if no significant change, to overhaul if above indicates significant changes).

Most important, however, is a general understanding and overview of the finance and accounts function, together with regular review meetings with the department. Like most things in life, accounts management seems much more threatening and obscure when it is avoided, rather than faced and allowed to become familiar!

IT

IT is becoming increasingly important to the management of animal protection societies. As with any support function, it can add efficiency and save valuable funds if well managed. Increasingly, IT solutions can also help towards mission fulfilment.

The whole work of the organisation can (and does!) grind to a halt these days if the IT system collapses. On the other hand, efficient modern IT systems can: -

- Assist with an exciting Web presence for educational, campaigning/lobbying (cyber activism), service delivery (e.g. re-homing centre) and fundraising purposes
- Permit e-mail list systems for mass communication with selected groups

- Permit sharing of all files, images, artwork and video through intranet (nationally and internationally) – for offices and networks
- Deal with accounts and fundraising data in an integrated software system
- Automate many previously manual processes, freeing up valuable staff time
- Permit automatic lobbying using specially designed software
- Run shelter management operations, using purpose built software systems

Needless to say, a reliable IT department or service is critical to the future success of the animal protection society. To achieve this, a manager needs a broad understanding of IT, and a good choice of IT Manager. If he/she is still building knowledge in this area of the organisation's activities, then any recruitment should be undertaken only with specialist advice and assistance. After all, nobody is able to judge suitability for a job that they do not understand?

Once a suitable IT professional is involved, a forward-looking IT strategy will help to chart the course towards the future. IT investment may seem costly at face value, but failure to invest will lose much more.

Office Management

As with accounts and IT, staff do not give a thought to their surroundings if they are efficient and suitable. Cramped inefficient surroundings can add enormously to frustration – and not only for individuals motivated by hygiene factors: they can also hamper work and thereby also frustrate the mission driven.

It is important to have one individual responsible for office management. If nobody is given the responsibility, then so many irritating things will go undone – despite the plethora of lists and job allocations! It is ridiculous and cost wasting for programme staff to be diverted into support functions. They have too much to worry about without this, and this is quite simply not where their talents and motivations lie. How many times has the busy mission driven individual been frustrated by having to take a turn in the towel washing, change the toilet roll or clean the staff toilet because its in a mess? Is there not enough to worry about with constant sights of animal suffering and trying to put the world to rights?! But a person with responsibility for discharging office management duties in an efficient and cost-saving manner will be able to take pride in achieving these aims, and thereby helping the organisation to achieve its mission in the way he/she is best able.

A committee of one gets things done.
Joe Ryan

Outsourcing

One very central consideration to the mission driven organisation is whether to outsource support services? This can result in the organisation being able to 'stick to the knitting', as recommended by management guru Tom Peters in his seminal book: 'In Search of Excellence'. The clear advantage to this is being able to concentrate

fully on mission achievement throughout the organisation – giving focus and direction. A number of specialist companies have been built up that concentrate on support service delivery to NGOs. They are familiar with the NGO environment and its needs, and because they specialise can deliver effective and cost conscious services. This would certainly solve the management dilemma of how to select and manage staff in these specialist roles. There is no need to motivate or manage, as this is outsourced. The service provider can simply be replaced if the service does not meet expectations.

The main drawbacks will be loss of control, flexibility, and – possibly – cost. If it is difficult to manage support service staff, then it is also difficult to manage support service contractors – and to know whether a professional is cheating the organisation! However, it is certainly worth carrying out an assessment, as outsourcing could achieve benefits in terms of both cost and efficiency.