

Managing People and their Work



Governing and Managing Organisations

Guidelines for AKDN's work with CSOs

No 6

A K D N

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

For more information about the AKDN Civil Society Programme, please see http://www.akdn.org/civil_society.asp

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“Civil Society Institutions play an essential role in the provision of social services, the protection of the marginalised, and the delivery of development programmes”

*His Highness the Aga Khan,
Toronto 18 June 2004*



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Why you may need these guidelines¹

Some problems appear in organisations of all kinds. Here is a sample:

- Board members are unconfident and/or over-committed.
- Managers face the same difficulties.
- The organisation's ideals do not match its day to day reality.
- Meetings are badly planned, badly run and/or badly recorded.
- Decision-making and management structures are not clear.
- Unpaid staff and volunteers lack clear job descriptions and responsibilities.
- It is not clear how to deal with unsatisfactory work performance or behaviour.
- The organisation's haphazard administrative systems hinder rather than help its effective operation.
- Financial management or control procedures are inadequate.
- You find unwillingness to address any of these problems, or inadequate procedures to tackle them.
- The organisation works on technical issues, but does not take a stand on matters of principle, values and ethics.

*If any of these problems affect your organisation,
these guidelines are for you!*

¹ Adapted from "Just About Managing", London Voluntary Service Council 2004

Discussion points for your organisation

1. Are Board members, staff and volunteers clear about who is managing whom, who is accountable to whom, and who is responsible for dealing with work problems?
2. Are personnel policies and procedures in place in relation to both employees and volunteers? Are they adequate? Do managers know them and comply with them?
3. Is the organisation clear about what each worker, whether paid or voluntary, is meant to be doing, when they are supposed to be doing it, and what standards are applied to the work?
4. Are problems with workers or volunteers performance identified, acknowledged and discussed with a view to resolving them, rather than being ignored or treated in an unhelpful, fault-finding way?



Action points for your organisation

If you have these documents, please review them. If you do not, it is time to design them:

1. Personnel Policies and Procedures
2. Procedures for appraisal of staff performance
3. Vision, Mission, and Strategy of the organisation (see Booklet 1 for guidance)

This booklet offers advice on the issues likely to come up in managing people and their work.



Managing people and their work

Effective management of paid staff or volunteers involves a combination of common sense, sensitivity, confidence, and good management practices in all areas of work. Some people seem to be naturally good at it: others need to acquire skills or sensitivity.

Human Resource (HR) management (often called Personnel Management) involves:

- Ensuring the organisation has clear, appropriate and workable policies and procedures for all aspects of employment and volunteering
- Ensuring all workers, whether paid or voluntary, are properly recruited, inducted, supervised, trained and supported
- Ensuring that all workers feel that they are a valued part of a team and organisation
- Ensuring workers know what they are supposed to be doing, how to do it, and how it fits into the organisation's overall plan
- Helping workers recognise and overcome intellectual, technical or personal difficulties affecting their work
- Setting standards of performance (quality of work and/or behaviour) and implementing procedures to monitor them
- Creating and maintaining a good emotional environment
- Helping sort out conflicts within the group
- Dealing with workers' and volunteers' concerns and grievances

Clarifying accountability

There is no single model, but every worker or volunteer should know to whom she or he is accountable and what this means in practice. Where there is a defined staff structure, this is usually reasonably clear. Where it is not clear, one way to clarify it is to ask:

If this worker or volunteer wanted to do something new or wanted to make a significant change in the way her or his work is done, with whom would the change have to be agreed?

If the answer is “nobody”, the next question is:

If this worker’s or volunteer’s work was inadequate or unacceptable, who would talk to her or him about it?

If the answer is still “nobody” (or, just as bad, “everybody” which in practice often means nobody), ask:

Who should be dealing with issues like these in relation to this individual worker or volunteer?



Ultimately every worker in a CSO whether paid or volunteer, is accountable to the Board as a whole. But accountability to a larger group is quite difficult to manage. It is usually better if each worker is directly accountable to one or two people.

Similar questions should be asked in relation to part-time, temporary or casual workers, trainees, those on secondment, consultants and anyone who is not part of a formal staff structure but who nevertheless needs to be accountable within that structure.

It is usually better if each worker is directly accountable to one or two people

Motivation

Good managers understand that people work, paid or unpaid, in CSOs for a variety of reasons. These include:

- Earning money
- Commitment and idealism: belief in what the organisation is doing or trying to achieve, desire to help or support people, desire to use skills or knowledge “for a good cause”
- Personal development: learning and using new skills, gaining confidence, building self-esteem
- Creativity: using imagination, expressing oneself, responding to challenge
- Social contact: being with other people



A range of less positive motivators can also be identified:

- Guilt: because workers or volunteers feel that they would be “letting the side down” if they were to leave
- Egotism: believing they are indispensable and the organisation could not survive without them
- Fear of moving onto another job or type of work
- Inability to find other work



An understanding of why an employee or volunteer has taken a particular job in the particular organisation, why she or he is remaining in it, and how she or he feels about the work – this is the starting point for supporting workers appropriately and dealing with performance or attitude problems.

Managers should also be honest about their own motivations. It is not unknown, even in the voluntary sector, for people to seek management positions because they want more money or the power they think is intrinsic in such positions.

Managers should be honest about their own motivations

I dentifying responsibility for problem areas

The roots of problems at work generally lie in:

- Poor individual management
- Inappropriate or inadequate skills, knowledge or ability
- Lack of motivation or commitment to work
- Breaches of conditions or rules
- Poor organisational management
- Factors outside the individual's or organisation's control

For the first three problems, responsibility rests jointly with the supervisor and worker to try and identify what these problems are, why they are happening, their effects, and what can be done to improve the situation.

For the fourth, where rules have been broken, responsibility lies with the supervisor to explain the rule and what has been done wrong, or to listen to the worker's or volunteer's reasons for her or his actions. They then need to look jointly at the reasons for the rule and the effects of its infringement, and decide how to proceed.

For the fifth and sixth, problems arising from poor organisational management and factors outside the organisation's control, solutions should not be made the responsibility of individual workers or volunteers. If no one is clear about standards and expectations, or if there is simply too much work, and no-one is willing to set priorities, it is unfair to castigate individuals.



U nsuitable volunteers

Some volunteers may lack the skills or knowledge needed by the organisation. In most cases this can be overcome by providing training or by assigning the volunteer to different tasks. But some volunteers may need more training or support than the organisation can justify providing. It is important to acknowledge this, rather than ignoring it and allowing a volunteer to become a net drain on the organisation.

Telling a volunteer that she or he is unsuitable is an uncomfortable task. It will be easier if a clear explanation can be given about what the organisation can offer volunteers, and why this volunteer cannot be accommodated.

While it may seem cruel to turn away volunteers, it is probably harsher in the long term to keep people whose confidence will be undermined because they constantly get things wrong and are resented.



Poor organisational management

Poor organisational management can contribute to poor performance and lack of motivation.

- The supervisor may not be able or willing to manage the worker or volunteer, so supervision sessions, appraisals and other procedures are used ineffectually (or are not used at all). The manager needs training and support.
- The supervisor may not have authority to implement changes required to help the worker or volunteer improve her or his work. Lines of communication need to be created between the supervisor and those who have authority to implement change.
- The organisation may be unclear about what it expects from the worker or volunteer. It may be giving mixed messages, and/or expecting too much.
- The organisation may have conflicting or too many priorities. Individuals and the organisation as a whole have to learn more about planning and time management.
- Workers or volunteers may feel unappreciated or unsupported within the organisation. Unless appropriate support is given, workers are likely to work at the minimum acceptable level and feel alienated from the team or organisation.

If the manager is unable or unwilling to manage, or if the organisation is unclear about its priorities, the worker or volunteer is being set up to fail. When this happens the organisation fails as well.



The background to these guidelines

The AKDN Civil Society Programme has produced a series of internal booklets to help those involved with AKDN agencies to acquire the skills they need to build and strengthen effective civil society organisations (CSOs).

There are basically four types of institutions for whom these booklets are intended:

1. *The Jamati Institutions: National Councils, ITREB, GRB, NCAB, and EPB*
2. *The Boards of the Service Companies – AKHS, AKES, AKPBS*
3. *Associations set up by the Service Companies or by other AKDN agencies to support the purposes of their programme – such as PTAs, school management committees, nurses associations, midwives associations, teachers associations, tenants associations*
4. *CSOs outside AKDN agencies which support their purposes*

All such organisations involve people who have committed themselves to improving the society in which they live by what they do and how they behave. Commitment and voluntarism may, however, not be enough for an effective organisation – specific organisational skills are needed as well. And these skills can be learnt.

The following booklets are also available in this series:

1. *Problems in Managing Organisations*
2. *Skills in Managing Organisations*
3. *Improving Management*
4. *The Board and its Functions*
5. *Organisational Structures and Systems*
6. *Managing People and their Work*
7. *Managing Finance*
8. *Building a More Civil Society*

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