

NGO INFORMATION BULLETIN No. 9
[Institutional Development Topics]

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP -- MANAGERIAL SKILLS

Both Are Essential To Strengthening Non-Governmental Organisations

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

When NGOs are forced to tackle difficult internal issues -- e.g., how to increase effectiveness, strengthen capacity, or improve performance -- they often fall into a trap of looking for quick and simple solutions, says Piers Campbell of *NGO Management Network News* (No. 17, April/June 1990). External training courses, a new staff person, or overhaul of administrative procedures are seen as expedient answers to the need for change.

While such approaches have some validity, they may not have the desired results. The reason why, according to Campbell, is that organisations themselves are much more complex than most of us realise -- and deep-rooted problems can rarely be solved by "quick-fix" solutions.

In this issue of *NGO NEWS*, we are going to tackle two interrelated subjects which resist "quick-fix" definitions -- **leadership** and **management**. We will examine how the quality and effectiveness of both can and will affect change within NGOs, and in the process we hope to stimulate new opportunities for institutional growth among our NGO partners in the Eastern Caribbean.

A number of sources were consulted in the preparation of this issue of *NGO NEWS*, and these are provided in the list of references which appears on page 6.

In an effort to simplify, Piers Campbell of the NGO Management Network defines an organisation as an *organised group* (or team) of *people* with a common *purpose*. The key words emphasised are:

- *purpose* - the organisation's clearly-defined goals and strategies;
- *people* - the organisation's members, staff, and board with requisite skills, expertise, and commitment;
- *organised* - the organisation's structure, systems, and administrative procedures;
- *group* - people working together as an integrated and effective team.

When looking at organisational change, Campbell states that it is essential to think of change in terms of these four key organisational components -- although he gives primary importance to the components which emphasise strategic planning (*purpose*) and team-building (*group*).

THE VISION OF MOTIVATED LEADERS THE SKILL OF EFFECTIVE MANAGERS

In an earlier issue of *NGO NEWS* (January 1990), we briefly addressed the subject of NGO leadership and asked the question: when is being a good manager not enough? We quoted from a book, *On Leadership*, by John W. Gardner, a former U.S. Cabinet member, and we think some of the issues raised at that time are worth repeating now.

It is Gardner's contention that good management is not necessarily good leadership (more on this below). For example, he points out qualities which may define good "leaders" but not necessarily good "managers":

- Leaders have the skill to cope with the conflicting demands of a membership core which can be diverse and unmatched in what it requires and expects from the organisation.

- Leaders are able to grasp and are sensitive to the relationship of the organisation to the larger community. A leader is not necessarily restricted by the organisation's agenda or its more focused and hence narrower mission statement.

- Leaders think long-term, beyond the day-to-day operational crises; they have a sense of vision.

- Leaders have an ability to move and mobilise people. In the extreme, they have the capacity to capture hearts or change perceptions.

- Finally leaders think in terms of renewal and are not generally comfortable with the status quo.

Attributes such as those identified above shape what we generally think of as the "challenge of leadership". True leaders will most often act and react as characterised by Mr. Gardner; indeed, without aggressive leadership, most organisations will not grow or move forward.

This, however, should not demean the necessity for good managerial skills in the operation of non-governmental organisations. What we want to suggest to NGOs is that in the pursuit of management imperatives, *they should not overlook the leadership imperative.*

In smaller organisations -- like the network of environmental NGOs in the Eastern Caribbean -- the reality is that those who **manage** (i.e., those who preside over the processes by which the organisation functions) are also those who **lead** the organisation. A small core of persons within the NGO (sometimes it is only one person -- the president, chairperson of the board, or executive director) must combine two roles, one as NGO leader and a second as NGO manager.

For organisations that are primarily volunteer-based, the challenge to both lead and manage can become overwhelming. The result too often is that those responsible for providing direction for the NGO will, overtime, emphasise one or the other -- motivation and mission over the nuts-and-bolts of administrative functions or procedure, structure, and performance over the intangibles of values and vision. It is an unfortunate (and perhaps overly simplistic) dichotomy. NGOs need both visionary leadership and effective management. The challenge is to find the means to support and sustain both.

SKILLS FOR NGO MANAGERS and LEADERS

[Adapted from: NGO MANAGEMENT, No. 14, 1989]

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. LISTENING: the ability to pick out positive aspects as well as problems, difficulties, and tensions in a given situation. 2. EMPATHY: the ability to identify with problems and situations as seen through the eyes of others. 3. QUESTIONING: the ability to sympathetically examine situations before expressing opinions or making judgements. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. OBSERVATION: the ability to pick up more subtle information about a situation, e.g., the feelings, concerns and intentions of others from non-verbal cues. 5. SUMMARISING: the ability to sum up complex information and identify key problems and alternate possibilities. 6. TIMING: the ability to sense when to encourage, when to challenge, when to give support. |
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IN PURSUIT OF NGO COMPETENCE

Unfortunately, competence in the art of "management" is not aggressively or even consciously pursued by most non-governmental organisations. One NGO (the African Region of Caritas Internationalis) has asked the question, "Why are NGOs so suspicious of the word management," and come up with one probable answer.

For many, it is because the term "management" is derived from the for-profit sector and seems alien to the not-for-profit world. In this context, management is associated with efficiency and productivity, whereas most NGOs tend to emphasise their "good works" rather than their competence.

Still another publication (*Impact*, No. 4, 1987) points out that in evaluating the management skills of NGOs, the volunteerism of such organisations is often equated with amateurism. This publication too identifies the lack of "market place" or "bottom line" indicators of success as an explanation for why it is difficult to advance managerial competence in NGOs.

Determinants of Success

For example, unlike for-profit business ventures, there is no profit

measure to trigger "shareholder" (e.g., Board) satisfaction or displeasure with management. The closest comparable measure is the success of the management team in raising funds -- which may or may not bear some direct relationship to substantive NGO accomplishments. Thus, NGO boards are forced to look beyond mere financial statements to determine institutional "success" and their own degree of satisfaction with the management structure. Essentially, they are left with subjective measures, which are not generally as persuasive as profit measures (*Impact*, No. 4, 1987).

Role of Managers

Basically, there is nothing intrinsically good or bad -- or alien -- about management. It simply describes a function or a process that every organisation needs if it is to be effective.

Historically, the role of the manager has been one of intervention, in the pursuit of defined institutional goals. It is the job of the manager to organise the tasks required to achieve the group's basic purpose and to motivate people to accomplish those tasks.

Thus, the role of the manager is multi-faceted: to buffer, screen, mediate, interpret, monitor, allocate. The effective manager is at once an evaluator, a disseminator, a spokesperson, an entrepreneur, a negotiator, a resource allocator -- and a leader.

The manager, by definition, operates in an environment filled with uncertainties. If there were no uncertainties, only perfect knowledge, there would be no need for managers -- only technicians.

Management or Control?

The need to optimise predictability and minimise complexity in an uncertain work environment has historically led to the development of "control models" for management. Such models focus on formal structure and highly predictable order.

However, many experts in the field contend that successful management is not a process of "control" but rather one of open-ended decision-making. The key to successful management, these experts argue, is

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| <p>7. MUTUAL LEARNING: the ability to project an attitude which says you do not know it all; a willingness to learn from the rest of the group in creating a spirit of collaboration and an environment open to creativity.</p> | <p>9. ENCOURAGEMENT: the ability to build confidence within the group by affirming the positive aspects of work accomplished while also helping group members to recognise negative aspects and think out alternative approaches.</p> |
| <p>8. PLANNING: the ability to use time effectively, to allocate resources as required, and to meet essential deadlines.</p> | <p>10. FLEXIBILITY: the ability to encourage creativity and a spirit of experimentation and entrepreneurship within the organisation.</p> |

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not for the manager to concentrate on procedures and structures designed to control events but rather to focus on his or her role as an adaptive decision-maker.

Managers who adhere too closely to standard routines, formal rules, and rigid behaviour run the risk of subverting the very goals and objectives for which the organisation was formed. The administrative tasks, in effect, displace the primary organisational goals.

This lesson is particularly important for small NGOs which generally begin as decentralised organisations. As they grow and prosper, there is a tendency for managers to want to duplicate the hierarchical structure and centralised systems of governments or international aid agencies. The risk is that the NGO will gradually lose its capacity to be innovative -- and, most importantly, its ability to function within a "learning environment". Successful NGO managers, therefore, seek management styles that combine function and structure with learning and innovation.

The paradox that confronts the NGO manager reflects the tensions of the classic public administration dilemma: how to maintain accountability and efficiency within an institutional environment that encourages flexibility and creativity.

Technical Expertise or Managerial Competence

Many NGO "managers" are hired for their technical skills rather than their organisational or managerial competence. Such persons tend to give a lower priority to management responsibilities, preferring to focus on the technical or programming aspects of their work. Yet, as Piers Campbell points out (*NGO Management*, No. 23, 1991), organisational and managerial expertise can be as important, if not more important, than technical skills.

Piers cautions that in addition to professionals with technical abilities, NGOs need managers with *organisational skills* (e.g., the ability to plan, coordinate, negotiate, communicate, mediate, monitor, evaluate) and *managerial skills* (the ability to supervise, motivate, delegate, allocate and -- most importantly -- make decisions). The relative priority that is given to each set of skills will depend on the NGO's immediate situation, the experience of other staff or volunteers, and the nature of the NGO's work.

In working with its NGO partners in the Eastern Caribbean, the Island Resources Foundation has often

encouraged NGOs to stretch limited financial resources by seeking support for a single staff position that combines the role of a programme coordinator (or project director) with that of an executive director (or NGO manager). The difficulty, of course, is in identifying an individual who exhibits the technical knowledge to successfully implement the NGO's programme agenda and the managerial skills to keep the organisation's "nuts and bolts" in order.

The NGO Manager as Facilitator

An important role of the NGO manager is to ensure that planning is carried out in the organisation, that conflict is resolved, that evaluation is done effectively, etc., etc. In this sense, the essential function of the manager is to act as a *facilitator* or catalyst within the group.

If one accepts the facilitator role of the NGO manager, then specific managerial responsibilities can include the following (adapted from: *"Working in Caritas: Organizing Ourselves for Greater Effectiveness"*):

- Assist the governing board in defining the values and purpose of the NGO;
- Establish, in consultation with the governing board, a programme strategy;
- Ensure the implementation of effective and appropriate programmes;
- Set up efficient structures and systems;
- Recruit and nurture committed and capable staff and volunteers;
- Maintain good relations with other NGOs and the larger community in which the NGO operates;
- Expedite organisational processes, e.g., problem-solving, conflict resolution, communications, coordination, etc.

The manager does not necessarily have to do all these things, but s/he must make sure that they are done.

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Management Styles

Basically, there is no right or wrong "management style". The approach chosen by any single NGO manager or management team must mirror or reflect the organisation in which they operate. Since there is no per-

fect formula or set of guidelines, much will depend on the personality of the manager, the capacity of staff (or volunteers), and the type of work pursued by the NGO. In short, to be effective, the NGO's "management style" should accurately mirror the organisation itself (Caritas Internationalis).

NGO LEADERSHIP

The subject of NGO leadership was one focus of a 1989 NGO workshop held in Thailand and organised by the Asian Cultural Forum on Development. Some of the outputs of that meeting were reprinted in NGO MANAGEMENT (July-September 1990), and highlights of that article are summarised below for our readers.

Workshop participants emphasised that NGOs should practice what they preach and adopt a leadership style that is both impartial and participatory. Hierarchical structures and authoritarian practices are to be avoided. It is also important that the many rather than the few be involved in decision-making.

Several leadership styles were rejected by participants as not appropriate for most NGOs, notably that of a shepherd leading a docile flock and that of a cowboy directing and driving the herd in front of him.

An analogy from the sports field seemed more appropriate. When watching a match from a public gallery, it is hard to pick out who the captain is because s/he plays along with the other members of the team. Nevertheless, the captain is busy arranging the team appropriately in light of the strengths and weaknesses of each team member.

Participants identified a number of qualities they felt NGO personnel in general and NGO leaders in particular should have:

- analytical skills
- creativity and flexibility
- courage of one's convictions
- decisiveness in making decisions
- self-discipline
- patience
- resourceful time management
- diligence and capacity

for hard work

- effective administrative skills
- appreciation of the work of others
- ability to learn from one's mistakes.

Accountability and openness were identified as essential for effective leadership. However, participants noted, accountability is not only to funding agencies, but also to the NGO's board, members, and programme beneficiaries.

NGOs should practice what they preach and adopt a leadership style that is impartial and participatory . . . An NGO leader should be "first among equals".

THE NGO PRESIDENT: A LEADERSHIP ROLE

[Summarised and adapted from:

B. O'Connell, EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS]

Many presidents of NGOs can be well into their term before they really understand their role and job. This is unfortunate because much of what the president's term of office will mean to the organisation is accomplished during the first few months. Many of the essential leadership functions performed by the president have to be in place early on if the presidency is to have a sense of direction.

Planning. As early as possible, incoming NGO presidents need to decide on the one, two or -- at the most -- three things they want most to accomplish. Most presidents make the mistake of starting out with too many aspirations and don't really pin down what it will take to carry out this full agenda. Many look back with regret that they never really got off the ground with many of the things that seemed so important at the beginning. Similarly, NGO presidents should not try to change too much too fast. An organisation can sustain or survive just so much institutional upheaval during any given period of time.

Motivating. Many NGO presidents leave motivation to chance. They forget that the board, staff, and members want to know where the president is going with the organisation, what s/he considers important. The president must be the regular motivator, encourager, and prodder of the NGO and must provide regular opportunities for discussion of progress and problems. Motivating others in the organisation is not the kind of thing that will just happen automatically.

Coordinating. It is the responsibility of the NGO president to see that the activities which the organisation's officers, governing board, and committees set out to accomplish are being implemented. If a key individual is letting the group down, it is the job of the president to face up to this problem, keeping in mind that the larger responsibility of the president is to all who contribute to and support the organisation. To have adequate time for basic coordination and oversight responsibilities, the NGO president should avoid being directly responsible for projects. To the extent that the president assumes responsibility for individual projects or issues, s/he will not be using his/her limited time to expand the overall capacity of the NGO to deal with an increasing number of projects and issues.

Evaluating. The president's success can be measured by: (1) the achievement of objectives set out at the beginning of his/her term; (2) the fulfillment of major commitments and projects; (3) the effectiveness of the organisation's response to unanticipated crises and opportunities; and (4) an increased increment in volunteer/member involvement, generation of revenues, funding of projects or other tangible measures of growth. During his/her tenure, the president needs to develop a regular checklist or other means to gauge progress and monitor accomplishments. To ignore the need for recurring evaluation within the organisation is an indicator of poor presidential leadership and will be reflected in the measures used to judge the president's success.

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