Improving Management

Governing and Managing Organisations

Guidelines for AKDN's work with CSOs
No 3

AKDN

Improving Management

*"Civil Society Institutions play an essential role
in the provision of social services,
the protection of the marginalised,
and the delivery of development programmes"*
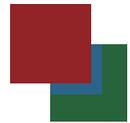
*His Highness the Aga Khan,
Toronto 18 June 2004*

Governing and Managing Organisations

**Guidelines for AKDN's work with CSOs
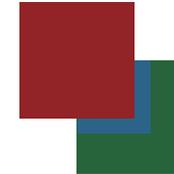No 3**

A K D N

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

*W*hy you may need these guidelines[1]

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

*D*iscussion points for your organisation

1. Do you feel able, within your culture, to ask some of the questions suggested here?

2. Do you feel that the primary work of the organisation is failing because of bad management?

3. Do you have an idea where to look for manuals, suggestions, training on management issues?

4. Do you know who can intervene to help you if things reach a crisis?

5. Do you see the problems that you are facing as problems that have lasted for a long time?

$\mathcal{A}$ction points for your organisation

Decide which of these problems afflict your organisation, and note any others:

1. Unclear objectives

2. Unclear terms of reference or boundaries

3. Ineffective and inefficient meetings

4. Board members

5. Unclear job descriptions and job expectations

6. Inadequate supervision procedures

   a. Haphazard administrative systems

   b. Inadequate financial management

For solutions, see the sections below.

$\mathcal{I}$mproving management

What if Managers can't manage?

What happens when the managers do not want to manage, do not know how to, or are not able to? This is one of the most difficult situations facing any organisation, and there are no easy answers.

Is this your case? If may be, if your people say:

"Our Board doesn't have a clue; all they do is rubber stamp our decisions."

"Our Chair thinks that she has the right to overturn any decision we make if she does not like it."

"Our Chief Executive never consults anyone."

"We haven't had a meeting for ages."

"There's no point coming to a meeting – everything is decided by the Chair, anyhow."

In a properly managed organisation, the Board or the Chief Executive would recognise problems, discuss them and implement solutions. But if they are unable or unwilling to do it – or if they are the problem – someone else will have to try.

An outside consultant may be able to say what insiders cannot and help managers see their weaknesses. But if the manager sees no need for a consultant, the organisation is unlikely to call one in. If the manager draws up the consultancy brief and controls the people the consultant can talk to, it may all be a waste of time and money.

In such cases the organisation needs to deal with the problems itself – through a kind of "Do-It-Yourself" consultancy.

Do-it-yourself consultancy

You can DIYC your organisation's failures whether you are a manager or a member of staff.

Bad management is nearly always rooted in organisational factors which transcend individual incompetence. Do-It-Yourself Consultancy starts by looking for those factors.

A problem will usually look like bad management. But to do something about you must look beyond the effect to the cause.

Ask: Why has this situation or problem arisen?

The next sections list some causes of managerial ineffectiveness, and ways to deal with them. But if the manager does not take action, you may have to wait for another opportunity to repeat your proposal. In many situations, though, a non-manager can take quite significant action.

Bad management is nearly always rooted in organisational factors which transcend individual incompetence

1 Unclear objectives

No-one can act effectively if objectives and priorities are unclear. If this is the underlying problem, some approaches are:

- Ask "Why are we doing this?" or "How does this fit into our overall objectives" if the Board or individual managers seem to be going off in strange directions.

- Be sure there is enough time and resources to carry out new activities or ideas. If not, challenge the proposals.

- If the organisation does not have one already, suggest creating a small group to outline objectives for the coming year (or six months) and draw up a work programme to achieve those goals.

- Propose regular (yearly or six-monthly) reviews for all in the organisation to look at achievements and set objectives for the next period, if these are not already scheduled.

2 Unclear terms of reference or boundaries

Both individuals and groups need to be know what they are supposed to be managing, and what is to be managed. Ways managers and others staff can improve the situation are:

- Propose terms of reference be drawn up for the Board and subsidiary groups, outlining the sort of issues they cover and whether the committee or group can take decisions or just make recommendations.

- In meetings, when you are not clear, ask: "Can we make a final decision or does it have to be decided elsewhere?"

- Ensure that meetings specify who is supposed to take action on every decision made.

- Encourage managers to clarify "boundary disputes" every time something is not done, or is duplicated, or is done by someone who should not have. Keep the boundaries clear through written terms of reference.

3 Ineffective or inefficient meetings

Bad management and bad meetings are inseparable. An endless cycle is created: bad management means people do not have the information or skills they need to participate fully in meetings and make appropriate decisions. So decisions are not made or cannot be implemented. So the people responsible for managing do not know what they are supposed to do – or they are expected to do the impossible. And people at the meetings do not get the information they need to make further decisions …. and so it goes on.

How to break the cycle:

- Insist detailed agendas be drawn up for all meetings.
- Ask for background papers to be available a fixed time in advance.
- Read the background papers and finish other preparation.
- Suggest committee training for the Chair, minute-taker or others.
- Do not be afraid to say: "I am not clear what has been decided."
- Suggest sub-groups be set up to carry out the initial reading, thinking and discussion about complex issues, so that every one in the room does not need to be an expert in everything.

When you are not clear, ask:
'Can we make a final decision?'

4 Board members

Board members may be unconfident, unaware or unsure of their responsibilities, and/or over committed. They may not feel able to challenge or even question staff.

Ways to overcome these difficulties are:

- Hold a familiarisation session before people are elected or appointed to the Board to tell them what is expected.
- Prepare an induction pack for all Board members.
- Have an annual induction and update session for all Board members (not just new ones).
- Ask Board members what they bring to the organisation, and would like to contribute to it, and what they want from the organisation.
- Propose a written agreement for committee members detailing what is expected of them, and what the organisation will provide.
- Suggest new Board members attend courses on Board skills and issues.
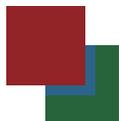
All new Board members could attend courses on skills and issues

5 Unclear job descriptions or job expectations

Even a good manager cannot work well with staff or volunteers if the workers are confused about what they should be doing. You can improve the situation if you:

- Insist that all employees receive written contracts and have job descriptions.
- Propose an annual review of all job descriptions, so that they are kept up to date.
- Ensure volunteers know what is expected of them and what they can expect from the organisation.
- Ask "Who will do it?" when new projects or tasks are taken on.
- Ask "How will I know if it is done adequately" or "How will I know I am acting properly?" if expectations are unclear.

6 Inadequate supervision procedures

Good management involves regular procedures for overseeing and reviewing work, discussing difficulties and clarifying how to proceed. Some changes which can be suggested by anyone in the organisation include:

- Propose a regular opportunity for all workers to discuss their progress and problems with someone else.
- Propose regular appraisal for all staff (perhaps annual).

6a Haphazard administrative systems

Without adequate information and administrative systems, good management is impossible. Filing systems, libraries, work diaries, year planners, procedures for dealing with post, phone calls and time off must be clear. Anyone can take responsibility for improving these systems:

- Suggest a "do the filing" day held every few weeks or months, when everyone gets their filing up to date.
- Propose improvements to the information systems, instead of complaining that you cannot find information.
- Put up a blackboard or whiteboard near Reception, where all staff indicate when they will be in.
- Indicate what could improve the administrative systems, instead of complaining that they do not work properly.
- Help prepare instruction sheets or a procedures book instead of complaining that people do not know how to do things correctly.

Instead of complaining, suggest improvements

6b Inadequate financial management

Decisions involving money cannot properly be made if people do not have comprehensible, up-to-date and accurate financial information. If this is not available, the first steps to obtaining it are to:

- Ask for clarification about who is supposed to provide financial information, how often, and in what format.
- Insist that this information is provided.
- Ask for explanations if information is unclear or too complicated.
- Ask for financial training to be provided if people consistently cannot understand the information.

Finally

As civil society organisations become more professionalized, there is a risk they will become over-managed – and the primary purpose of the organisation may be lost. It is important to keep a proper and appropriate balance between effective management and responsive, creative services for the people you want to help.

Keep a balance between professional management and creative services for the people you want to help.

Places to get further information:

- "Just About Managing" by Sandy Adirondack. London Voluntary Service Council 2004
- "Manual of Practical Management of Development Organisations" Vol 1: Tools for Action, Vol 2: Management Tools
- 'CIVICUS Toolkits' (14 volumes) freely downloadable from www.civicus.org/toolkits

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*

Illustrations: Petra Rohr-Rouendaal, "Where there is no artist", Practical Action Publishing, 2007

AKDN Civil Society Programme

www.akdn.org/civilsociety

**Civil Society Programme
Pakistan**

AKF Pakistan
House 1, Street 61
Sector F-6/3
Islamabad, Pakistan
Tel: 92 51 227 0512
Fax: 92 51 227 6815

**Civil Society Programme
Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan**

AKF Tajikistan
Rudaki 137
Building "Tajikmatlubot", 4th floor
Dushanbe 734003
Tajikistan
Tel: 992 372 247650
Fax: 992 372 510061

**Civil Society Programme, East Africa
(Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania)**

AKF East Africa
ICEA Building (8th Floor)
Kenyatta Avenue
Nairobi
Kenya
Tel: 254 20 227369
Fax: 254 20 248286

Civil Society Programme, Mali

AKDN Mali
Immeuble UATT
sis Quartier de Fleuve
Route de L'Archeveche, 1er etage
Bamako
Mali
Tel: 223 222 0695
Fax: 223 222 3466

Civil Society Programme Headquarters
1-3 Ave de la Paix
1202 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel: 41 22 909 7200
Fax: 41 22 909 7291