

Physical Fitness for Your Organization: A "Wellness" Approach to Effectiveness

Tom Connelly, Jr., EdD

INTRODUCTION

People today are actively concerned about their personal physical fitness as a critical component of leading a fuller and longer life. Physical fitness is a central component of the health concept known as "wellness." Simply put, "wellness" is a positive, pro-active approach to caring for a person's total self: mental, social, spiritual, and physical. The outcome of a "wellness" program is normally presented as strength, vitality, and higher levels of satisfaction as opposed to a "curative" program outcome, which is normally a mending, healing remediation effort. Organizations emulate many of the same behavioral and growth characteristics of the human species. Thus, if "wellness" is good for people, why not for organizations as well, particularly volunteer organizations?

GETTING THE SKELETON OUT OF THE CLOSET

Within the spectrum of physical fitness opportunities, one can choose to work with almost any of the body's eight basic systems, but for purposes of this discussion, the skeletal system will be the essential target. Normally considered to be a static entity, the skeletal system represents, within the volunteer organization, the structure and framework (committees, board, service sections, etc.)

of the organization. It is the foundation from which organizational activities and services are delivered.

Organizational structure can also be one of the most critical "motivators" in seeking to make the volunteer organization more effective. Effectiveness here is presented as the organizational outcomes (services, activities, etc.), enhanced by greater commitment (participation) of the organization's members (volunteers). A fundamental understanding of the concept of organization structure and the results of that structure is essential to the effectiveness of the volunteer organization.

The transition of individuals into the inner workings of the volunteer organization's structure from the state of being a volunteer participant is oftentimes an overwhelming and confusing move. There are two individual perspectives one must adjust in order to survive the move from being the "hands" to being the "parent" in the volunteer organization. First, there is no such thing as "a volunteer." Each and every person who enters the volunteer service arena brings with him or her many different ideas, goals, objectives, and experiences. The volunteer organization and its leadership must be prepared to deal with these definite differences among its participants, and likewise be ready to adjust the or-

Tom Connelly, Jr. has an eighteen year history of contributing his time and energy for volunteer activities. He has served as staff in a volunteer professional organization, has been active in civic work, president of a state professional organization, board member and officer in two national professional organizations, and most recently elected as a trustee to the board of a voluntary non-profit hospital. He is presently Dean of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina.

ganization's structure. Secondly, one has to accept that the organization itself is not a "thing" but people who have agreed upon a structure of authority relationships and patterned interactions which will eventually lead to the attainment of a set of overall goals. Because formal structures of authority and interactions are subject to participant adaptation, the organizational structure (the skeleton) becomes a natural focal point for preventive and pro-active approaches to enhancing wellness.

DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF "ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS"

Organizational wellness, like human wellness, can be measured by improvement in the condition of the being (organization or human). Volunteer organizations today are having to cope with "doing with less," thus improving the "condition" revolves around issues of productivity (effectiveness). For this discussion, productivity should be taken not to mean doing "more," but doing "better" with what is available.¹ People are the most precious of the resources of the volunteer organization; therefore, creating a productive environment for doing "better" means improving the commitment (participation) of volunteers in the organization's activities. It is essential, then, to examine several issues inherent in organizational activities, which have a strong impact on member productivity, i.e., wellness.

It is extremely important to recognize that organizations are not single-tiered, static entities as depicted on an organizational chart. There are basically three levels of activity which occur in the organization, each of which represents, from the volunteer's point of view, a different picture of the organization itself.

The first of these levels is the Production level, where the project and service work takes place. This is where the greater energy of the organization is spent: inserting mailers

into envelopes, transporting patients, carrying messages, and in general taking care of the basic business at hand. Next in the organization is the Coordinative level, which is represented by the committee chairperson, area vice president or whoever begins to look like middle management in a business operation. This is where the critical focus is on assembling the workforce, staffing the committee, setting up the meeting, and in general coordinating the activities and resources necessary to accomplish a task.

Perhaps the least visible activity level (in terms of productivity) in the organization is the Strategy level. Generally this is the governing structure--officers and board--which functions to maintain the organization as an entity (business and service) as well as to determine its future. The impact of this activity level on the others is oftentimes less definitive, but it is always a perceived force.

What is critical in the organizational wellness approach is to understand that each of these activity levels is occurring simultaneously and quite often in isolation from the others. This potentially leads to misunderstandings, misperceptions, and other communication breakdowns, many of which can be prevented through the development of conscious structural flows of information at each level, through each level. Bulletin boards, newspapers, minutes of meetings, phone calls, and other forms of communication throughout the organization can resolve much of the problem area here.

A second major issue in organizations is that of goal orientation. Organizations, as social units seeking "specific goals," must deal with two primary forms of goal orientation: the organization's and the individual participant's. As mentioned earlier, there is no such thing as "a volunteer." Each participant enters the volunteer activity with a different set of goals based on individual

needs. Volunteer organizations have their goal sets as well. It becomes critical then that the volunteer organization spend time matching up perceptions of individual and organizational goals. Bringing together an understanding of who gains what from the participation of the volunteer is an essential part of goal determination and definition.

As a collection of people, the volunteer organization must improve its productivity by enhancing the outcome of people working together in a collaborative and interdependent fashion, and that collaborative, interdependent activity occurs most effectively when goal orientations are the same.

A third unavoidable issue in organizational activity is that of conflict, which is inherent in any effort of bringing individuals with multiple goals together for a common purpose. Organizationally, conflict typically can occur as an outcome of two kinds of issues: organizational issues and people issues.

Decision-making and goal-setting tend to be the focal points for creating conflict within the organizational issues arena. As long as volunteers function at different levels of the organization--production, coordination, strategy--they will view organizational issues differently, thereby setting in motion structurally-created conflict.

People issues of personality and disagreement with policy will also ignite conflict within the organization. Organizational nature requires policies for purposes of order. Volunteers, in particular, tend to perceive themselves as having multiple options, thereby feeling less need to comply with organization policies. Volunteer organization leaders (paid managers, committee chairs, etc.) find this lack of compliance or disagreement to be a personal problem creating conflict. Personality clashes are inevitable and must be recognized as such.

Multi-level activity, goals, and

conflict are inherent aspects of the volunteer organization. How the organization's leadership recognizes and deals with these issues determines in great part the wellness of the organization. Most particularly the maintenance of productivity (doing better) and efficiency of the volunteer organization are dependent upon the participation of its members. Member participation can quite often be associated with the questions of goal definition and potential for goal attainment. Organizational and individual goals are quite naturally associated with levels of activity within the organization (where the individual fits in and potential for mobility) and conflict (comfort or discomfort in opportunities for meeting goals).

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

Leadership in the volunteer organization must be aware and willing to understand the relationship between the goal-directed behavior (motivation) of its participants and the goal attainment structure and activities (organizational environment) of the volunteer organization. In her book, The Effective Management Of Volunteer Programs, Marlene Wilson referred to the goal attainment structure and activities of the organization, as the "Organizational Climate."² Recent observers of the organizational climate scene have now begun to define these attributes of the organization's environment as its "corporate culture." Ellen Wallach, in an article entitled, "Individual and Organizations: The Cultural Match," illuminates the idea of organizational climate, using the McClelland model of social motivators to develop a perspective on the relationship between individual motivation and "corporate culture" (organizational) environment, organizational climate, etc.³

Wallach describes three broad corporate cultures: Innovative, Supportive, and Bureaucratic. Each of

these cultures tends to support a different set of participating goals, thereby having an impact on the involvement level of the participant. Recruitment of volunteers is also a factor determined by an accurate determination of corporate culture.

INNOVATIVE organizations, those which emphasize personal responsibility, encourage risks, and give recognition and reward for excellence, tend to attract participants with achievement goals. People who seek participation in the volunteer experience in order to satisfy personal accomplishment needs are most happy in this type of organization. Project related activities, loose administrative controls, and plenty of certificates and recognition are healthy indicators of wellness in this environment. Service agencies such as hospital auxiliary and community action groups (Red Cross, crisis intervention, etc.) are examples of this cultural form.

SUPPORTIVE organizations, those that encourage close, warm relationships, give support and encouragement, emphasize group membership, and allow great freedom with minimum structure tend to attract individuals with "affiliation" goals. These participants are seeking to meet belonging needs with less values placed, for them, on achievement of a specific outcome goal. Social organizations, fraternal groups, and such tend to be most representative of this organizational behavior cultural determination.

BUREAUCRATIC organizations, those that provide considerable structure, develop well-defined positions of responsibility, authority and status, and encourage the use of formal authority as a basis for resolving conflict, tend to attract participants whose motivations move along those of power goals. These participants need the organization to assist them in meeting their needs for power. Political parties, special interest groups, and social cause organizations tend to be most representative of this.

What is critical here for the wellness of the organization is the recognition by the leadership that the structure and processes of operating the organization have a major impact on the participation of the members. It may, in fact, be the most critical factor in attracting and maintaining membership (i.e., participation). There must be a constant examination of organizational goals and the activities to meeting those goals in relation to the motivational needs of the participants. If a fraternal organization decides to commit itself to a greater "project" orientation and thereby restructures itself, it can be expected that there will be some change in participation and possible membership. By the same stroke, an orientation change of a service organization to that of an advocacy group will create a change in participants as well. Each of these is monitorable and measurable by the leadership. Organizational leadership is in a position to determine how the relationships between individual motivations and corporate culture will occur.

SUMMARY

Success of the volunteer enterprise is dependent upon the degree and level of participation of the members. Member participation has been characterized as being a function of motivation and commitment by the members. Creating a situation for high participation requires more from the organization's leadership than the "outstanding member award" strategies of the past. Volunteerism has become a complex service with more complex organizations vying for the resources, particularly human resources, to provide services.

Volunteer participation has become a true marketing issue. Marketing is defined here as "an exchange of values." For effectiveness, the volunteer organization must be critically aware of the value it has to exchange for some value (typically participation) that it wants. Member

participation (motivation and commitment) is now much more than purely a function of "inspiration." Organizational behavior--dependent on structure, goal setting, conflict resolution, coordination of levels of activity, response to members, rewards, etc.--could be the most critical aspect of successful volunteer participation.

Volunteer leaders must take a pro-active or wellness approach to the business of leading the organization. Knowledge about the effect of the organization's structure on the participation of members is an important component of operating a successful volunteer enterprise. That knowledge must be coupled with a knowledge of the goals of the participants in order to determine how the two might be brought closer for better productivity ("doing better").

Volunteer organizations, like the body, can be conditioned and brought into "shape." As with the body, it is more cost effective and enjoyable to condition than to repair. Volunteer leaders have that opportunity if they will adopt a "wellness" approach to effectiveness in their organization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Deal, Terrence E., Allan A. Kennedy and Arthur H. Spiegel III. "How to Create an Outstanding Hospital Culture," Hospital Forum. (January/February 1983), pp. 21-34.

Etzioni, Amitai. "The Triple Role of Institutions," Educational Record (Spring 1983), pp. 6-10.

Lippitt, Gordon, Ronald Lippitt and Clayton Lafferty. "Cutting Edge Trends in Organization Development," Training and Development Journal (July 1984), pp. 59-62.

FOOTNOTES

¹Thomas A. Knox, "Corporate Culture Productivity," mimeographed paper presented to the Council on Human Resources, American Hospital Association, Chicago, Ill., September 1983.

²Marlene Wilson, The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs, Volunteer Management Institute, Boulder, Colo., 1976, p. 59.

³Ellen J. Wallach, "Individual and Organizations: The Cultural Match," Training and Development Journal, February 1983, p. 29-36.