

## DO YOU HIRE AND FIRE YOUR VOLUNTEERS?

Do you hire and fire your volunteers? Or do you simply accept all or most of the well-meaning people who seek to serve in your volunteer program? If you do not hire your volunteers, odds are that your volunteer program has not been carefully planned and its chances of being of real benefit to your agency are not very good.

What exactly do I mean? Basically, it's very simple. Volunteers are valuable people and as valuable people, they deserve the same treatment as that extended to paid personnel. Too many times, agencies begin volunteer programs in the agency. Rarely does a volunteer program begin after a long and well-conducted planning period. Rather, volunteer programs are frequently talked about one day and implemented the next day.

In order to establish viable and worthwhile volunteer programs, agencies must begin to view the volunteer as a non-paid staff member. When the agency views the volunteer as a non-paid staff member the chances of implementing a successful volunteer program are greatly enhanced. New paid personnel are not hired unless there is a real need for additional staff. But is this true of the non-paid volunteer? How many volunteer programs are suffering from an over-abundance of volunteers? Too frequently, agencies, in the first instance, fail to establish a real need for volunteers, and, in the second instance, recruit more volunteers than are actually needed.

If a need exists for volunteer staff, then this need should be easily transferred to the form of written job descriptions. This is extremely important because the function of a job description is to outline the duties to be performed and to establish the minimum qualifications for the position. Well-written job descriptions should be the basis upon which agencies hire and fire volunteers. But do they?

All social agencies have written job descriptions for paid personnel, but all social agencies do not have written job descriptions for non-paid volunteer personnel. Why not? The most logical answer is that volunteers really are not very important to those agencies which do not take time to outline in writing the nature of the volunteer's function. If the volunteer's job is not defined by a written job description, then how is the job defined? Does each volunteer arrive at his or her own conception of the volunteer role? If each volunteer is allowed to define his or her own role, then the agency

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is opening itself up to potential confusion and mis-understanding on the part of the volunteer. And a confused, misguided volunteer will soon become frustrated with the agency and its volunteer program.

Not only will a well-written job description outline the function and duties of the volunteer, but it should also list the necessary qualifications for each volunteer position. Let's face it, job descriptions for paid positions serve to eliminate unqualified applicants because they list the minimum qualifications for the position. Volunteer job descriptions work the same way. An agency will find it much easier to recruit qualified volunteers if the minimum qualifications have been printed and distributed in the form of job descriptions. Hence, agencies should hire volunteers on the basis of need and on the basis of the volunteer's ability to meet the minimum qualifications for the position.

When hiring volunteers it is essential for agencies to recognize their new personnel as non-paid staff. All regular staff privileges should be extended to the volunteer staff. For instance, most of today's volunteers are recruited to perform functions and duties identical or quite similar to paid staff. New paid staff normally receive an orientation, in-service training, a probationary period and adequate supervision. The volunteer staff should receive equal treatment. Most volunteers receive an orientation, but rarely receive in-service training or adequate supervision. The main reason for this is the lack of volunteer job descriptions. The job description for every paid position will state clearly the in-service training and supervision to be received. However, since the volunteer is normally without a written job description, in-service training and adequate supervision are frequently neglected. Further, there is rarely any such time as a probationary period for a volunteer. Rather the volunteer either perseveres in spite of the agency or withdraws in utter frustration.

Finally, written job descriptions can serve as the vehicle for firing unsuitable volunteers. Hopefully, written job descriptions will help prevent this situation by allowing the agency to recruit better qualified volunteers. But when a volunteer is not performing the required tasks, a written job description serves as the basis to realign the volunteer's efforts, or if necessary, to terminate the volunteer for failure to fulfill the requirements of the volunteer position.

## APPLYING ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A VOLUNTEER BUREAU

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Most of us will recall from high school days the Square-Cube Law of biological growth which postulates that as the surface area of an organism doubles, the volume of the organism will triple. Some years ago Professor Mason Haire suggested, perhaps partly in jest, that social organizations (industrial and non-industrial) experience a similar effect. That is, as the organization doubles in size, the internal structure and dynamics required for efficient functioning seem to expand by a factor of three (Haire, 1959). Whether or not the Square-Cube Law holds for organizations, all of us would agree that the persistent problem facing administrators is dealing effectively with the twin challenges of growth and change.

As the amoeba constantly adjusts its shape, size and direction in response to a constantly changing environment, the effective volunteer bureau must modify its structure, internal relationships, objectives and programmes in order to serve the needs of a constantly shifting community environment. A newly emerging field in the behavioural sciences, Organizational Development can provide a great deal of assistance to administrators of volunteer bureaus in dealing effectively with growth and change. The purpose of this paper is to describe Organizational Development, its approach and techniques and to present highlights from a successful and ongoing OD effort in a volunteer bureau.

A leading practitioner has defined Organizational Development as:

"A long range effort to improve an organization's problem solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative management of organization culture--with specific emphasis on the culture of formal work teams--with the assistance of a change agent or catalyst, and the use of the theory and technology of applied behavioural science, including action research" (French and Bell, 1973 p.15)

Thus, Organizational Development is not a unified theory and is not a discipline in

itself, but it draws insights, approaches and methods from a number of behavioural science disciplines; particularly psychology, sociology, anthropology and economics. Nor is Organizational Development a packaged approach because each organization has different needs, therefore any single corrective approach cannot be applied to all organizations. Generally, however, the following elements are present in an OD application:

1) An organizational problem involving people is recognized. Organizational Development problems are those management problems for which solutions are sought generally within the scope of the behavioural sciences, i.e., relative to the individual and to groups, organizations and environment.

2) Expertise is brought to bear. Often, but not always, help is elicited from experts external to the organization. Some organizations find that some of their own staff members are sufficiently well trained in the behavioural sciences and are otherwise capable enough to institute OD programmes, and some large organizations even have permanent OD groups.

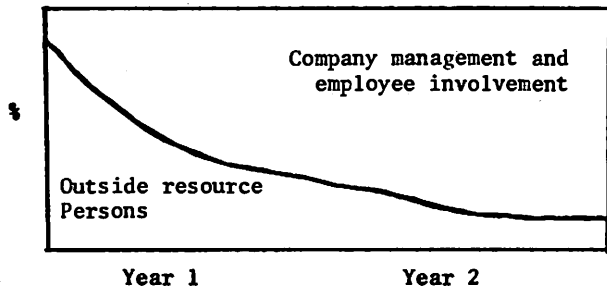
In contrast, most firms find it useful to seek the help of an external change agent; normally a consultant or university professor highly trained in behavioural sciences and having considerable experience with different types of organizations. Apart from expertise the external resource person may offer a certain credibility which might not easily accrue to the inside resource person.

In numerous examples of OD programmes, the outside change agent is heavily involved in the initial stages followed by a gradual withdrawal as persons within the organization assume more responsibility for the ongoing programme. Figure 1 illustrates a typical proportional mix of inside to outside resource people in an OD programme over time.

3) A diagnostic prescriptive approach is taken. Organizational ills take many forms and, as in the case of human illness, symptoms may be recognized. The diagnostic prescriptive approach is focussed upon recognizing symptoms of organizational illness (such as lack of goal commitment), prescribing and instituting

Figure 1

Typical Mix of Inside and Outside Resources  
Required in an OD Program



treatment (such as team-building), re-examination, further treatment or treatment modification, and so on. Thus, the OD programme is problem centered, custom designed and subjected to conscious reappraisal.

4) A conglomerate assembly of knowledge and techniques is judiciously and carefully used. A host of tools are available to the OD practitioner--empirically derived insights and knowledge about human behaviour in organizations, the interview, the questionnaire survey, observer and observer-participant based analysis, stimulation, model construction, laboratory and T-group variations, cases, role play, rewards system design, tools of economic and financial analysis, and others. Careful utilization of these powerful tools and techniques calls for complex understanding or organizational processes.

Organizational Development must be viewed as more than a sophisticated problem solving approach. All OD efforts and OD practitioners seem to espouse a philosophy...work is accomplished most effectively by people who are committed to the organization; who trust and respect each other and who realize and utilize their interdependence. As is the case with all organizational programmes, the success of an OD programme depends on thorough understanding and support, especially by the executive director of the volunteer bureau and by the board of directors. By this time, little needs to be said about the necessity of securing the active involvement of those in key positions in organizations. Failure to gain full understanding and support can doom not only a current programme but may have a severe effect on the success of any future programmes which may be undertaken.

Determining the Need for Organizational Development

Because of the unique nature of its operations, each volunteer bureau will have a different set of organization requirements, even though many of the structural characteristics may be similar. Beckhard (1969) lists ten organizational conditions that call for OD efforts:

1. The need to change a managerial strategy.

2. The need to make the organizational climate more consistent with individual needs and changing needs of the environment.
3. The need to change "cultural" norms.
4. The need to change structure and roles.
5. The need to improve intergroup collaboration.
6. The need to open up the communication system.
7. The need for better planning.
8. The need for coping with problems of merger or consolidation. (Not inconceivable for a volunteer bureau - ed.)
9. The need for changing motivation of the work force.
10. The need for adaptation to a new environment.

Obviously, not all of these needs may be present in a volunteer bureau at a given point in time nor will their intensities necessarily indicate the same action priorities.

Each Organizational Development strategy is different and must be "tailor made" to suit the requirements of the organization involved.

Methods of Bringing about Organizational Change and Improvement

A wide range of activities is available to the practitioner of Organizational Development. In the jargon of OD experts, these "intervention strategies" are really structured activities designed to bring about a predetermined goal, such as the heightening of individual awareness, the building of an effective organizational team, controlled confrontation between two organizational groups holding ambiguous or conflicting views, etc. French and Bell (1973, p.102) indicate that these intervention activities or methods may be grouped into "families." The families of OD interventions which seem to particularly useful in volunteer bureau applications are:

Diagnostic activities. These are activities which are undertaken in order to determine where the organization is now in terms of its objectives, its problems, its strength and weaknesses. Methods which are available for diagnosing the organization include the interview, participant-observation, observation, the questionnaire survey, goal setting meetings.

Education and Training activities. These activities include all the normal training and management development approaches which are too numerous to describe in detail. One continuing problem faced by the director of a volunteer bureau concerns the education of new members of the Board concerning their roles, responsibilities and terms of reference.

Intergroup activities. Work groups and diagnostic groups composed of preselected members can be constructed in order to diagnose and to work through a variety of intergroup problems. Laboratory training may involve techniques such as sensitivity training modified to the needs of the organization.

Team Building activities. These are designed to improve the operations of groups of people working together in the organization as committees or in permanent work groups. Techniques such as role play, case analysis, force field analysis can be quite useful in team building. Intergroup team building meetings may be held in order to bring together representatives from different groups which have a common area of concern. Problem confrontation exercises may then be used.

Planning and Goal Setting activities. In a volunteer bureau, the executive director and the Board must engage in activities which are directed at planning and goal setting. The outside change agent may be very helpful as a consultant in planning meetings by providing theoretical insights, offering creative suggestions, and facilitating the planning group as it establishes its targets.

Coaching and Counselling activities. A number of methods are available whereby the consultants and other members of the organization can seek to develop individual members of the organization by working with them to help them better understand their behaviour, to learn new modes of behaviour, to plan and to achieve personal goals and to derive more satisfaction from the organization. Coaching and counselling activities are particularly important in a volunteer bureau where it is crucial that the personal expectations of members are met as fully as possible.

Each of these intervention activity areas contains a wide variety of exercises and methods which might be used. The effective use of these depends on having awareness of their existence and on skill in application. The external change agent or consultant must have a wide variety of Organizational Development techniques at his command and must be able to apply these judiciously and carefully if he is to gain and hold the respect and trust of his client organization. Further, he must be able to pass on his knowledge to members of the organization in order that they may continue to use the techniques and strategies of OD in the future.

Clearly, Organizational Development is not an "easy way to manage." OD always embodies change--modifying the structure and processes of the management system in order to improve organizational performance. Very often, changes in established practices may produce personal anxiety and disharmony at least in the short run. Although disruption, anxiety and stress might be anticipated as side effects of the change oriented OD programme, they are very real problems which demand highly skilled management.

#### Organizational Development in a Volunteer Bureau

In order to provide a more clear understanding of how an Organizational Development programme is undertaken, this section provides the

highlights of a programme which was begun approximately five years ago in a medium sized volunteer bureau in a major Canadian metropolitan area.

#### Problem recognition phase

Over the course of a two-year period prior to the beginning of any organizational development efforts, a number of serious conflicts had arisen between the executive director and the Board over the determination of suitable objectives for the bureau and over the methods of accomplishing the limited objectives which could be agreed upon. The Board and the executive staff were unable to succeed in working through their problems and this had led to heavy turnover of staff, eventually including the executive director. Communications between the executive director and the Board became very strained and eventually closed off completely. At the time the bureau was having these organizational difficulties, its role was rather narrowly confined to referral activities serving the needs of about six user agencies. Subsequently, a new executive director was appointed; a person with significant social service experience but from another community.

Thus, a very significant organizational change was taking place. Previous Board-executive director relationships were severed creating a uniquely "unfrozen" state in which expectations for improvement, on the part of almost everyone involved, were heightened. Many members of the Board realized the importance of having a director who would work in partnership with them and not just as an instrument of the Board. New ideas for programmes which could be undertaken by the bureau began to blossom forth, creating a high level of discussion and confusion concerning just where the bureau should be heading. At the same time, the executive staff seemed to be having more and more difficulties with the administrative demands of its programmes. Particularly burdensome were the demands of a Volunteers for Seniors programme. The bureau, under its new executive director, was experiencing growth pains; its objectives were ambiguous, the demands on the director's time and talents were becoming very heavy, Board members were not being used effectively either as individuals or as committee groups, and the future was unclear. At the same time, Board member expectations continued to be high and the executive director had been able to build confidence and trust within the organization. Many opportunities were clearly visible.

#### Diagnostic-prescriptive phase

The Organizational Development effort was initiated almost by accident in 1970. Feeling the need to improve the efficiency of herself and the staff, the executive director contacted a professor of Organizational Behaviour at a nearby university hoping that perhaps a time

and motion study or some type of efficiency study might be undertaken.

The professor, who henceforth will be known as the change agent, suggested instead a preliminary meeting to discuss the organization's structure and dynamics of the volunteer bureau. As an outgrowth of this preliminary meeting, the executive director discussed with her Board the possibility of undertaking an Organizational Development programme. Shortly thereafter, the external change agent was invited to attend a Board meeting where he outlined the requirements for an organizational diagnosis. The Board agreed to undertake an interview and questionnaire study of the bureau's activities. Under the direction of the change agent, a graduating student in Business Administration agreed to conduct the study as part of his university degree requirements. The investigation took six months and examined at least the following major areas of concern: 1) The extent and adequacy of services presently being provided by the bureau to its user agencies. 2) The adequacy of the consultation process between the bureau and its user agencies concerning present and long range service needs. 3) The opportunities for further service which might be provided by the bureau to its user agencies and to the community at large (the focus here was upon assessing the broad range of objectives or missions which might be undertaken by the bureau). 4) The similarity of structure and activities between this bureau and other bureaus elsewhere (for comparison purposes, the Greater Seattle Volunteer Bureau was examined). 5) The nature and scope of the executive director's position and the various positions of other staff members. 6) The respective roles of the Board and its various committees. 7) The Board and staff relationship within the volunteer bureau. 8) The relationship between the bureau and the community it seeks to serve (particularly important was the public relations aspect). 9) Adequacy of the funding base on which the organization depends.

The report contained a number of recommendations which were offered to the Board for its consideration. The study drew attention to several organizational deficiencies within the bureau; for example, the bureau's activities had been narrowly confined to recruitment and referral and not enough attention was being paid to the agencies using volunteers. It was recommended that a programme be undertaken to inform agencies of the various services available to them from the volunteer bureau and how these services can benefit the agency. It was recommended that more emphasis be placed on the relationship with agencies including the development of a training programme for coordinators of volunteers.

The need for the Board of Directors to define the objectives of the bureau was highlighted. It was recommended that this activity be given first priority. The study pointed out that the volunteer bureau's means of support was coming from only one funding source and that other funding sources should be investigated.

At the same time, the bureau's attention was directed to a number of opportunities for enhancing its role in the community. It was felt that public relations effort could be very important in developing greater community awareness concerning voluntarism and that many opportunities for service were largely untapped. The possibility of establishing branch offices with representatives from surrounding communities was raised.

Thus, the diagnostic prescriptive phase was directed at seeking information and presenting the information to the organization so that critical areas for improvement are highlighted and that opportunities are clearly pointed out.

#### Developmental phase

Following receipt and discussion of the diagnostic report by the Board, the bureau moved very quickly and in a logical fashion. A problem definition session was held under the direction of the external change agent with the Board, including a number of new members, and the executive director of the bureau in attendance. A confrontation goal-setting exercise was used at this meeting to generate a list of possible goals which could be undertaken by the bureau and to establish some rough ideas concerning just what priorities might be established (Fordyce and Weil 1971, p.93-7). A three-member group was chosen from among the Board members to draft a preliminary statement of goals as a result of the input from from this first meeting. This was done, and the Board formally began to move in a systematic way towards established objectives. As an outgrowth of the goal-setting activities, the Board's role began to be redefined as a planning role. The Board established mechanisms whereby the bureau's objectives would be reviewed very carefully each year so that modifications could be made where appropriate.

During the developmental phase, as the bureau began to move towards reestablished goals, it found itself gaining in stature with other social service organizations. Whereas prior to the Organizational Development effort, the bureau was treated as an appendage--a sidelight to the decision making in many of the user agencies, the bureau and its activities were becoming a much more important part of social service planning in a large number of user agencies. The bureau began to be called on to provide a wider variety of volunteer persons, illustrating that volunteers were being used in ways not heretofore conceived.

Many of the objectives originally outlined during the goal-setting period have been accomplished and others are being pursued with vigour. The funding base has been increased, providing a great deal of flexibility in terms of service activities, the executive director has acted several times in a consultant capacity, extending conscious efforts and helping to establish and strengthen volunteer programmes in the community and in other smaller communities in the Province. The bureau is working much more closely with user agencies and has provided some short-term and

an extensive long-term training programme for coordinators of volunteers (Anderson and Dougans, (1973). Consultation services have been provided for several user agencies; for example, with provincial correction services and the School Board.

At the provincial level, voluntarism, largely through the public relations efforts of the bureau, has become a much more important part of administrative planning. Partly as a result, the bureau recently (1974) has been granted provincial funds to establish a Voluntary Action Resource Centre, designed to collect and disseminate a wide variety of information concerning voluntarism and voluntary activities and perhaps to provide extended consultation throughout the region.

During the development, the bureau has been experiencing a great deal of growth (e.g., the bureau now serves approximately sixty volunteer coordinators as compared to five or six in 1970). Moreover, the Board and the staff of the bureau appeared to be coping systematically and effectively with their increased organizational demands and have taken advantage of a number of the opportunities which have been presented them in the course of social evolution.

#### Present Efforts

This bureau, like others in Canada, is looking forward to further opportunities for change and development as a result of the founding conference of the Canadian Association of Volunteer Bureaus (held June 12-15, 1974). During its developmental phase, the bureau has expanded its role beyond the traditional recruitment and referral to include training, consulting, and undertaking Organizational Development activities for other bureaus, has increased its public relations activities, and has broadened its funding base. At its next annual planning and development session, the bureau will be facing the important question concerning the modification of its existing structure to incorporate the new Resource Centre. Very likely, new roles will be defined, certain old roles will be redefined, certain functions of the Board may be modified, and certain new activities will be discussed and undertaken.

In conclusion, Organizational Development is a continuing process and is not just a "one-shot" activity. It involves a lot of hard work on the part of all members in the organization, but, through this process, exciting new organizational opportunities are created for the organizational team.

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