



HR PERSPECTIVES

The newsletter of the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

NEW APPROACHES TO ENDURING CHALLENGES

Message from the ed

Over the course of the last year I have drawn inspiration from people and organizations who are trying out new approaches to address some of the more enduring human resource (HR) challenges in our sector.

One of the first new initiatives that came to our attention was the Muttart Foundation's bold experiment to build HR expertise in clusters of community organizations in Edmonton and Calgary over a period of three years. As the pilot project draws to a close, the HR Council sees shared services in HR as a promising model for small and mid-sized organizations that individually don't have the financial resources to hire an in-house HR specialist. This model could actually be used to address a range of other functions like accounting or fund-raising. It would free up organizations to concentrate on their particular missions while encouraging practical collaborations among organizations in a community.

Another source of inspiration for me has been Santropol Roulant in Montreal. I had the good fortune of spending time with the former Executive Director, Vanessa Reid, before she left the organization last year. I was intrigued by how Santropol Roulant has been able to go well beyond surviving; it thrives and grows in spite of the fact that it, like other organizations, has staff coming and going on a regular basis. Vanessa described to me the processes they undertook to build, share and transmit knowledge in the organization and, more importantly, the principles that underlie their approach to supporting and nurturing all of their people at Santropol.

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EVOLVING LEADERSHIPS

(Santropol Roulant is an organization...)

Written by Vanessa Reid, former Executive Director of Santropol Roulant

Embedded in Santropol Roulant's culture is an acknowledgement and honouring of change and transformation. We work with the growing seasons for our food, the seasons of life through intergenerational relationships, volunteers' school terms; and of course funding cycles. This, coupled with the intense activity of a grass roots organization and the generative creativity that comes with new people coming and going means forever anticipating, and adapting to, change. It means creating a working environment that can tap and nurture —not deplete—the energies of its staff and volunteers.

Rather than look at "staff development" or "human resource management", I like to think that Santropol Roulant engenders Evolving Leaderships, an ongoing process of individual and collective growth and evolution. This speaks to the potential in each person and their unique contribution to the team, one which hopefully and necessarily shifts and changes as each person evolves and learns.

In the action-packed schedule of meals-on-wheels, fundraising and volunteer orientations, we felt that to realize the incredible and pulsating potential of our community, we needed to balance our action with reflection, our outward and inward growth. We undertook a very intentional process for close to three years to carve out the time and space to make what is essentially a paradigm shift in *how* we work. Integral to this was a pedagogy, a conscious focus on learning.

Here are a just few ways in which we put this to practice:

Changing the pace and focus of our work to spend time on the health of our core: the people who work at the organization.

We carve out Thursday mornings in our six-days-a-week schedule for our staff meeting; we close our doors and turn off the phones.

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There are no doubt dozens of other stories like those of Santropol Roulant and the Muttart Foundation... stories that reflect the thoughtfulness, resourcefulness and ingenuity of small and mid-sized organizations looking for creative ways to support, nurture and develop their most precious resources—the people in their organizations.

In the fall, we want to document existing and emerging initiatives that support HR development in our sector. As a clearinghouse for information and knowledge about HR, we will then share what we discover through our website. Please send us your stories about how organizations are creatively addressing some of those ongoing HR issues such as providing fair compensation, retaining staff, providing opportunities for ongoing training and learning, attracting younger workers, or integrating new immigrants into the workplace.

In the voluntary/non-profit sector, we don't produce widgets. Nor is our raison-d'être about adding to the financial bottom line. We are in the people business and we cannot take our human resources for granted. In a context of growing labour shortages in our country, we need to ensure that we continue

to attract and retain the best and the brightest minds, young and experienced, in this country.



Lynne Toupin, Executive Director

THOUGHTS

Does the Evolving Leadership concept make sense to you? Would this work for your organization? All those interested in providing feedback are encouraged to contact the author of the article, Vanessa Reid, via the HR Council at gwhite@hrcouncil.ca.

Santropol Roulant is a volunteer organization established and run by young people. They bring people together across cultures and generations through their innovative meals-on-wheels service and intergenerational programs. They are based in Montreal, Quebec.

For more information on Santropol Roulant please visit their website at www.santropolroulant.org or phone them at (514) 284-9335.



The afternoon is for team-work/meetings, volunteer and community events, quiet or individual work, networking, coalition and bigger picture work. We experiment with meeting formats and themes; bringing in participants like board members, volunteers, coaches, and partners. We vary the length of time and the space we use—a café, someone's home, another organization. Every single staff member—new and experienced—takes their turn facilitating and we all share taking minutes. We give feedback to the facilitator and discuss how the meeting went. This is a crucial time for collective thinking, reflection, long-term planning; it is professional development for the individuals and for the *organisme*.

Working with the varied length of contracts

Jobs at Santropol Roulant are often a first professional experience and we know that staff will be with us anywhere from three months to three years. To make this cyclical contract reality a strength, we use this as an opportunity for mentorship and communication among staff—from the three-person hiring committee (which changes according to each position), the one-month orientation (the mentor having been on the hiring committee) through to the Capturing Your Experience departure testimonial. Staff who might not work closely together normally get the chance to work together on creating and taking responsibility for the development of the whole team.

Every person has gifts

When we hire a new person, we know that their energy, presence and skills (known and unknown) will impact and change the dynamics of the team. We will literally “never be the same” again. When the team makes the decision to hire the new person, it is often based on how they might impact the whole team and what we feel we can give to that individual while they are with us. It is, at its essence, a reciprocal exchange of gifts. Criteria for hiring include energy and presence, creativity and vision, as much as skills and experience.

Evolving Leaderships is simply a way of understanding and working with who we are now and who we are becoming through our experiential and reflective processes; it taps into the spontaneous and unexpected and encourages taking personal and organizational risks. It means that everyone is evolving and all of us give and take leadership.

SHARING HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

A pilot project in Edmonton and Calgary, funded by the Muttart Foundation, has proven that sharing HR services can significantly benefit small and medium-sized voluntary organizations.

Over the last decade, large public service organizations and private companies have explored the idea of shared services in human resources and accounting. Typically they have combined or consolidated these services in one location.

For non-profits, the question is not one of consolidation but one of access. Hiring an HR consultant can be expensive and time-consuming, particularly for a small or medium-sized voluntary organization.

“HR issues have been front and centre in the voluntary sector for a number of years,” says Eldon Emerson, Manager of the Human Resources Cluster Project in Edmonton. “Agencies have been struggling with their ability to attract and retain the right people.”

In 2002, the Muttart Foundation began testing the shared services approach. The first pilot project provided HR advisory, consulting and support services, through Mr. Emerson, to six social service agencies in Edmonton. A year later, a similar project began in Calgary.

In Edmonton, the six agencies forming the HR ‘cluster’ vary widely in size, and in the type of services they offer. They include: ABC Head Start (early childhood education), Boyle Street Community Services Co-op, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton, HIV Network, KARA Family Support Centre and Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre. Together, they employ about 240 full-time staff and 77 part-time staff.

For the last four years, Mr. Emerson has been their ‘HR professional’. The cluster, which is self-managed recruited and hired him, and assigns him work. The Muttart Foundation is responsible for his salary. Although the Foundation knows the general nature of his work, and asks for the cluster’s assessment of that work, it does not know the details.



At the first meeting, the cluster identified four specific areas where they needed help including salary and benefits administration; policy and procedure development; performance review issues and recruitment (particularly permissible screens and questions and appropriate job descriptions).

Explains Mr. Emerson: “The agencies decide their priorities, and I scope out the project, suggest who will do what, provide rough timelines and provide the services. Essentially, I’m an HR department at the end of a phone, able to provide them with resources or point them in the right direction.”

But Mr. Emerson does not just provide HR services. The core of the project is the development of an in-house HR capacity so that organizations can deal more effectively with HR issues in the future.

“I don’t operate like a typical consultant—here are five recommendations and my invoice,” says Mr. Emerson. “Because this is a capacity-building project, as I do the project I want to transfer some residual capacity to the organization either using existing mechanisms in the organization or setting up a task force, so when the project is over they keep the learning, the skills and the

systems.” He adds: “Each agency uses me very differently. Some call me when they’re in hot water and I bail them out. I’ll show them what they could have done to prevent this so it is still a learning experience.”

In one organization, Mr. Emerson helped redesign the performance management system. “We set up an internal task force composed of staff, did workshops about what performance management is, why

organizations need it and what are the different types of models and approaches. Then, as a group they designed a system, tested it, trained managers and supervisors and implemented it. I’m still around to help troubleshoot but they understand enough about performance management to fix it themselves. They can tweak it and refine it over time.”

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Mr. Emerson says this is one of the reasons the pilots have been so successful. “The Executive Directors really got involved and invested some time,” he adds. “They recognize that, by definition, they are the organization’s chief HR officer.”

A mid-term evaluation showed that participants are “getting far more out of the project than they anticipated. They’re getting things done that they always wanted to, in a timely manner and in a way that they can use the information.”

Both the Edmonton and Calgary projects will end in August 2006. Mr. Emerson says the Muttart Foundation wants to share the results of these projects across the voluntary sector. “We’ve proven the model works and it is very robust.”

He adds: “The biggest challenge is understanding these organizations and their cultures well enough to design the best solution for them. It’s really getting away from canned approaches, keeping the integrity of a good HR system but designing a new one so that it makes sense for these agencies, so they can work with it and adapt it. It’s easy to give everyone a Cadillac, but if they can’t afford it you need to design a Kia.”

The Muttart Foundation is a private foundation which supports charities in Canada, primarily in Alberta and Saskatchewan. They support social service programs, particularly those related to children and youth. The Foundation has also been active in increasing the capacity of the charitable sector generally.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS: FROM SUCCESS TO SIGNIFICANCE

“When we joined the HR Cluster,” explains Liz O’Neill, Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton, “we wanted to find out how to increase the number of children

we support. There are 39,000 kids ‘at risk’ in our region and we were only serving 1,000. Mr. Emerson helped us do a complete organizational review. We looked at what staff were doing versus what role we thought they should be playing. We back-mapped every activity, every piece of paper, every function, and we changed everybody’s role.”

“Today, we’re serving 2,200 children and our staff report greater job satisfaction,” says Ms. O’Neill. “The new systems (structure, salaries, processes) we’ve put in place will

allow us to continue to double the number of children we serve until 2010. We still have the same number of staff in fund development but now they’re raising \$500,000 more. We still have the same number of staff in volunteer recruitment, but they’re bringing in 1200 more volunteers.”

This new model is being replicated in other Big Brothers Big Sisters offices across the country.

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