

Case Study: Active Ageing Today (AAT)

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Background

Active Aging Today (AAT) is an organisation which has been around for over forty years. It started as a group of volunteers who stood up for the rights of the aging (people 65+ years old). Over time the organisation has been able to secure funding via grants and has grown to a multimillion dollar non-for-profit organisation with over 45 paid staff.

Organisational Structure and Workforce Composition

The organisational structure consists of members (mainly other not-for-profits and those interested in people who live with disabilities), a board (all volunteers, some of whom have been with the organisation since its inception) and a CEO who has been with the organisation for over twenty years. A number of departments, consisting of 4 to 25 staff each, have been developed around currently funded projects. The departments all have a Team Leader who is the first point of call for the ground staff in their team.

Another way to understand how workers are organised is by considering whether they are office or field-based workers. The majority of the field workers have a lot of direct experience with aging, mainly through exposure to caring for a family member with an aging-related disease or disability. These field workers assist some 500 people, clients who are then classified for effective service provision (and for funding purposes) according to their particular aging related disease or disability, e.g. vision impaired, mobility issues (such as being wheelchair bound) or hearing impaired.

The scenario

Due to the high stress and work levels of both the administration department and the CEO, it was decided that the organisation hire an Administration Manager. Alex was selected - he knows aging well, as his Father passed away from dementia (Alex was one of his carers) and his Mum is in a nursing home with mobility issues and diabetes, and he has several years of managerial experience. He looked forward to the new challenge of working for an organisation that supports what he believes in – aging with dignity.

Upon arrival, Alex was very casually inducted by a staff member from a different department. He does not get formally trained - no one has time to do this. Expectations about the role aren't well explained. It is a new position within the administration section of the organisation - which has had historically a number of challenges with work flow, communication and keeping records – but Alex is told he can take the role where he sees fit and gets going!

After several weeks on the job, Alex finds that there are few organisational systems in place (like backing up data, centralisation of information, understanding of administrative jobs and avoidance of duplication). The organisation still writes cheques and deals in cash accounting and bookkeeping. The software systems are out of date or not properly used. Alex sets to work and creates an ambitious plan to upgrade software systems, to centralise organisational information and train his administrative employees in the changes that will lead the organisation into a more streamlined and less stressful existence.

Today, several months into the job, we find Alex frustrated and disillusioned - he has raised awareness of the changes required to run the organisation more effectively but his staff are very reluctant to change. People keep guarding their own work and protecting knowledge of how they do their role - no one understands how to do anyone else's role.

Higher management, consisting of the CEO and some of the Board members, are very encouraging and want the change to occur but then load a lot of very simple data entry tasks onto the new Administration Manager. When Alex wants to delegate this to his team, he finds out that their skill level is very much below acceptable. Added to this, is a resistance to change, particularly if it involves using new technologies, not only in his team but within the organisation as a whole. Concepts like cloud computing and online banking are met with great scepticism. The organisation has historically never fired anyone and has a large group of workers who have been with the organisation for many years.

Alex is at his wits end but he thinks he knows what and how to implement positive change in the organisation - he is drowning in work and looks incompetent. As the organisation does have some funds to spare, he has decided to hire a consultant to help him to interpret the situation and provide recommendations on how to proceed.

People profiles of key employees

Senior Management

CEO – Sally, she has a very demanding and busy job dividing time between securing funding, staff issues, social events and future planning. She normally arrives late at work and is off sick at least one day each fortnight. She sends Alex weekly lists of things that need to be done they are either too extensive to complete in a week or she forgets all about it. Although frustrated by the organisation and its staff she has been with the organisation for a long time and she seems to just accept the frustrations of workers and the board. Even if this means she is reprimanded by the president every second week.

President – Gerard, who has been given early retirement from a higher management position in industry, is a very passionate volunteer President. He calls the office most days up to five times to check up on things or give a to-do list (of simple administration tasks) to Alex.

Alex's Staff

Finance worker – Robert, this staff member does not talk (a lot) and finds it very hard to show how and what the processes are in his job. When asking for a clear explanation of finances, Robert finds it really hard to give; clear, precise answers and sometimes the (financial answers) change from day to day. In his defence both the CEO and Chair place a lot of pressure on him.

Administration Assistant – Sarah, she is friendly hard working and willing to do anything. She can cope with the level of negativity within the work place and seems to just roll with whatever is happening on the day.

Administrator – Julia, has been with the organisation for years. It is very hard for Alex to decipher what she is doing. It becomes clear after a while that she has a very limited skill set in terms of email, database recording and basic computing skills. She also gets very emotional and a significant amount of Alex's time is spent on coaching her mental state or her skill set, without any great improvement.

Field workers

Are frustrated and although they love their time with the clients (the aging) they feel unheard and uncared for by senior management (especially administration).

Other Managers and Team leaders

They think administration is incompetent (and are not afraid to voice this opinion) and they believe that administration does very little “real” work. When there are suggestions by administration they normally receive this with hostility or scepticism. These staff often secretly worked on their own administration processes (creating policies or forms) without informing administration. The result is that information is duplicated, there are multiple versions and nothing is centralised.

ESSAY CONTEXT AND QUESTION:

You have been hired by Alex, as his consultant. As you are studying business at university, Alex is very keen for you to identify and explain AAT's management challenges by identifying key concepts from your MGMT110 Introduction to Management lectures and by using academic resources – such as the textbook and journal articles - to justify your response.

Your first task is to write an essay answering the question: **What are the challenges facing AAT and how should the Administrative Manager resolve these using key management concepts?**