

DISCUSSION PAPER: CONSIDERING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SHINE VOLUNTEER NETWORK

Introduction

In 2003, SHINE undertook a consultation exercise to confirm that SHINE was fulfilling the needs of its membership and a broad strategic direction was identified for the organisation. The results of this consultation confirmed not only that SHINE should continue to provide the services that were already available to members, but that additional issues, such as mentoring and marketing should be considered. This creates an additional demand for volunteers and leaders within SHINE.

SHINE operates within a changing health information environment where increasing demands are being made on librarians, particularly those working in the NHS – who make up the majority of the SHINE membership. In addition there is competition from new and established organisations seeking to use the skills of the health librarian workforce and SHINE faces competition from these groups in seeking volunteers.

This paper considers the issues facing SHINE in relation to volunteering and leadership. The paper is intended to stimulate discussion amongst the committee and potentially the membership.

It should be noted that this paper represents the perspective of the author and not that of the network or its serving officers.

Aims of this Project

The primary aim of the project was to identify potential problems in the availability of volunteers and leaders to take forward the work of SHINE and to identify ways in which SHINE can make it easier for members to volunteer to participate in and lead working groups where problems were identified.

Methodology

The issues around the recruitment of volunteers and leaders in SHINE were assessed using the Soft Systems Methodology, with information from a questionnaire of SHINE members informing the information gathering stage of the project.

Soft systems methodology takes an holistic view of the problem situation and seeks to provide solutions that take into account environmental issues and personal perspectives as well as SHINE's own needs.

SHINE members were asked to fill in an on-line questionnaire which sought to identify the current and potentially future issues around the availability of volunteers and the membership's interest in taking an active part in the organisation. The responses to the questionnaire were considered as part of the analysis of the problem situation. It should be noted that the questionnaire results will be positively biased since there will be a selection bias towards those who have a more active interest in the network. This means that issues around willingness to participate is likely to be higher among this group than amongst non-respondents. It is interesting to note that 65% of respondents were exclusively NHS librarians; this is higher than the percentage of SHINE members who are NHS librarians (51%).

Key Issues

The analysis highlighted three key issues:

- The need to identify new volunteers;
- The need to identify new leaders to lead working groups;
- The need to ensure that knowledge is not lost from the organisation when members step down from their role on groups or on the committee.

The need to identify new volunteers

Over the last few years the healthcare information environment has changed substantially, particularly in the NHS, creating greater demands on librarians and meaning that they are less able to contribute volunteer time to SHINE. In addition there are competing organisations seeking to use this volunteer workforce. SHINE may need to consider taking a more formal approach to the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

The questionnaire distributed to SHINE members identified a willingness amongst volunteers to participate in the network, although the majority of these individuals identified reasons why they were unable to do so. The majority of responses stated that they were unable to participate because they were too busy at work/home with a significantly smaller percentage stating that they either had no cover to attend meetings or that they lived and worked too far away to participate.

Respondents valued the Union List and the community/networking aspects of SHINE most highly, indicating that groups working in these areas will find it easier to recruit volunteers than other groups might. Very few respondents identified anything they valued least about the network, but of those few who did nearly 50% cited Interim, meaning recruitment to this function could be challenging.

The need to identify new leaders

Recent years have seen greater demands placed on those librarians who already participate heavily in SHINE. This has led to a high turnover of lead roles within the organisation. The questionnaire distributed to members identified only one individual currently not leading a group who wished to do so – out of 54 responses. The demand for leaders is lower than the demand for volunteers; however, it is the group leaders who play a vital role in ensuring that the services SHINE provides are fulfilled.

With a number of current group leaders wishing to step down in the near future, we urgently need to recruit new leaders to participate in the organisation.

The need to ensure that knowledge is not lost from the organisation when members step down from their role on groups or on the committee.

We need to ensure that valuable knowledge is not lost as a result of this high turnover of leaders in SHINE. This is particularly important in the case of the CPD group- who have implicit knowledge not only of venues and speakers, but also about which training sessions work best within the organisation – the Union List team, who provide a highly specialist resource, the Interim editorial group and the web-site editorial group. Knowledge associated with key roles such as that of Treasurer, Membership Secretary and administration of the ILL's scheme also needs to be retained in a way which makes it easy for new incumbents of that post to take on these roles.

Evidence Base

Key to identifying how to recruit and retain volunteers is understanding why people volunteer. Research into volunteering has shown that people volunteer to:

- Satisfy personal goals;
- Connect with social networks;
- Be part of an effective service/organisation.

The last issue was the most important factor for volunteers in research undertaken by Martinez and McMillan (2004)¹ who were likely to stand down from a volunteer position when they felt they were not achieving anything useful.

People did not volunteer because:

- They felt they lacked the capacity;
- They lacked motivation;
- They had not been asked.

Potential Solutions and Options

Three systems were identified by the analysis to address these three key issues. Components to those systems were included and assessed against current practice in the organisation to identify areas where SHINE may wish to take action to implement these systems. The following tables show this comparison and resulting actions.

¹ Martinez, T. and McMullin, S. (2004) factors affective decisions to volunteer in nongovernmental organisations. *Environment and Behaviour*; 36(1): 112-126

System 1: A system to encourage SHINE members to actively participate in the running of the organisation.

Conceptual Model	Real World Situation	Comment	Action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify where volunteers are needed most. 	Groups currently identify for themselves when volunteers are needed.	This only works where the groups themselves are functional. A more formalised process might be welcome.	Potentially. This could benefit from being formalised.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market these specific groups/volunteer roles 	There is no clear idea what skills and roles each group needs and has at present. Much of the knowledge in this area is implicit and it is assumed that everyone shares the same perspectives.	This provides an opportunity for the organisation to consider what it needs to undertake each core role as well as to market the roles of the groups.	Yes. This needs to be made clearer to make participation more appealing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify/ask individuals to volunteer 	This has been done effectively in the past.	This has been an effective recruitment technique in the past. This would allow the Committee to address the NHS bias in volunteering.	Yes. Consideration should be given to this and a clear position on asking individuals to participate should be identified.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request volunteers at the AGM 	This is the current recruitment method.	This only works well when the group is active and functional.	No. This is current practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow people to volunteer on-line 	This is not enabled, although contact addresses for each working group are available on the web-site.	This would provide opportunities for those who are not available at the AGM to volunteer.	Yes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training for volunteers where needed. 	This is done by some groups and not others.	This was very successful for the web-site group when they offered web-design training for all new members. However, it wouldn't be applicable for all of the groups or roles. This could be costly.	Yes. Identify groups where this would be useful, also identify costs of training.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify volunteers on the SHINE web-site. 	Currently only working group leads are identified on the SHINE web-site.	The working group participants are acknowledged for their input at the AGM, but not otherwise throughout the year. This could enhance the social capital aspect of volunteering.	Yes, this is a low cost option and can do no harm. Individuals will need to consent to having this information made public.

System 2: A system to encourage SHINE members to become leaders within the organisation.

Conceptual Model	Real World Situation	Comment	Action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify where leaders are needed most. 	Leaders are currently identified when a person steps down from the Committee.	The nature of volunteer work means that leaders are difficult to replace unless the person is willing to step down. It is not unusual for a non-functioning group to cease providing the service they are set up to provide of their own accord, giving an opportunity to replace or revisit the purpose of that function.	No. The current system is sufficient.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market these specific leadership roles 	Currently, recruitment to chair working groups is almost exclusively by invitation or by election within the group, the wider network is not asked if anyone would like to volunteer.	The current system has worked well in the past, but seems to be less so now.	Yes. Members should be given an opportunity to lead a group when an opportunity arises.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify/ask individuals to lead working groups 	This is current practice.	This has been an effective recruitment technique in the past, but it does not allow new volunteers to take on leadership roles unless they are already known to the committee.	Yes. However, this practice does not allow all members an opportunity to undertake leadership roles and should be used as a last resort rather than standard practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training for leaders. 	This is not currently provided for leads within SHINE.	The questionnaire asked people if they felt they would need leadership training to lead a working group and many said that they would. This would be a high cost option if a commercial training course was used.	Yes. Identify costs of training and undertake a cost benefit analysis.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify leaders on the SHINE web-site. 	Currently working group leads are identified on the SHINE web-site.	This is effective, not only for giving leaders the acknowledgement they deserve, but also because it provides a contact name for their group.	No. This is current practice.

It should be noted that non-functioning groups are not always traceable to a lack of leadership, the changing focus and circumstances of the network, of the function and of the individuals participating in that group also affect their productivity and effectiveness. However leadership is a key issue in adapting to and compensating for these changes and it should be a leaders' role to identify when problems occur and to ensure that they are dealt with appropriately.

System 3: A system to retain knowledge about the running of SHINE.

Conceptual Model	Real World Situation	Comment	Action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a role and remit for each working group. 	All groups have a role and remit, although some of these are now out of date.	Old remits could benefit from being revisited. Otherwise, this system is working well.	No. This system is in place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have procedures for each working group/ role. 	Some roles have procedures, but many don't.	This idea does not seem to be popular with the group leaders, although some have taken it up.	Yes. Agree whether there is a need to institute procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store and maintain relevant information from each working group. 	Meeting agendas and minutes are kept on the SHINE web-site, but other information that it may be useful to maintain is not.	Better knowledge management could be beneficial to the network, the web-site group are an excellent example of how this can be achieved.	Yes. Consider the benefit of knowledge management to the network.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System of sharing knowledge within working groups (mentoring/shadowing) 	Some groups do this well, sharing roles and actively sharing knowledge, but others do not. A mentoring network has been discussed several times, and will be a requirement for professional registration in the near future.	SHINE is good at informally developing individuals, but there is no formal network for doing so. This informality may be appealing to members, but less so to the organisations that employ them.	Yes. Consider the benefits and disadvantages of setting up a formal knowledge management system.

The issue of retaining knowledge is more important in some areas than in others, for example in the CPD group, which has had only three members for some time, all of whom have implicit and essential knowledge about the organisation of training events. In other groups, such as the web-site group, key skills required to participate in the group can be learned through training and from existing documentation and records about the group.

The options for action are therefore:

System 1:

- To implement all or some of the suggested actions proposed by this report;
- To take no action.

System 2:

- To implement all or some of the suggested actions proposed by this report;
- To take no action;
- To consider ceasing to support those functions for which we cannot identify a leader to take on the work.

System 3:

- To implement all or some of the suggested actions proposed by this report;
- To take no action.

Conclusion

After undertaking a systemic analysis of the issues relating to the sustainability of volunteering in SHINE, I believe that implementing some or all of the actions identified in the tables above could help SHINE become more competitive in the market for volunteers and leaders, enabling the organisation to continue to provide and develop the services currently required by the membership. Managing the knowledge within the organisation could also help manage the changing memberships of the working groups more effectively.

I recommend that a full consideration of this paper be considered by the SHINE Committee on behalf of the membership and that the Committee's recommendations be taken to the 2006 AGM for approval.

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SHINE Chair

28th September 2005

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