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Adopting The Process View: A Case Study of Modeling Change In The Not-For-Profit Sector

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study focuses on the operation of an adoption agency in the UK, illustrating the issues involved in a small, not-for-profit organization seeking to respond to the pressures to streamline and automate its routines and procedures. It illustrates the limitations of inadequately planned IT-centered initiatives, and how such strategies can be redeemed by process-oriented methods—specifically those derived from a combined BPR and soft systems approach. It also exemplifies the critical importance of organizational issues and the constraints they impose on effective implementation of IT.

The methods involved demonstrate the strengths and limitations of a business process orientation, and show how BPR can be applied to an organization where professionals, employees and volunteers work together and coordinate their activities.

The overall conclusions to the case point to ways in which the organization's processes can be improved and aligned; placing it in a far better position to take advantage of IT and associated technologies, both within the organization and with regard to its main sources of support and collaboration. As such it is a case study in organizational preparedness for IT rather than a straightforward study of an IT application.

BACKGROUND

NCH was founded in 1869 by Methodist Minister, Thomas Bowman Stephenson, and was known as 'The Children's Home', providing care to orphans and children who needed care and support (Philpot, 1994, p23). The organization currently (mid-2001) provides residential care and various types of community-based services to improve the lives of many children and families suffering from poverty. Also it is influential in Government Social Policies regarding poverty, unemployment, homelessness and children's rights. Over the 130 years of its existence, emphasis on service provision has changed from residential homes and schools to community-based projects throughout the United Kingdom (UK).

The whole organization currently employs approximately 4,000 full and part-time people. There are approximately 436 projects managed by NCH that are geographically dispersed. These projects are regionally based and are accountable to a Regional Office which is overseen by NCH Head Office, based in London. The current strategic aim of NCH is 'to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable children and young people' (NCH Action For Children, 1999).

Adoption NCH Yorkshire (A-NCH-Y) is based in the north east region of England. A-NCH-Y is one of four NCH adoption and fostering projects in England. It is a strategic business unit (SBU) of the overall organization and is accountable to the Regional Office in Harrogate (12 miles away). Its activities are governed by the Adoptions Agencies Regulations legislation. A-NCH-Y consists of four full-time and two part-time social workers, one full-time and one part-time administrative worker, one Project Manager, one Senior Practitioner and four sessional workers. Sessional workers are qualified social workers who are allocated work when the caseload of the established team of social workers is too heavy to take on new assessments. The Project Manager has an overall responsibility for the human and financial resources of the project. The social workers are responsible for recruiting, training and assessing prospective adoptive families, as well as matching and placing children with approved families, and supervising the adoption placements.

The strategic aim of A-NCH-Y is 'to enhance the lives of children needing permanent family placements, by providing a specialized quality adoption service to Local Authorities'. The project currently provides a wide range of services such as:

- Recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adoptive families
- Post-placement support to families and children
- Post-adoption support to families
- Access to records and counselling to adults previously placed for adoption through NCH
- Adoption counselling under Section 51 of the Adoption Agencies Regulation 1983

Overview of the Adoption Process

The adoption process begins with A-NCH-Y marketing its services through information meetings and publicity to the general public and Local Authorities. Further information is sent out in response to inquiries made by interested parties. Prospective families are selected according to basic criteria for adoption, including age, relationship status, health, absence of criminal records. If the criteria are fulfilled, the family is eligible to apply to adopt children. Individuals or families who can offer a secure and stable placement, and who meet the recruitment criteria are eligible to adopt. Families undergo intensive assessment and preparation with a project social worker, and statutory references, including Health, Police, and Social Services, must be obtained. The completed assessment report is presented to the Adoption Panel, where recommendations about the suitability of applicants are made. The Regional Director of Children's Services makes the final decision about approval of the applicants. Profiles of approved families are then circulated to Local Authorities who have children in need of permanent placements. Local Authorities send profiles of children, for whom they are seeking families, to Adoption NCH (covering all four adoption projects), in order to find a suitable match between a child and an approved family. Local Authorities pay an agreed inter-agency fee on behalf of the child for the approved placement offered by A-NCH.

A child placed with a family is monitored for progress and adjustment. If the child and family are progressing well, the family can apply to the Court to gain an Adoption Order, giving them legal rights as parents. After the Adoption Order has been granted, there is no statutory involvement for A-NCH-Y or the Local Authority with the family. The family and child are, however, able to gain post-adoption support at any time. On completion of the adoption process, the completed files are stored in the Adoption Archives at A-NCH South East, for future access and post-adoption counselling.

Legislation and public sector involvement govern the adoption process. The role and responsibility of Local Authorities and voluntary agencies are defined in the Children's Act 1989. The

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