

# Management Style in the Non-Profit Sector in Ireland



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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the style of management in the non-profit sector in Ireland and it explores the extent to which the values of managers translate into the practice of management in Irish voluntary organisations. One of the most obvious manifestations of management practices is the style of management adopted in an organisation. One of the most influential contemporary writers on the subject, John Purcell (Purcell, 1987; Purcell and Grey, 1986), states that management style is 'the existence of a distinctive set of guiding principles, written or otherwise, which set parameters to, and signposts for, management action in the ways employees are treated and particular events handled' (1987: 267).

Using both quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from in-depth interviews, the findings from this study indicate that managers' style is consensual, consultative and inclusive, and they are more people-oriented than task-oriented. Overall the data shows that there is a good 'fit' between managers' description of their management style and their values. The majority of managers described their most important values as universalism, spirituality, benevolence and self-direction, which find resonance with the caring, enabling, people-focused style of management in the non-profit sector in Ireland.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which the values of managers in the non-profit sector translate into the practice of management in Irish voluntary organisations. One of the most obvious manifestations of management practices is the style of management adopted in an organisation. Style has been defined as 'the distinctive manner, pattern or approach of individuals or entities in doing something' (Fowler and Fowler, 1996). One of the most influential contemporary writers on the subject, John Purcell (Purcell, 1987; Purcell and Grey, 1986) states that management style is 'the existence of a distinctive set of guiding principles, written or otherwise, which set parameters to, and signposts for, management action in the ways employees are treated and particular events handled' (1987: 267).

Management style can, according to empirical studies (Park, 1996; Rees and Porter, 2001), be categorised on the basis of four determinants: firstly, how managers make decisions; secondly, how managers handle information; thirdly, how managers build social relations with other individuals in the organisation; and finally, how managers exercise control and motivate others. This study will use these categories to examine and discuss the style of management that respondents in the survey said they used.

In order to explore how managers' values translate into their management style, the question of what style of management is adopted by the respondents will be addressed. Managers' perception of their own style or approach to management, as well as their views on the style of management in the Irish voluntary sector as a whole will be explored. How managers' values impact on their management style will then be examined. Given the crucial role that values play in voluntary organisations, as suggested by the literature (Jeavons, 1992; Salamon et al., 1999), it is suggested that the style of management described by the respondents will be related to the values that they state are important to them.

### **Non-profit sector and the private sector**

In focusing on the non-profit sector, there is a wealth of evidence that suggests that there are enough significant differences between the public and private sectors to merit the non-profit sector worthy

of separate attention. Drucker (1973), a leading management theorist, commented that unlike the commercial sector, market behaviour does not influence the decision making of non-profit organisations. According to Drucker, non-profits' income is derived typically from multiple sources and is not related to performance, but rather to their fund-raising capacity and a budget. Drucker (1990) takes this line of distinction even further in contending that the business of non-profits should be conceived of in terms, neither of making money nor of providing service as an end in itself, but rather of effecting change. The 'product' of a non-profit organisation, according to Drucker, is 'a changed human being' (1990: xiv). Gazell (2000) draws together Drucker's insights regarding the non-profit sector and suggests that there are difficulties inherent in managing non-profit organisations that differentiate them from the private sector. According to Nutt (2005) one of these important differences lies in their different approach to decision-making. In his study on budgeting practices, Nutt concludes that private sector managers place too much reliance on analytics and too little on bargaining, while public sector managers rely too heavily on bargaining and too little on networking.

Following on this theme of the purpose of non-profit organisations, Dabbs (1991) argues that, in the absence of a profit motive, members of a non-profit organisation need to be able to identify with its goals in order for them to feel a sense of personal significance and social acceptance. He suggests that, generally, wealth-creating businesses monitor and control their activities by the three Es – efficiency, effectiveness and economy – with efficiency being the main element. Efficiency is the relationship of inputs to outputs, which usually generates profits. In the non-profit sector, effectiveness is more important, that is, the extent to which objectives are achieved (Dabbs 1991).

This distinction between the goals of a non-profit organisation and a commercial company is reflected in an organisation's primary task according to Dartington (1998). A primary task is defined as the task that the system was created to perform. Dartington (1998) believes that this is the essential difference between the non-profit sector and private sector. In the private sector, the primary task is always linked to making profit, whereas in the non-profit sector, the

primary task relates to the mission of the organisation. A commercial company may change from producing razor blades to after-shave if the move will result in increased profits. A non-profit organisation will not change from providing hostels for the homeless to day care centres for children if its mission is to alleviate homelessness in the elderly.

What is emerging from the above discussion is that the mission of an organisation is the essential difference between the private sector and the public sector. Businesses exist for, and are driven by, the profit motive whereas non-profit organisations exist for the mission itself. O'Neil and Young (1988) suggest that the activities that businesses engage in are 'instrumental' to achieving their overall objective of profit. In contrast, the particular activity the non-profit organisation engages in is 'of primary concern, not subservient to an overriding financial bottom line' (1988: 3-4). This view is echoed in the research findings of Rhodes and Keogan (2005) who found a strong emphasis on mission in relation to strategic objectives.

### METHODOLOGY

Having examined the benefits and limitations of the available tools, it appeared that a combined research approach would be most appropriate. Data was needed from as many organisations and as wide a spectrum as possible to ensure the validity of the findings so this pointed towards a survey. A survey would facilitate the gathering of information from a wide range of organisations. Having decided on a survey, the decision as to whether to utilise a postal survey or telephone survey arose. A postal survey was the obvious choice, as this seemed to be the best way to collect data from as many organisations as possible.

Rather than relying solely on a survey for the data, however, it seemed appropriate to try to get behind the data, to understand the processes at work. A postal questionnaire would not elicit any depth in the responses and it was thought that a greater understanding of the processes at work in management style could only be achieved by talking to managers of voluntary organisations. The decision was taken to combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to give richness to the data and to

increase confidence in the findings. A questionnaire survey was decided upon, followed up by in-depth interviews with a selection of the respondents from the survey.

Prior to designing a survey some definitional and methodological issues remained to be resolved, however. At the time of writing, no single, comprehensive representative database of non-profit organisations, or of the voluntary and community sector in Ireland, existed. The sample used for this study, therefore, was a list, provided by the former Eastern Health Board, of all organisations funded under Section 65 of the Health Act 1953 and Section 10 of the Child Care Act 1991 in the Eastern Health Board region. This database had the advantage of providing a cross-section of organisations, from the larger, well-known ones to small, local agencies. It included urban, rural, local and national organisations. There are also a wide variety of organisations represented in the sampling frame as they were funded under a range of programmes, such as Children and Families, Community Services, Disability Services and Health Promotion. A significant amount of work was necessary to update this list and to locate some of the more obscure organisations.

A total of 314 questionnaires were mailed out. Of these, 23 were not valid for reasons such as that the organisations had ceased to be in existence or could not be traced. This gave a valid sample of 291 (314 minus 23). The objective was to achieve as high a response rate as possible to increase the validity of the findings. Babbie (1995) indicates that an adequate return rate on postal questionnaires is in the order of 50 per cent, while Bailey (1982) acknowledges that many studies only achieve 10–20 per cent response rates.

Twenty people were chosen to participate in the in-depth interviews. The decision on whom to select was guided by the findings that emerged from the quantitative data.

### MANAGEMENT STYLE

Some preliminary data is available on the respondents' view of their style of management from the quantitative survey, which is amplified with data from the in-depth interviews. In the in-depth interviews, respondents were asked a number of more probing questions. They

were asked to describe their style of management and if they varied their style according to circumstances or the needs of staff. They were also asked for their view on the style of management in the voluntary sector as a whole and if they viewed the management style in the voluntary sector as more feminine or masculine in orientation. We shall firstly consider what the quantitative data tells us about the respondents' view of their management style and then we will further explore their perceptions using the qualitative data.

Managers, in responding to the survey, tended to regard their own management style as consultative and participative.

**Table 7.1: The Degree to which the Organisation Consults with the Consumer**

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Often consults with consumer	145	70.3
Occasionally consults	45	21.8
Rarely consults with consumer	16	7.9
<b>Total</b>	206	100.0

**Table 7.2: Frequency of Consultations with Staff over Decisions that Affect Them**

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Often	193	93.7
Sometimes	13	6.3
Never	0	0
<b>Total</b>	206	100.0

The data in Tables 7.1 and 7.2 indicate that the managers in the study said that the norm was for consultation to occur, although, interestingly, managers said that they consulted more often with staff (94 per cent) than with consumers (70 per cent). Furthermore, ninety-two per cent of managers said that their organisation was democratic, a figure borne out by the high numbers who stated that they involved staff in decisions (93.7 per cent) that affected them. A total of 96 per cent of managers described their organisation as

participative. In other words, managers were indicating their support for a consultative/participative approach to management.

So far, the quantitative data suggest that the respondents considered that they had a democratic, inclusive management style. To achieve a more in-depth understanding of this approach to management, participants were asked about their style of management during the fieldwork interviews. There was a great deal of similarity and overlap in the style described by the respondents. Some of the words that respondents used to describe their style were 'facilitative', 'enabling', 'consensual', 'consultative' and 'open'. One respondent who had been chief executive of a large, Dublin-based organisation for 25 years gave this view on his management style: 'I would like to think of it as enabling – it's not top-down, and it's not directive. It's by consultation, by consensus' (VO 10).

Frequent reference was made by managers in interview to this type of consensual approach to decision-making. This can be seen in the following quote from an interview with a manager of a small, national association: 'An inclusive style is used most often. We look at the problem; we see what needs to be addressed. Then by and large we come to a consensus about the solutions. "We" means at a staff team meeting, manager and staff together' (VO 5).

Another chief executive of a large, multi-centred organisation also said: 'I am inclusive and like listening to people so you get ideas all the time. I work with my door open and I think I am fairly accessible to people as well' (VO 2). This idea of an open door, accessible approach to management was alluded to often in interview and was associated with a hands-on approach. The following manager of a medium-sized, national organisation suggested: 'I would like to think I have an open door...I think I am approachable on a daily basis to staff and I try to involve myself in a very hands-on approach' (VO 4). A hands-on style of management was stated to be the norm as reported by managers. 'I lead by example' (VO 9), said one manager, while another stated that he did not ask staff to do anything he would not do himself.

Another respondent who had managed a small, community-based service for 25 years gave the following description of her management style: 'I talk to my staff every morning to see if they are happy and then I delegate what we'll do today. I would involve staff in most decisions' (VO 14).

As can be seen, therefore, managers in interview said that they had an open, consensual, inclusive style of management. This is explored further in the next section.

### A PEOPLE-ORIENTED STYLE

Many theorists conceive of the various management styles as lying on a continuum. While the terminology differs, it can be suggested that, in essence, at one end of a continuum are people who are very task oriented and concerned with output. Task-oriented people are those with strong concerns about a group's goals and how to achieve them (Bass, 1981). These people are also referred to as production-oriented, goal achieving, work-facilitative or goal emphasising (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Bass, 1981). At the other end of the continuum are people who tend to pay more attention to process than output and place a higher priority on people than tasks. Managers who have strong concerns about their group members' relations with them and each other, and express these concerns by creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere, are said to be people-oriented (Katz et al., 1950; Beatty, 1988).

The quantitative data showed that 97 per cent of managers said that their organisations were either caring or very caring. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (90 per cent) said that there was a friendly atmosphere in their workplace. It is not unexpected that the majority of respondents would view their organisations as friendly and caring, but managers also seemed to be placing an emphasis, themselves, on people-centredness. Perhaps also as a consequence of this stated strong person-orientation, the majority of managers (67 per cent) perceived that there were high levels of staff morale in their organisations (see Table 7.3). It could be suggested that managers themselves were transferring their own view of people-orientation onto their organisation and wanted to view their organisation thus.

**Table 7.3: How High is Morale in your Organisation?**

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
High staff morale	139	67.5
Average staff morale	49	23.8
Low staff morale	18	8.7
<b>Total</b>	206	100.0



In addition, managers said that they placed a high value on their interactions with staff and that this is important to them (see Tables 7.4 and 7.5). Almost all the managers said that they held face-to-face interaction with staff frequently and most of them (96 per cent) said that they met regularly with all their staff, while 91 per cent said that they encouraged teamwork.

**Table 7.4: Communications with Staff Face-to-Face**

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Often	199	96.6
Sometimes	6	2.9
Rarely	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>	206	100.0

**Table 7.5: I Meet Regularly with All Staff**

	Frequency (N)	Per cent
Yes	197	95.6
No	9	4.4
<b>Total</b>	206	100.0

The quantitative and qualitative data in this study revealed a clear pattern, in that the respondents said that they displayed a primary orientation towards people rather than toward processes or outputs. As one respondent said: 'There is a lot of give and take. Human beings will always take priority with me over anything else because they are the biggest resource we have and they are tremendous' (V0 5). Another manager believed that her most important job was to support the staff as the following quote illustrates: 'My main function is to make sure that staff are stable and motivated' (VO6).

The stated people orientation of managers in interview can be seen in the following quote from a respondent who was discussing how staff are treated differently in the commercial sector:

The difference is the way you view staff. You're not looking towards staff as having to produce a contribution toward bottom line profit. It's a totally different thing altogether – what you are

looking for is someone who will fit into a family of an organisation, that will share in the general ethos of the organisation.

(VO 10)

The analogy of a family that the above manager used to describe his organisation brings to mind Handy's (1997) view. He suggested that perspectives of organisations are changing to embrace a concept of 'community'. In these communities, employees are thought of as citizens rather than human resources. It could be argued that, in voluntary organisations, there is a good fit between these concepts of family values, organisations as communities and employees as citizens. The above manager said that she consciously sought staff that already possessed the appropriate values, in order for them to fit into the 'family' of her organisation, a view echoed by most other respondents. Another respondent said that, in her organisation, the induction period was used to socialise staff into the ethos and values of the organisation.

These views indicate an awareness in managers of the importance of values permeating the whole organisation. A further indication of the respondents' stated primary orientation toward people emerged during the interviews. Managers said that they were aware of staff needs. A manager of two community-based projects gave this example:

I got a phone call from a member of staff today who is not well. I asked another staff member how long we could pay that person for. Realistically, we will pay that person for as long as we can without telling the funder because that person has been very good since they came here.

(VO 7)

Another newly appointed manager of a small, volunteer organisation suggested that she changed her style according to the needs of her staff. She said: 'Different people need different styles. Some people need direction more than I would like to give them. Sometimes you have to be easygoing with people, coax them, pat them on the back, other people you have to be more stern' (VO 18). Another manager said that the needs of staff took priority:

If a staff has health needs or child-care needs, or anything like that, difficulties with children, that's a huge priority and that is much more important than them being at work here anxious...there would be evidence here at times when the staff are more important than clock-watching and the staff would respond to that in a tremendous way by staying late another time.  
(VO 5)

This paper set out to explore managers' perception of their management style and a picture is now emerging from the data. Respondents view their style as inclusive, consensual, participative and people-centred. Besides being asked about their own management style, in interview managers were also asked for their views on the style of management within the wider voluntary sector and the analysis of their responses are contained in the next section.

#### MANAGEMENT STYLE IN THE WIDER VOLUNTARY SECTOR

In the in-depth interviews managers were asked for their views on the style of management in the wider voluntary sector. A number of respondents were unable to comment on what sort of management style prevailed in the wider voluntary sector as they said that they had little involvement with agencies other than their own. Of those who were able to offer a view, there was considerable variation in the responses. Several respondents related management style to the size of the organisation, suggesting that the larger organisations were more professional in their approach. Two other respondents said that they had witnessed a management style imported from the private sector that had failed. The following is the comment from one of them: 'I've seen people put in rigid management style that may prevail in the private sector and they have failed miserably' (VO 7).

In terms of what differentiated the style of management in the voluntary sector, two respondents referred to the slower pace and the emphasis on staff: 'There's a higher than usual focus on the staff in terms of how they feel, how they cope' (VO 9). Other words that the respondents used to describe the style of management that prevailed were democratic, consultative and consensual. While the

managers were less expansive in discussing management style in the wider voluntary sector than when they were talking about their own style, nevertheless, the responses given were similar to the responses regarding their own personal style.

The next section goes onto explore another aspect of management style in the voluntary sector as a whole. Given that the survey had revealed that there were more female than males in the sample, the author was interested to discover if managers thought that there was a gender element associated with the management style described by the respondents. This is the topic explored in the next section.

### MANAGEMENT STYLE AND GENDER

In interview managers were asked whether they would describe the management style within the voluntary sector as more masculine, that is competitive, or more feminine, that is caring and co-operative, in orientation. The Economist Intelligence Unit with Korn/Ferry International (1996) study described those with a masculine management style as having the following five traits: risk-taking, self-confident, competitive, decisive and direct. Those with a feminine management style were said to be empathetic, supportive, nurturing, relationship-building, power sharing and information sharing.

The figures from the survey show that males were in the minority (44.2 per cent,  $N = 91$ ), while females accounted for 56 per cent ( $N = 115$ ) of the sample. As the majority of managers in this study were women, it is pertinent to explore if there was any significance in this in relation to management styles.

The majority of the managers said that, overall, the sector's style of management tended to be more feminine than masculine. The following comment from a male manager of a large national organisation, was typical of the views expressed: 'I'd say more feminine overall but it's such a diverse sector there's probably a mixture of both but more feminine overall' (VO 2). Another female manager compared the management style of the voluntary organisation where she currently worked to the management style of two private sector organisations that she had previously worked in: 'It is more feminine really because it is a caring profession. It's not competi-

tive...the accountancy firm was 100 per cent masculine, and the insurance company was 80 per cent' (VO 18).

Indeed, respondents used the term 'masculine' to typify a stereotypical approach to management that focused on competition, on the bottom line and results. One manager who said that he sat on the board of a semi-state body commented: 'The commercial sector, I would not like to be working there...there is a culture of bravado' (VO 10). None of the men or the women interviewed associated this approach, however, with either males or females. The following manager said that the males she knew in the voluntary sector exhibited a feminine style: 'The people I have dealt with are mostly men but they have that feminine approach' (VO 11).

Both male and female managers used the word 'caring' frequently to illustrate how they believed that the voluntary sector was more feminine in its orientation: 'The people involved are more caring and take more caring approaches' (VO 15). These comments were consistent with the findings from the quantitative data noted earlier in this paper that showed that 97 per cent of managers perceived their organisations to be either caring or very caring.

The description of 'caring' is interesting in itself, as it is a word that feminists would argue that is associated with the female role in society. Worthy of note is that when caring was cross-tabulated with gender, no statistically significant results were found. This means that male managers were just as likely to perceive their organisation as caring as the female managers. This bears out Donoghue's (2001) note of caution about stereotyping both the voluntary sector and women as caring.

Like the myth of 'goodness' that Donnelly-Cox and Jaffro (1999) suggest is identified with the voluntary sector, perhaps there are also commonly held assumptions made about the role of women and caring in voluntary organisations. The findings discussed above demonstrate the value in exploring the complexity of these roles in voluntary sector organisations.

The evidence from the both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the feminine approach to management that respondents described has more to do with the values of the managers in the voluntary sector, rather than their gender. The

following manager expressed the view that a combination of both so-called masculine and feminine traits is needed to manage voluntary organisations:

I see feminine values definitely in...I would hope that managers would have feminine qualities and it is a help. If you are all masculine, the budgets, the money, and the figures, I think they (the management board) are looking for those sort of people, but I think they are also looking for a balance.

(VO 8)

The results of the Economist Intelligence Unit survey (1996) confirmed this view that this dual approach to management is more effective than a singular approach.

One further aspect of the masculine versus feminine style of management discussion merits attention. While the consensus from the managers who were interviewed was that there was a more feminine than masculine style of management practised in voluntary organisations, two respondents related a masculine or feminine management style to the life cycle of an organisation. The view was expressed that as an organisation gets bigger and takes on a closer relationship with the state, it changes from having a feminine management style to a more masculine management style. This is highlighted by the following comment: 'As organisations get bigger, they probably go more toward the masculine mode or competitive and if they are smaller, and more in the beginning stages they are probably more feminine' (VO 8).

Indeed, some respondents suggested that voluntary organisations become more like statutory agencies as they get bigger. Similar views were also noted earlier, when managers were asked about the style of management in the wider voluntary sector. Kramer (1987) has argued that, as voluntary organisations get bigger, they adopt more bureaucratic policies and procedures. Meanwhile, Donnelly-Cox and O'Regan (1998) have suggested that with age, voluntary organisations in Ireland move towards an institutional approach, which is characterised by professionalism, with the majority of funding coming from the state. Furthermore, they argue that the professional, not the organisation, becomes the repository of the

'philanthropic value' when an organisation moves to phase three of its growth (1998: 19).

These comments from several of the respondents support the view in the literature that organisations become more formal and structured as they get bigger. One might, therefore, expect to find a difference in the value structure and a decrease in the importance of caring in the larger, more established organisations. The data did not show any such difference, however.

### COMPETING VALUES

Despite this orientation toward a people style of management that managers reported, in the interviews some respondents referred to a tension between meeting the needs of staff and the organisational goals. This tension was described as the need for a balance between supporting the staff and getting the work done, and the need for balance between democratic decision-making processes and the reality of the responsibility of the chief executive. One manager said that she placed equal value on the needs of her staff and the clients of the organisation as she recognised that 'one needs the other' (VO 9). The tensions she faced, however, were revealed, as she also said that at times she had to sacrifice efficiency in the interests of staff: 'I do like efficiency and that sort of thing but I can't get hung up on planning and efficiency because that is not the priority' (VO 9).

Some managers referred to situations where they typically had to confront situations where competing values were at play. They may have to choose between behaving efficiently and compassionately, between the needs of their staff and the clients they serve. According to Rokeach (1973) a person's hierarchy of values determines the choice that is made. In the example above, the choice was made to give priority to staff needs.

Another manager acknowledged that at times, she experienced a tension with the general culture of tolerance prevailing in her organisation, which she felt could be also be interpreted as 'lax administration' (VO 3). She suggested that her role was to keep a balance between the competing values of efficiency and tolerance by keeping the organisation running smoothly within the 'easy-going atmosphere' that the volunteers created.

This need for balance has been noted by Jeavons (1992). In the long run he believes the effectiveness of the organisation will be undermined if those in charge are not seen to honour a range of basic human, social and professional values in the way that it operates. When discussing management style in interview, many respondents said that they would change their style from a democratic, participative approach to a more directive one if the situation warranted it. For example, the manager quoted below said she changed her style if tasks needed to be completed: 'I can be plain straightforward directive at times and authoritarian at times but not too often. Inclusive is the style used most often' (VO 5).

Despite their consultative, democratic approach to management, many managers said that they were aware that at the end of the day they had to be responsible for decisions taken, a view voiced by the following manager:

It's a way of them knowing that you are the boss and if you need to, you are the boss. They have that guidance, they're not free-floating. The other side of that is you see them as people and you are aware of their difficulties and problems...Positives should be praised as that is how you get the best out of people.

(VO 11)

Overall, it appears from the data that while the people-centred approach typified management style, at times this caused tensions in perceived levels of efficiency and, at times, the need to achieve organisational goals resulted in a shift toward a more task-centred approach.

### CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to explore how the values of managers translate into the practice of management in voluntary organisations. Having examined management style, the conclusion was drawn that that managers perceived it as consensual, consultative, open, and inclusive. Furthermore, the data indicated that the respondents were more 'people-oriented' than 'task-oriented'. When respondents were asked about the overall style of management in



the voluntary sector, the language used was similar to that used by the respondents to describe their personal management style.

Furthermore, respondents regarded the style of management in the Irish voluntary sector as more feminine than masculine in orientation, in that the feminine style was related to a more caring approach. The data from this study demonstrated that, although there were more women than men in management positions in voluntary organisations, the values and management style were not differentiated by gender. No significant differences were apparent in the management style of men and women and no significant differences were found in the values of male and female managers.

There was some evidence, however, to suggest that at times there was a tension between respondents' need to be efficient and achieve organisational goals, and the people-centred approach. It is acknowledged that the findings in this study are based only on the perception of managers. Further research to include the views of other stakeholders, such as staff and management committee, would advance scholarship in this area.

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