

Just what is it with charity operations?

At a level all operations are the same. You take a bunch of inputs, do some magic and turn those inputs into products or services that people want / need.

There are special challenges though for Charity operations and the services they provide.

It starts with the prediction of demand, the uncertainty of funds and incoming resources (be they materials or people, for example volunteers) and progresses through understanding the needs of service users / beneficiaries (as opposed to customers) and the processes that make the transforming magic happen. There are additional nuances around managing charity operations. A good example is how to get a team of diverse and disparate volunteers to conform to prescribed tasks and activities. They are always brilliantly motivated, but they don't always do it the one best way it needs to be done.

Blimey!

If that wasn't enough, Johnson & Clark in their brilliant book 'Service Operations Management' identify a whole stack of extra challenges.

These include:

- Managing the needs of multiple and diverse customers in real time
- Ensuring the right data is available in the right place at the right time to inform decisions
- Understanding the service offer their charity is looking to make and managing the outcomes and experience to meet it
- Co-ordinating different parts of the charity at multiple levels from strategy through to delivery
- Continually improving and encouraging innovation

That's why I believe the Operations job is one of the most challenging yet rewarding roles in any charity, yet I wonder why it doesn't seem to get the recognition and support it should.

Too busy doing? Of course. No time for learning? Yep. Not knowing operations is a teachable role. Probably.

The thing is the demands on charities to

1. do more with less
2. keep overheads to a minimum
3. maximise the proportion of donations making their way to front line deliverables
4. corral of all its resources to deliver great outcomes

sits squarely with its operations function. That may be one or two people or it might be a whole department depending on the size of the charity.

Helping operations continually perform better is often overlooked, not prioritised or maybe not appreciated, but it really matters. It's critical to the sustainable future of every charity.

We're happy to explain in more detail, we'll present to your Trustee Board... we'll even demonstrate on site what we mean.

Let's just make sure your operations aren't overlooked.