

21ST CENTURY STEWARDS

The rise of operational management in churches and the need for new vocations

*By Tim Thorlby
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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a rapid growth in the number of local churches in London employing Operations Directors and Managers. However, there has been little published research or reflection on this new trend and its impacts. This short report set out the findings of new research into this area and is presented as a contribution to wider national discussions about the shape of churches and their constituent ministries in the 21st Century.

This research has been designed and delivered independently by the Centre for Theology & Community (CTC) and has been grant funded by The Mercers' Company, the City of London's Premier Livery Company.

RESEARCH METHOD

We have undertaken in-depth face to face interviews with both clergy and operational managers across six different churches in London, including parishes in three different Dioceses – London, Southwark and Chelmsford. The interviews have been complemented with desk and internet research, including a trawl to map operations posts in London, as well as wider conversations.

Our research, as ever, is focused on the more typical local church in London, although we believe that the findings may be of interest to churches regardless of size.

KEY FINDINGS

- We found that the use of professional management skills can provide significant benefits to churches, releasing the time of priests to undertake their core ministries and facilitating the mission and ministry of others by providing a well organised context within which they can serve.
- There are, rightly, questions about how such approaches fit within the governance and culture of a church but most of these seem to be well addressed. In practice, nearly all of the concerns about operational management and its impact on church

structures, governance and culture are dealt with well. As with any professionalisation of roles within a church, there remains the risk of displacing the service of the lay members of a church and so church leaders must be alert to this in particular. Such roles should always be delivered in a way which actively facilitates the various ministries of the congregation rather than attempting to 'do it for them'.

- Operational management fits squarely within the ancient church tradition of 'diakonia', as a service to the church which allows the better management of resources whilst other differently gifted church leaders are released to preach, teach and pastor.
- The active management or stewardship of a church's resources makes an important and positive contribution to the overall life and health of a church community and its ability to serve others. For some people, serving the church through this stewardship of resources is their life's calling and vocation.
- In considering the work of operational managers – and indeed others who serve churches in practical ways – we believe that there is an important vocational issue to address. We believe that the time has come for the stewardship of church resources to be properly and formally recognised by churches as a vocation. The vocation of stewardship includes those serving churches at local or national levels as well as those Christians helping to deliver mission through parachurch organisations. It is time to raise the profile of this important dimension of church life and also to encourage and develop those people called to work in this way. It is time to recognise, invest in and celebrate the significance of this work in both a practical and spiritual sense.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the local church should:

- teach and preach on the **value** of 'stewardship' skills
- create more **stewardship roles** where appropriate and affordable (particularly where this has been overlooked in the past)

We recommend that large well-resourced churches should:

- consider how they could **share** their stewardship skills and experience appropriately with other churches in their area

We recommend that the national church should:

- develop a **formal qualification** to support the recognition of, and training of, stewards who serve the church's mission and ministry, with the qualification to include both high quality practical and theological work. This vocation and training should be open to both clergy and lay people.
- consider the appropriate resourcing of a **national network** for stewards to support the development of this important area of ministry and the sharing of good practice
- include the proper **recognition of stewardship roles** within the training of priests (not expecting them to become stewards but assisting them in recognising the role and knowing how to work with stewards)
- emphasise the importance of **collaborative working and person-management skills** within the training of priests



1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a rapid growth in the number of local churches in London employing Operations Directors and Managers. However, there has been little published research or reflection on this new trend and its impacts. This short report set out the findings of new research into this area and is presented as a contribution to wider national discussions about the shape of churches and their constituent ministries in the 21st Century.

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1.1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The aim of this report is to explore and reflect upon the impact of new approaches to operational management in churches in London. To what extent does operational management enhance the capacity and sustainability of local churches? Are there issues arising in the implementation of such approaches? For example, how does operational management fit with the building of a church community and with pastoral care? The report seeks to explore the current reality and identify any lessons for the church.

This research has developed out of a programme of work funded by the Mercers in east London. They awarded co-ordinated grants to five church plants for ‘multiplying mission in east London’ and various activities have been supported with the funding. Some research has also been included in the programme, so that others might benefit from the experiences of these churches. The first piece of research in the programme was an impact assessment of the work of these churches, published in 2016 as ‘Love, Sweat and Tears’¹. This is the second piece of research.

The Mercers’ grants were partly intended to help those churches to develop greater organisational capacity and sustainability as well as yielding useful learning for other churches further afield. Two of the five churches have used a part of their grants for supporting Operations roles to develop their capacity and sustainability. Our research has taken this as a starting point and includes consideration of the operational management in two of these grant-supported churches, but the study has been expanded to include discussions with a wider mix of churches to allow a fuller and more rounded discussion of the issue.

There is little existing published research on the growth, nature or impact of operational management in churches in the UK, so we hope this report will make a helpful contribution to wider discussions about the shape of ministry and the evolving nature of our churches in the 21st Century.

There is a national network for Church Administrators (UK Church Administrator Network - UCAN) which does include some operations

¹ Thorlby, T (2016) *Love, Sweat and Tears: Church planting in east London*, Centre for Theology & Community

managers and directors amongst its members, although the network covers a much broader remit than this. The Network’s co-ordinator John Truscott regularly publishes practical guidance notes on a range of church administration issues, including one relevant to the current topic – ‘Appointing an Operations Manager’².

1.2 METHODOLOGY

This research has sought to explore how local churches are developing new approaches to operational management and what difference this is making to the churches involved. As ever, our research has focused on the church experience in London, although the reflections may well be relevant further afield.

We have undertaken in-depth face to face interviews with both clergy and operational managers across six different churches in London, including parishes in three different Dioceses – London, Southwark and Chelmsford. The names of most of our interviewees are recorded in the report’s acknowledgements section, although a couple have been withheld at the interviewee’s request to protect confidentiality. The interviews have been complemented with desk and internet research, including a trawl to map operations posts in London, as well as wider conversations.

It is worth noting that the handful of very large churches in London (the ‘mega churches’ with over 2,000 members) have been using operational managers for many years - and with such large organisations, it is not difficult to see why. As these churches are few in number and very different in nature to the vast majority of other churches in London we have not sought to explore the nature of management within them. Our research, as ever, is focused on the more typical local church in London, although we believe that the findings may be of interest to churches regardless of size.

² Article 38: *Appointing an Operations Manager*, 2016, John Truscott – available from www.john-truscott.co.uk

1.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The rest of this report is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the findings of our research and discussions and describes what operational management posts in churches look like in practice and who undertakes those roles. Section 3 explores the impact of these roles on their churches, including the costs, risks and benefits. Section 4 considers the theological dimension of this work and Section 5 offers our final conclusions and some recommendations.

The Annex draws on some of the learning from the research and provides two brief checklists for churches interested in exploring whether the appointment of operational management staff is relevant for them and what that might look like.



2 THE RISE OF 'OPERATIONS' IN CHURCHES

This section outlines what we have learnt about the growth of operational management roles within churches in London and the nature of this work and the people who do it.

2.1 WHAT ARE OPERATIONAL MANAGERS/DIRECTORS?

A common practice for many years in churches has been the appointment of a 'Church Administrator'. This has often been a part-time role, perhaps full-time in a larger church, and the purpose has been to support the church and particularly the clergy in undertaking the church's various administration tasks. This has traditionally included dealing with correspondence and enquiries from the public, maintaining church records and keeping on top of the paperwork that goes with maintaining church buildings and managing a church's finances. Their work is usually complemented by that of volunteer Treasurers, Trustees, Church Wardens and other similar roles.

Many churches still use this model today and it often works well.

However, in the last decade in particular we have seen a growing number of churches in London employing Operations Managers or Operations Directors. These roles are different from the more traditional Administrator model in three important respects:

- The range of tasks which these roles encompass is often broader
- The level of responsibility and decision-making involved is significantly greater
- They are often responsible for managing other members of staff and/or volunteers

In short, Operations roles involve greater management responsibility than those of Administrators.

It is important to note that it would be quite unfair to characterise the shift as one of 'greater professionalism', as many Church Administrators are entirely professional in their approach – the change is in the nature of the role being undertaken (moving from administration to management), not how well it is being done.

2.2 WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

The growth in the use of Operational Managers and Directors is not a reflection of the growth in the size of churches – churches are, on average, smaller than they used to be. It used to be typical for a local parish church to have hundreds of worshippers on a Sunday and no paid Administrator at all.

Two things have changed in the last few decades.

Firstly, most churches have more paperwork to undertake, and of a more complex nature, than they used to. This has been driven by various factors, including

- A need to comply with tighter health and safety regulations in church buildings
- Requirements to support the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults within church activities
- More complex employment regulations and requirements
- The need for more external fundraising to complement congregational giving, requiring the preparation of funding applications (and monitoring returns, if successful)
- The growth in weekly correspondence made possible by email

Even the smallest churches will have a significant amount of administration to undertake. Churches with larger congregations and busier programmes of activities will also, obviously, have correspondingly greater management and administration requirements on top of this.

Secondly, there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that finding church volunteers willing to undertake so much administration in their spare time is difficult. Whether this is because people are less willing or able to commit time than used to be the case or simply because the amount of administration required has increased is hard to say but the result is the same – it is proving harder for churches to undertake all of their administration tasks through volunteer time alone.

2.3 WHERE IS IT HAPPENING?

The use of operations roles is particularly prevalent in London in two contexts:

- Operations roles are evident in most of the large churches of nearly every denomination (i.e. those with thousands of members) – whether Anglican, Pentecostal or other protestant churches – confirming the necessity of such an approach when a certain scale is achieved.
- Most other incidences of such posts in London appear to be amongst Anglican churches, which account for the majority of the examples we found. It is much harder to find such roles amongst the smaller churches of other denominations.

From our own research for this report, we estimate that at least 5-10% of Church of England parishes in London now have a paid Operations Manager or Director.

Most of these local churches have Sunday congregations of well over 100 people, but not all – some have opted for an Operations Manager partly because of their property management requirements, partly where they have multiple halls to let.

Many of these Anglican churches are part of the Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) Network, but by no means all – the parishes vary greatly in their location, context and churchmanship. We have found churches employing Operations Managers/Director across Greater London in three Dioceses (London, Southwark and Chelmsford), in both wealthy and deprived areas and in different church traditions, including Anglican Catholic.

2.4 THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE ROLES

JOB SCOPE

Every job description is different, quite rightly, reflecting the varying requirements of the different churches. However, most job descriptions

overlap to a fair degree and so in Figure 1 we have summarised the most common responsibilities found within the roles of Operations Managers or Directors.

Figure 1: Responsibilities of Operations Managers/Directors

TYPICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Strategy**

Contributing to the development of the church's forward planning, as well as helping to ensure that decision-making is 'joined up' across the church

- **Systems**

Setting up and running the various systems and processes necessary for the efficient day to day running of the church as a charitable organization, including:

- Human Resources
- Finance
- IT (including audio-visual equipment)
- Legal issues
- Church administration

This will always involve working with volunteer Treasurers and PCC committees, and may involve managing book-keepers and others on a day to day basis, where the church employs such staff.

- **Communications**

Typically, this might involve being responsible for the church website, its social media and any church membership database, although this role is often shared with others depending on the skills/interests of the church leadership and other volunteers or staff.

- **Governance Support (PCC)**

Providing administration support for the church governance body (the PCC in an Anglican church) including the preparation and circulation of agendas and papers and maintaining records, all under the direction of the church leadership.

● **Building maintenance**

Ensuring that the church's use of its buildings complies with all necessary legislation and ensuring that it is properly maintained. This can include a range of tasks, covering:

- Buildings insurance
- Health and safety risk assessments and compliance
- Maintenance and repairs (including any necessary Church or Local Authority permissions required for this, where significant)
- Cleaning

This area of responsibility often involves working alongside Church Wardens or Property Committees and managing the day to day work of others, whether paid or volunteers including vergers, cleaners, gardeners, site managers, handymen, etc. It also often involves managing contractors.

● **Facilities management**

Managing the marketing, letting and use of church premises by external groups as well as the church's own groups.

● **Projects**

This is an area where flexibility is required, involving the development and management of ad hoc projects as and when required in the life of the church. Typically, such projects might involve:

- Fund-raising (i.e. preparing funding applications) for new buildings projects or new church ministries
- Organising summer camps, church weekends away, annual church/community fun days, large church social events, etc.

SOMETIMES INCLUDED...

● **Supporting Sunday services**

Clergy generally retain full responsibility for leading the organization of Sunday services, including filling the various rotas (preaching, reading, prayers), with worship leaders also filling their rotas for musicians. The Ops responsibility, if any, tends to be restricted to providing administration support for compiling rotas (eg Sunday school, hospitality) or managing sign-up of participants to new courses.

The main variations between job descriptions are twofold:

- **Scope** – as noted above, the precise boundaries of roles do vary but the core of the roles is very similar
- **Seniority** – roles can be Operations Managers or Operations Directors, the difference being one of seniority, experience and salary. Operations Director roles tend to command higher salaries, attract older people and be a feature of larger churches, particularly where they are managing large teams of people.

With respect to the scope of the operations roles, there are some important features worth noting, particularly in relation to how they relate to the church's nature and mission:

- **Rarely on a Sunday** – interestingly, in the operations roles we explored, the clear majority do not play a significant role in helping to organise Sunday services, and leadership of this remains very much with the clergy. Indeed, the operations staff are not even expected to attend the church on a Sunday in many cases. This does differ in some churches where the manager plays an organising role in Sunday services and is expected to attend regularly, but this appears not to be the norm. It can be difficult for operations staff to worship in the same church in which they work as they are rarely seen as 'off duty', so where they do play an active role on Sunday the boundaries clearly need to be managed.
- **Not involved in pastoral work** – we found no examples of operations managers/directors playing any significant role in the organising or undertaking of pastoral work. This work remains entirely with the clergy or volunteer members of the congregation.
- **Admin support only in Governance** – It is quite common for operations managers/directors to undertake the administration of church governance meetings (such as PCCs) - preparing and circulating papers in advance on behalf of the minister - and some also attend as observers or to take minutes, but church experiences vary significantly here. In some churches, managers do not even attend PCCs. It is rare for operations staff to actually be members of the governance body, and where it happens guidance from the

Charities Commission needs to be followed and conflicts of interest must be properly managed.

STRUCTURES

Operations directors/managers usually work directly to the church leader (the Vicar) and will often have management responsibility for staff or volunteers who are working on the church's various systems (eg book keepers) or looking after the buildings (eg vergers, cleaners, etc).

Any staff related to worship, pastoring or mission are more likely to work directly to the church leaders rather than to the operations staff. In this respect, churches tend to keep a clear distinction between their pastoral/mission work and their operations work.

In a very large church with a large staff team, it is not uncommon to have an Operations Director, as well as an Operations Manager and other specialist staff too under their management – administrators, a finance manager, a buildings manager, etc. In smaller churches, it is more likely to be one or other of the roles, but not both.

ROLES CAN CHANGE

It is an obvious point perhaps, but the nature of roles can also change over time as the needs of a church evolve. The growth of a church, the development of new ministries and the expansion of buildings can all impact on the skills and experience which a church needs to support it. Keeping roles under review periodically is important.

SALARIES

In London, the salary bands for full-time roles, at the time of writing, looked like this:

Operations Managers	£20,000 - £30,000 per annum
Operations Directors	£30,000 - £40,000 per annum

Although we did find some part-time roles, most seem to be full-time or nearly full-time.

2.5 WHO UNDERTAKES THESE ROLES?

Who are the people working as operations managers and directors? We found that they:

- are as likely to be women as men
- are nearly always graduates; of the managers we met with, degrees included a diverse spread from geography and gender studies to banking and finance and international relations
- are often in their 20s or 30s, but for more senior roles may be older
- have varied professional experience, including university and charity administration, parliamentary affairs and also a Lutheran priest
- sometimes have management or administration qualifications or training from previous jobs but not always.

Some operations staff clearly feel called to their work – they see it as their vocation in life. Some do not, for them it is just a job.

As noted above, they may be part of the congregation in the church where they work, but this is not always true, it may depend upon the role. It can be hard to work in operations and worship in the same church, as one manager noted:

“everything thinks they are your boss in church...people forget you are a person too”

It would seem there is currently no obvious template for an operations manager beyond having a graduate education and some relevant experience of administration and management.

2.6 WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO THEY RECEIVE?

The operations managers/directors are always line managed by the principal church leader (i.e the Vicar or Rector) or one of the clergy where there is more than one priest. They usually meet formally

weekly or fortnightly. The most organised churches also have regular performance appraisals/reviews every year to provide feedback and ensure their staff can air any issues.

Beyond this, we found no examples of any systematic training or development for operations managers. There is no 'career structure' within the church and no training or qualifications of any kind on offer. The only professional training which operations managers had received (as noted above) was during their previous jobs before working for the church.

We found some evidence of networking between operations staff across churches but it tends to be very personal and informal. The HTB Network has its own informal network (centred on a Face book page) but staff rarely meet together face to face. In the Willesden Area of the Diocese of London, there is an Administrators Network which organised meetings from time to time, but this is not focused on operational management. There is also the national independent UCAN network run by John Truscott, but membership of this by operations staff seems to be partial at best – and its membership is broad in terms of the roles undertaken.

2.7 IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

We close this section with a selection of quotes from our research interviews.

One of the clergy made this simple, but important point:

“A church needs to be well run”

The operations managers and directors who we interviewed clearly work hard to try to ensure this happens. How do they view their own roles?

“Ops is ‘making things happen’...”

“we make church happen together as a team....clergy, volunteers, staff...”

“I help to join the dots in the church”

The work is clearly challenging at times.

“I plug the gaps...churches do have a habit of doing things at the last minute...”

“sometimes I have to help manage the priest’s expectations about what is possible”

Most of the operations staff were very positive about their role in church and were pleased to be able to contribute to the life and mission of their churches:

“we’re an enabling ministry”

“Administration is a gift”



3

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

This section uses the evidence we have gathered to explore the significance of operations roles, the difference they make and addresses the concerns raised about them. It addresses six key questions which are commonly asked.

3.1 ARE OPERATIONS ROLES REALLY NECESSARY?

“SURELY A VOLUNTEER COULD DO ALL OF THIS, WHY DO WE NEED AN OPERATIONS MANAGER?”

Church leaders only recruit operations staff when they want to do so – the decision is always voluntary. The cost means that it is never a decision taken lightly – it is hardly an easy option. The decision to recruit reflects a situation in a church where the level of organisation required has gone beyond a point where the clergy and volunteers feel that they can adequately respond. We also have yet to meet a church leader who has gone down this route and now wishes they did not have their operations manager/director – indeed if they did feel this way, they could simply make the post redundant.

A growing number of churches (the great majority not being mega churches) feel that they need this kind of managerial support in order to be able to function effectively; they have reached a point where they believe that the combination of clergy and volunteer time being invested is not sufficient for the scale of activity they have to manage. The fact that a growing number of churches (and a growing diversity of churches) are ‘voting with their feet’ on this issue suggests that there is a real issue here being addressed.

The motivation is to see the church’s ministries and mission running well and not undermined by a lack of organisation. As one of our interviewees noted, the gospel is not just communicated through words but also through how we manage our buildings (what they look like to others), how we show hospitality to visitors, how well we communicate to our surrounding communities and how we manage our staff and volunteers. Why would a church not do this as well as it can? A good organisation can help to support mission and ministry. A second motivation is also to release clergy who may feel that too much of their time is absorbed in the day to day management of activities.

3.2 ARE OPERATIONS ROLES VALUE FOR MONEY?

“RECRUITING AN OPERATIONS MANAGER IS SO EXPENSIVE, CAN IT POSSIBLY BE WORTH IT?”

Recruiting a full-time operations manager or director is not a trivial expense and clearly not possible for all churches. We have seen what it can cost with salaries of £20,000 – £40,000 and sometimes higher. So, what are the benefits? For those churches which can contemplate such an additional expense, is it worth it?

In our in-depth interviews, we identified four key benefits:

- **Releasing clergy time** – one of the most obvious benefits is that an operations manager can take a significant amount of administration and correspondence off a Vicar’s desk. In one of our case studies, the church leader estimated the time he saved as “16 – 20 hours per week”, which is the equivalent of over two full days a week – time that he is now able to spend on ministry and mission. In another church we researched, recruiting an operations manager had saved the Vicar more than a day of work a week, which had allowed him to reduce his workload to something more sustainable - “the Vicar takes a day off now – he never used to”.
- **Generating new church income** – A second important benefit is that investing in operational management has allowed a number of churches to increase their income:
 - Firstly, it has enabled some churches to manage their buildings more actively, particularly to enable more frequent lettings of halls, etc. One of the operations managers we interviewed had effectively covered their full cost through the additional lettings income which they had enabled (and their role was much broader than facilities management).
 - Secondly, operations staff are able to prepare and submit funding applications for church projects, bringing in new grants for buildings and staff.

- **Providing new project management capacity to support new initiatives** – A third benefit is that they provide additional capacity to develop and manage projects which no-one had previously had time to do. Churches have been able to bring forward projects from the ‘back burner’ which the church leader had not previously had the time to do.
- **Delivering more organised systems and processes** – A fourth and more obvious benefit – and very much a core of the role – is the setting up and/or operating of the various systems and processes which a church needs to run effectively – HR, finance, health and safety, etc. Taking on the management of these processes is very much what releases the time of others, but having organised processes is obviously a benefit in itself. An additional benefit can also be that the church’s engagement with the community can sometimes be more organised too – faster response times to enquiries by phone or email.

Those churches with under-used assets where a new manager can effectively pay for themselves through more active property management are clearly in the happy position of being able to benefit from some new management capacity at zero net cost. For other churches the costs and benefits would need to be weighed up and an assessment made of whether going down this route was right for the church or not.

3.3 DO OPERATIONS STAFF HAVE TOO MUCH POWER WITHIN A CHURCH?

“I’M WORRIED THAT AN OPERATIONS MANAGER WOULD HAVE TOO MUCH INFLUENCE ON THE CHURCH”

Power is a reality within churches and it is usually distributed between the clergy, the PCC (or Trustees/Elders), volunteer post-holders (such as Church Wardens) and members of the congregation. Decisions which ‘the church’ makes reflect the interplay of all these people. How this works in practice, of course, varies significantly from church to church and the personalities involved.

Understanding what difference the appointment of an operations manager/director would make is an important question. Does it change the balance of power within a church?

The short – and perhaps not very interesting – answer is ‘no’.

An operations manager is appointed by the church and, in every case which we found, is line managed by the clergy in the same way in which all other church staff are. They therefore have no ‘power’ other than that delegated voluntarily by the clergy and no freedom to make decisions other than those granted to them by the clergy or the PCC/governance body. As one of our interviewees put it:

“the Vicar is still very much in charge”

In practice, we did not find that the work of operations staff makes much difference, if any, to the balance of power (i.e. who makes the decisions) between clergy, the PCC and the congregation.

As we have seen above, the biggest impact from the appointing of new operations staff is felt by the clergy who often find a significant amount of their time released as they can delegate some tasks they were previously performing themselves. Managing an operations manager/director will clearly involve a new dynamic in itself and in a healthy line management relationship there will be scope for discussion and debate. Clergy will find new proposals being ‘tested’ and questions asked – usually a helpful constructive process – but an operations manager cannot actually just say ‘no’ to their line manager if they doubt the value of a particular idea. Hence, the power relationships in a church are fundamentally unaltered.

Any appointment can, of course, not always work out as well as intended. For example, an operations director who had misunderstood their role to be ‘chief executive’ rather than ‘chief of staff’ could well generate serious conflict. Similarly, the appointment of someone who was not very collaborative would also be highly problematic. These outcomes would be significant failures of the recruitment process though if such misunderstandings of the role had been allowed to develop.

As with any appointment therefore, new roles need clearly defined job descriptions and good recruitment processes to find people with appropriate skills and aptitudes.

A more significant issue than the power of operations staff is the potential impact they might have on the culture of the church and this is the next question we consider.

3.4 DOES OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT CHANGE THE CULTURE OF A CHURCH?

“OUR CHURCH IS A COMMUNITY, WE DON’T WANT A ‘BUSINESS MANAGEMENT’ CULTURE TO TAKE ROOT”

Perhaps the most significant critique of operational management in churches is a concern about its impact upon the culture of the church – churches are, after all, grassroots community institutions with a spiritual mission and identity. Could the introduction of professional management practices damage the character of a church?

Here, we suggest that there are three constituent concerns which can fairly readily be addressed, but a fourth which needs more careful thought.

There are three criticisms of the use of professional operational management in churches which we think are not borne out in practice:

- “We are not a business” – Professional management practices are not the preserve of the private sector, they are used every day in the delivery of public services and to support the work of charities of all shapes and sizes. Professional management in a church does not therefore necessarily imply any shift towards private sector behaviour.
- “Professional management has no place here” – It is also not obvious why a church should necessarily have a principled objection to being well organised. As we have seen earlier, good management is just a form of service which can release the time and talents of others and contribute to the effective stewardship of a church’s buildings and other assets.
- “Professional managers don’t understand pastoral concerns” – It is certainly the case that most operations managers are not trained pastors and should not therefore be playing a role in the

pastoring of others. As we have seen in practice, this is usually well understood on all sides and so operational management roles do not normally include such responsibilities.

There is a fourth criticism which we believe is the most significant and which deserves careful attention – do operations managers displace volunteers from acts of service? There can be a tension between excellence and inclusion – a tension between ‘doing things well’ or ‘efficiently’ and involving volunteers from the congregation even if that might be a little untidy or imperfect. Does the professionalisation of a role diminish the need for volunteers and reduce the scope for people to serve and grow with all the challenges which that can entail?

There is a legitimate concern here, which needs to be properly understood. This is not a concern which is unique to operational management, however, it actually applies to the professionalisation of any role in a church, whether youth worker, children’s worker, facilities manager, operations manager or even priest. All of these touch on the tension between ‘excellence and inclusion’. It is most likely to arise in churches where there are multiple paid staff where a ‘staff team knows best’ mentality can begin to develop.

The challenge here is to know how to frame and deploy a professional role into a church context in a way which is both effective and fruitful for the congregation. We would suggest that the core principles are these:

Principle 1: Necessary: Paid professional roles should only be used within a church context where the role cannot reasonably be done well by volunteers.

Principle 2: Enabling: Paid professional roles should always be undertaken in ways which release gifts, leadership and acts of service from the congregation, promoting their flourishing.

Thus, the purpose of good operational management in a church is not just the creation of an efficient organisation for its own sake but for the purpose of releasing greater mission and ministry from the church and its congregation. Operational management is not about ‘doing every

job' but is an enabling ministry which should help to release others to fulfil their own ministries also. For example:

- releasing a priest from a lot of administration so that they can spend more time on pastoral concerns and mission, or
- improving the organisation of a Sunday school rota so that those volunteers can invest more of their time in teaching children (and preparing for that) and less time in email correspondence
- managing vergers, cleaners and other staff well so that they can enjoy their roles and develop new skills

3.5 DOES THE PRIEST BECOME A CHIEF EXECUTIVE RATHER THAN A PASTOR?

“IS THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST BEING CHANGED? PRIESTS TRAINED TO BECOME PASTORS AND DON'T WANT TO BECOME CHIEF EXECUTIVES”

Moving towards an operational management approach does not fundamentally change the purpose or role of the priest; indeed, one of its main impacts is to release more of the priest's time to focus on their pastoral ministry.

Nearly every priest already spends part of their working week doing administration and management as well as managing the work of others, whether that is an organist, an administrator or a builder fixing the roof. The introduction of an operations manager into such a context does not mark any shift in principle – they are simply a new person for the priest to manage – the main difference being that the priest will end up spending less time on administration and management as a result. Lay volunteers may also find some of their time freed from administration so that they can spend more time in service.

An important point made to us by several interviewees was how the roles of priest and operations manager are clearly very different but can both be enhanced through good collaboration. As we have seen,

the aim of the operations manager is to serve the priest and the church, with fairly obvious benefits to both. Similarly, the more the priest understands the role of the manager and works in a collaborative way, the more effective that person will be. Put simply, a disorganised Vicar or one who wants to micro-manage their colleagues, will make it harder for an operations manager to add value; the best results will always come when both are working well together.

One of the implications of this is the importance of ensuring that priests receive appropriate training through ordination and afterwards – not so that they can become operational managers themselves but so that they understand the various (non-priestly) tasks that need to be undertaken in running a church effectively and how to manage people effectively to ensure that these are done. This is about recognising and valuing the importance of good stewardship and organisation in a church organisation and acquiring the skills necessary to facilitate that.

3.6 CAN AN OPERATIONS MANAGER FIX A DYSFUNCTIONAL CHURCH?

“OUR CHURCH HAS SOME COMPLEX PROBLEMS, WILL APPOINTING AN OPERATIONS MANAGER SOLVE THESE FOR US?”

No, probably not.

Operational management is not a panacea for all of a church's difficulties. Where a church has significant internal political problems (conflict and dysfunctional relationships) or finds itself in a crisis situation – such as with a serious financial or property related problem – it may need assistance in sorting itself out first before moving to a new approach to managing its affairs.

The skills required for 'change management' in a church (conflict resolution or some kind of 'rescue') are quite different to the skills required for building and managing ongoing systems and processes of management.

As ever, a church needs to be clear about which problem it is trying to solve before it embarks upon any recruitment or expenditure to address that challenge.

3.7 CONCLUSIONS

Our research suggests that for churches with significant management and administration requirements an operational management approach can deliver significant benefits. The way that these roles are being undertaken also seems to fit happily within existing church structures and cultures without most of the problems which critics seem anxious about.

The key risk which we have identified – and one shared with any professional appointment in a church – is that of displacing the service of the lay members of a church. Such roles should therefore only be used where necessary and should always be delivered in a way which actively facilitates the various ministries of the congregation.

A key challenge for the future is in working out how these roles could become better recognised within the church so that where they occur they can be used to greatest effect.



4 THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

In this section we reflect upon how the work of operational management can be understood theologically.

4.1 MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION ARE GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Orthodox Christian theology affirms the validity and importance of the many gifts and ministries which are a present reality within the church today – from evangelism and pastoring to acts of service and giving. Christians are familiar with St Paul’s image of the ‘Body of Christ’, illustrating how every Christian has a role to play within the church and how every gift has its place:

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

(1 Corinthians 12:7, NIV)

St Paul even lists “administration” within the list of spiritual gifts he offers later in the same chapter (verse 28). The word is translated differently across various bible translations but is most commonly given as ‘administration’, ‘government’ or ‘management’; its practical meaning is clear.

In Luke’s account of the life of the early church in the book of Acts, we see how quickly practical issues arose which required a more organised response:

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group.”

(Acts 6:1 – 5a, NIV)

In other words, as the church grew in size the challenge of distributing resources also increased, to the point where it became a major distraction to the church’s leaders as well as a source of community conflict. The solution was to identify a new group of servant-leaders (chosen for their spiritual maturity and wisdom) who would take responsibility for this area of service within the church. Their work would have involved the collection of donations and the distribution of food or funds to the poorest households in a church with thousands of members and which was growing at an accelerating rate. The benefit of these new roles is that widows were cared for more reliably and the Apostles had more time to preach and teach.

The Greek word used to describe the work involved in this new role was ‘service’ - ‘diakonia’ – from which we derive the word ‘deacon’. The role of deacon is still recognised in many Christian denominations today, although these roles now differ significantly in nature.

It is not too difficult to see how ‘operational management’ fits squarely within this tradition as a service to the church which allows the better management of resources whilst other differently gifted church leaders are released to preach and teach.

4.2 MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION ARE KINGDOM ISSUES

It is possible for church leaders to recognise management and administration as gifts without really valuing those gifts – an intellectual acceptance without a real appreciation of why they matter.

These are not ‘lesser gifts’, somehow less important than those of pastors or evangelists. St Paul describes the whole body of the church as a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). Priests are chosen to preside over a church to provide order, but the other roles being performed around them are not therefore less significant.

The mission of a church is to worship God, to become disciples and in loving our neighbours, to make new disciples. The gifts and talents of many people assist in this – musicians, worship leaders, teachers, preachers, pastors, evangelists, youth workers etc. Their work is rightly

recognised and celebrated.

The ability to manage a church's resources – to support its whole mission and ministry - should also be on this list, but often seems to be missing. This also needs to be recognised and celebrated – and where it is missing, it needs to be sought out.

Church resources include its money, its buildings and its people. Its mission is to its own community and also to its neighbours. When a church's resources are managed well it leads to:

- donations being well used
- new income being generated and deployed for mission
- buildings being well used and properly maintained for the future
- people being well managed and their skills developed
- enhanced mission and ministry

When a church's resources are not well managed – most often through neglect over time – it can easily lead to:

- donations being wasted
- opportunities to secure income being lost
- buildings deteriorating and incurring higher repair bills
- empty church halls for much of the week
- unhappy church staff and volunteers
- the undermining of opportunities for mission and ministry

The active management or stewardship of a church's resources makes an important and positive contribution to the overall life and health of a church community and its ability to serve others – honouring its financial gifts (and those of previous generations which have been invested in buildings), valuing its people-skills, and witnessing to the wider community through its buildings and services and the way the church is organised.

For some people, serving the church through this stewardship of resources is their life's calling and vocation. Their abilities are God-given and can be used to further the mission and ministry of the church.

Jesus himself regularly used ideas and images of management

and stewardship in his parables about the Kingdom, painting good stewardship as a mark of wisdom:

- in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25), Jesus commends those who take some risks and invest their time and money for fruitful gain in the Kingdom but has only criticism for those who, through laziness or lack of enterprise, simply 'bury their talents'
- in the same chapter, Jesus tells a story of 'ten virgins' waiting for a bridegroom, with the wise women being the ones who planned ahead and took enough oil to light their lamps through the night
- in preaching about the costs of discipleship (Luke 14), Jesus talks about how wise people 'sit down and estimate the cost' of new projects

4.3 A NEW CHURCH VOCATION: STEWARD

We believe that the **stewardship of church resources** is a vocation which should be properly and formally recognised by churches – to raise the profile of this important dimension of church life and also to encourage and develop those people called to work in this way. It is time to recognise, invest in and celebrate the significance of this work in both a practical and spiritual sense. The early church used to do this, but it has become 'lost' over time. It is time to return to this.

The role of 'Deacon' was originally used to acknowledge this work but this word now has other meanings – we therefore propose the term 'Steward' to mark out the distinctive vocation of those called to help the church manage its resources. This includes those serving churches at local or national levels as well as those Christians helping to deliver mission through parachurch organisations. It may include those who are clergy (or could be part of their training) but will also include lay people.

The church should be:

- teaching and preaching on the value of 'stewardship' skills
- creating more stewardship roles where appropriate (particularly

where this has been overlooked in the past)

- investing in, and training, stewards, including some formal qualifications which cover practical management capabilities as well as some theological reflection and formation
- including the proper recognition of stewardship roles within the training of priests (not necessarily expecting them to become stewards but assisting them in recognising the role and knowing how to work with stewards)



5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

This report has explored the growing use of operational management within churches in London, considering what this looks like in practice and its impact on those churches.

We found that the use of professional management skills can provide significant benefits to churches, releasing the time of priests to undertake their core ministries and facilitating the mission and ministry of others by providing a well organised context within which they can serve.

There are, rightly, questions about how such approaches fit within the governance and culture of a church but most of these seem to be well addressed. As with any professionalisation of roles within a church, there remains the risk of displacing the service of the lay members of a church and so church leaders must be alert to this in particular. Such roles should always be delivered in a way which actively facilitates the various ministries of the congregation rather than attempting to ‘do it for them’.

In considering the work of operational managers – and indeed others who serve churches in practical ways – we believe that there is an important vocational issue to address.

We believe that the time has come for the **stewardship of church resources** to be properly and formally recognised by churches as a vocation. The vocation of stewardship includes those serving churches at local or national levels as well as those Christians helping to deliver mission through parachurch organisations. It is time to raise the profile of this important dimension of church life and also to encourage and develop those people called to work in this way. It is time to recognise, invest in and celebrate the significance of this work in both a practical and spiritual sense.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the local church should:

- teach and preach on the **value** of ‘stewardship’ skills
- create more **stewardship roles** where appropriate and affordable (particularly where this has been overlooked in the past)

We recommend that large well-resourced churches should:

- consider how they could **share** their stewardship skills and experience appropriately with other churches in their area

We recommend that the national church should:

- develop a **formal qualification** to support the recognition of, and training of, stewards who serve the church’s mission and ministry, with the qualification to include both high quality practical and theological work. This vocation and training should be open to both clergy and lay people.
- consider the appropriate resourcing of a **national network** for stewards to support the development of this important area of ministry and the sharing of good practice
- include the proper **recognition of stewardship roles** within the training of priests (not expecting them to become stewards but assisting them in recognising the role and knowing how to work with stewards)
- emphasise the importance of **collaborative working and person-management skills** within the training of priests



ANNEX: HOW DO WE APPOINT AN OPERATIONS MANAGER?

This Annex draws together some of the practical learning points identified in our research and offers a couple of checklists for the benefit of churches interested in exploring whether operational management may be right for them, and how a new role might best be shaped.

DISCUSSION 1: SHOULD WE APPOINT AN OPERATIONS MANAGER?

QUESTION 1: WHAT CHALLENGES ARE WE TRYING TO ADDRESS?

Firstly, discuss and be clear about why you are interested in appointing any operations staff. What challenges are you attempting to address? Is this really the right solution? Possible challenges facing churches include:

- The congregation is declining
- A significant building project is required
- The church is experiencing some kind of dysfunction or crisis
- The church is growing and workloads are increasing
- There are lots of willing volunteers but we are struggling to all work in a co-ordinated way

Different challenges require different solutions:

- Sometimes existing volunteers might just need to be better organised – could a new process of co-ordination be tried? Is there someone in the congregation who is particularly good at this?
- Sometimes ‘projects’ or ‘issues’ need only a time-limited help – a project manager for a few months or a consultant perhaps
- The most urgent need may be for a missional worker to support growth – a ‘children and family’ worker to help the church to reach out more
- ...or it may be that an operations manager is the right answer to the question.

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT BENEFITS WE WANT FROM ANY APPOINTMENT?

If you think that a new operations staff member is the right answer, be clear about what outcomes you want to see – list them. They might include:

- Better organised systems and processes (which ones?)
- Reducing the workloads of the priest and existing key members of staff (who?)
- Taking responsibility for specific projects or tasks (which?)

The list of outcomes sought needs to be achievable in its scope and length and broadly coherent in the kinds of skills it might expect one person to have. You may need to prioritise and decide which are the most important. If the list seems very varied, ask is this is one full-time role or perhaps two different part-time roles?

QUESTION 3: CAN WE AFFORD IT?

Weigh up the potential benefits. This should also include the possibility that the new appointee might be able to generate income through property management or fundraising – but it is important not to overstate this. Before proceeding to appointment the church should be able to identify the resources to fund the post properly.

DISCUSSION 2: HOW DO WE SHAPE AN 'OPERATIONS' POST?

The key decisions to make when shaping a Job Description and Person Specification are usually these:

1. What **scope of responsibilities** should the post include?
 - Figure 1 in Section 2 provides a starting point for this discussion, and other churches are usually happy to share Job Descriptions to help with discussions.
 - A particular question to consider is the extent to which the post holder is expected to participate in organising Sunday services and/or be present on a Sunday. How do we ensure that this job is sustainable?
2. What **level of seniority** is this post – a Director or a Manager or an Administrator – and what is the salary range?
3. Where does the post fit within the **existing staff structure** – who will line manage them and who will they in turn line manage?
4. How do we ensure that this role **releases the gifts, leadership and service** of members of the congregation rather than displaces them?

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

In undertaking the recruitment process:

- Recruit openly to find the right person
- Use your networks to distribute the advertisement
- Offer a clear job description, person specification and salary range
- Be clear how the role will support the mission of the church – this is, after all, a key part of the motivation to work for a church

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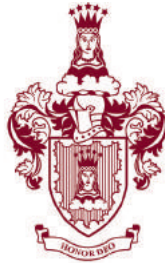
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Any errors or misunderstandings are entirely those of the author.



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