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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROFESSIONAL ORGANISER TO SOCIETY

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As a prelude to examining the contribution of the professional organiser to society, I would like to look first at various aspects of voluntary organisations in society.

1. The role and nature of voluntary organisations
2. How they develop
3. Role of chief executive and staff.

1. Role and Nature of Voluntary Organisations

There are about 1000 voluntary organisations in Ireland. Voluntary organisations come into being usually in order to represent their members and/or to provide services for them. The objectives may be very diverse, for example, local development, personal development, charitable, educational, cultural, political, economic, medical, social, or even religious.

They are formed by groups of people with similar interests and reflect the diversity of our society. They bring a richness to our pattern of living and are, frequently, the first vehicle to express a new need which, in time, may be fulfilled by legislative change, state, or commercial service. They provide a means for articulating the needs of seeking change. They also fill many of the gaps in service to the individual which the private or public sector leaves unfilled. They are, therefore, major agents for change, and are, frequently, the test bed for new ideas and services in our society.

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Many voluntary organisations concentrate on representing the interests of their members, for example, trade unions, trade and industry associations, conservation associations, consumer groups.

Others concentrate on providing a service for their members, or other sections of society, for example, professional institutions, parish councils, charitable associations, cooperative buying or selling groups, sporting associations.

It is probable that, at least, 75% of the adult population is associated with, at least, one voluntary organisation, whether in trade, sport, charity or personal development.

As a rough estimate I would suggest that private, voluntary organisations employ at least 7,000 people - this is certainly true if one includes cooperative buying, selling, and producing groups. Thus the largest Irish representative voluntary organisation has a full time staff of about 400, and a budget of about £2 million. This is followed by a few having over 50 (including CII and FUE), perhaps 100 having, at least, one full-time employee, and the vast majority having one part-time employee and relying, principally, on the voluntary efforts of its members.

Voluntary organisations providing service are much more labour intensive. The cooperative movement probably represents the largest concentration of full-time employees among voluntary organisations which concentrate on service, and, at least, one of

these now has annual sales approaching £100 million. There are probably 5,000 employees in producer cooperatives.

A small number of membership organisations concerned with personal development employs over 50 people. Again, perhaps 100 trade, sporting, social, and charitable organisations have a small full-time staff, while the great majority depend on part-time help and the time given voluntarily by their members.

## 2. How They Develop

I suggest that there are three main phases of development :

### Phase I.

- No paid staff.
  - a) Formation of committee, articles of association, objectives and membership criteria.
  - b) Membership drive
  - c) Preparation of work programme
  - d) Organisation of work programme

### Phase II.

- Secretariat
  - Appointment of part-time, or full-time secretariat which executes policy.

### Phase III.

- Dictorate
  - Appointment of full-time Dictorate which contributes to the development of policy, and has responsibility for its execution.

By the time a voluntary organisation has reached the third phase, it probably has the following characteristics :

1. A large and representative Council which has prime authority. Usually elected with a small number of cooptions. Partial resignation and election annually. President elected every two years.
2. An Executive Committee to which the Council has delegated all decision making authority and responsibility. Usually about twelve people elected from Council members with partial resignation and election annually. This Committee functions as a board of directors and meets monthly.
3. A Finance and General Purposes Committee which agrees overall financial budget, and screens new members.
4. A Chief Executive who assists the Executive Committee in developing policy, and has responsibility for execution of policy.

### 3. Role of Chief Executive

- a) Full authority and responsibility for internal organisation
- b) Operate within budget agreed annually
- c) Advise Executive Committee on policy and responsibility for execution
- d) Generate resources

3. Role of Chief Executive (contd.)

Essential requirements :

1. Close relationship between President of Council/Executive and Chief Executive
2. Clearly defined relationship between Chief Executive and Executive Committee
3. Chief Executive must work hard to understand and interpret the needs of members
4. Involvement of Council Members in work of organisation
5. Constantly monitor the evolving relationship between staff and members. Main role of members should be to guide policy through Executive Committee. Initiatives should come from staff and members via Chief Executive and Executive Committee. Policy documents for decision should be prepared by staff with outside help where necessary
6. Regular information to all members and public
7. A plan for action and resources generation for at least one year ahead. Try 50% target
8. Maintain enthusiasm of members
9. Monitor effectiveness of efforts