Organisational Risk Assessment

Introduction

It is not feasible to eliminate all risk. However, we have an obligation to protect people – employees, clients and members of the public with whom we interact - as far as it is 'reasonably practicable'.

Risk can be associated with the actual, legitimate operations we perform in the provision of services in line with the technical proposal provided to the municipal authority or the physical environments and circumstances in which they are legitimately performed.

The following are crucial components of risk avoidance:

- Elimination of activity that is not a legitimate part of our repertoire of services
- Avoidance of activity in inappropriate circumstances or unsuitable physical environments
- The performance of work by those lacking suitable qualifications and / or experience
- The failure to have in place appropriate systems of supervision
- The failure to have in place appropriate safety measures

Thus, it is understood that when an activity represents a significant departure from routine but, nevertheless, is considered legitimate, an additional risk assessment will be undertaken that applies specifically to the activity in question.

Defining 'risk'

Risks can be operational in nature and threaten the smooth continuation of organizational activity or they can relate to health, safety, hygiene and security.

Risk assessment involves the identification and analysis of *hazards*.

- a *hazard* is anything – circumstantial or physical - that may cause harm or jeopardy
- the *risk* is the chance, high or low, that somebody can be harmed by such a hazard or that the organizational operation can be threatened

Criteria against which we measure Risk

- the environment in which the service is provided
- the larger framework in which we act as service providers (working partnerships, financial provisions, methodological framework, regulatory framework incl health and safety)
- lack of sufficient numbers or suitably qualified personnel
- lack of sufficient instructions, internal rules and procedures
- guaranteeing the safety of the clients, employees and members of the public with whom we interact
- lack of proper organization / supervision of the work

Breaking our Operation into Components

When assessing either operational risk or risk in the context of health, safety, hygiene and security, our overall operation can be broken into the following main components –

1. **General service provision**: risks relating to the general domain of social work case management, the sector in which we operate and the physical environment in which we perform our repertoire of services
2. **Emergency placement unit**: risks particular to this facility and the activities performed in relation to managing emergency placements
3. **Group work with children**: this work is generally (but not exclusively) performed in the context of the centre for street children and it may be undertaken at the complex or in other locations
4. **Small group home**: risks particular to this facility and the activities performed while caring for the disabled children

The following areas of activity happen infrequently but, nevertheless, they should be subject to risk assessment because they are now established parts of our routines. Additional risk may arise because of increased dependence on agents from outside the organization and the need to work in surroundings that are not subject our control –

1. Summer camps
2. Work in and around educational facilities (schools, kindergartens)

Risk Assessment – Steps

1. Identifying the hazard (including long-term hazards like exposure to stress)
2. Deciding who or what may be harmed and how
3. Evaluating the risk and deciding on precautions
4. Recording findings and implementing precautions
5. Reviewing and updating

Hazard Identification

Hazards can be identified by

- Undertaking periodic reviews
- Reacting to notifications by clients, employees or members of the public
- Keeping abreast of changes to the framework in which we work, professional opinion etc

While the results of risk assessment should be widely dispersed, acknowledged and understood by the personnel, it is accepted best practice for the assessment process to be undertaken by a small team of people who are fully conversant with organizational activities and the operational framework.

The risk assessment team will be headed by the project manager and will comprise of the operations director and all team leaders. There is virtue in having an independent team member for sake of objectivity.

Full risk appraisals should be undertaken *annually*. During the interim period, all personnel should be encouraged to provide team members of risks they have recognized or those that have been drawn to their attention by others.

Who or what could be harmed

There are different categories of employee in terms of roles, age, gender and experience. We work with clients with different needs and vulnerabilities. We should consider the terms and conditions in which these various individuals are *legitimately* engaged with our organization and / or affected by our activities and / or present in our facilities or other locations in which we are working. It is these circumstances in which we have an organizational duty towards these individuals. However, we should recognize

that we work primarily with or on behalf of children and, in addition, some of our clients have impaired ability to accept personal responsibility for their actions.

Operational risks can affect parts of our organizational operation or the entire operation. Even if an operational risk will impact on only a small part of our operation, if the risk is severe it may have serious repercussions. Also, operational risks can create a knock-on effect that may not be immediately obvious.

Evaluating the risk and deciding on precautions

Risks should be assessed in terms of IMPACT and PROBABILITY

Risks can usefully be colour-coded in charts and internal literature as follows:-

Critical **High** **Medium** **Low**

Operational risk –

Critical: impacts on ability to deliver against the technical proposal at all

High: compromises heavily ability to deliver in accordance with technical proposal and EQ standards, within budget in a sustainable way

Medium: compromises somewhat our ability to deliver in accordance with technical proposal and EQ standards and within budget (moderate delays and budget impacts)

Low: able to deliver but with elements of programme heavily dependent on commitment of management team

Precautions

Precautions should be reasonable, practicable and commensurate with the circumstances. In some instances, simple precautions may eliminate a risk entirely while, in others, significant measures may offer only a partial solution.

Excessive risk aversion can impact significantly on operational effectiveness and the assessment team should be fully aware of our organizational capacity to *manage* risk in different circumstances. In many instances, the potential benefit of an action outweighs the inherent risk.

Recording findings and implementing precautions

The results of an organizational risk assessment and the list of recommended actions is an important management document that benefits from brevity and explicitness.

The following basis of tabulation is recommended –

Risk (brief description)
Detail
Implications (brief explanation)
Risk management – recommended action(s)
Impact – critical / high / medium / low
Probability – critical / high / medium / low

The compilation of this document should be followed by enactment of a Precautions Action Plan. Some precautions can be implemented immediately while others may take time to put in place. They may involve additional training of personnel, financial investment or revision of procedures. The action plan should stipulate reasonable deadlines and specify those responsible for putting the precautions in place.

Reviewing and updating

Two questions need to be asked.

1. Has the recommendation been acted upon?
2. Does it have the desired effect or is additional action needed?

When the recommendation involves human action, the situation should be reviewed at monthly intervals for a period of 6 months to ensure continued compliance. The review should be undertaken by a member of the assessment team who does not have direct responsibility for the activity in question.

In the month prior to the Annual Assessment, the prior year's assessment should be reconsidered in the light of changing circumstances (if any).

Confidentiality

The self-critical aspect of organizational risk assessment means it is a confidential exercise. It may also involve the frank assessment of the framework in which we work which, again, demands confidentiality.