Leading with values: creating a safe organisational culture

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Contents

Executive summary

This report is part of a cross-sector tiered project developed in response to the Charity Commission's domestic charity safeguarding summit. The summit was held in March 2018 in response to reports of harassment, abuse and exploitation in the charity sector. The project is led by ACEVO and NCVO covering leadership and culture respectively.

This report highlights three pillars of moral leadership that will enable leaders to create safe workplace cultures in which unacceptable, abusive or bullying behaviour is dealt with before it can escalate. The pillars are:

1. Being values led

Values must be authentic, relevant to the work of the charity and resonate with the staff team. Values should be the golden thread that runs through all decision making in the charity.

2. Modelling ethical behaviour

Culture is modelled from the top and created through action. Leaders cannot just tell people what is important: members of the team will decide that based on what they see the leader do and by what happens within the charity.

3. Nurturing a culture of continuous improvement

Leaders should encourage open, honest, constructive conversations about areas of disagreement which will enable each staff member to feel that their voice is valued and listened to. This will create a culture in which staff and volunteers are not afraid to challenge the status quo.

As well as outlining what good leadership looks like for charity leaders, the report provides suggestions as to how funders, the Charity Commission and government can model behaviour that facilitates an operating environment that does not inadvertently encourage or reward poor leadership.

The report finishes with recommendations designed to support the development of safe cultures across the entire charity sector.

Recommendation 1: As part of the civil society strategy, the government should announce the creation of a safeguarding centre of excellence. The centre should include reinstating the **Safe Network** training programme and the development of a programme of values-led leadership training.

Recommendation 2: Research is commissioned that examines the state of leadership in the charity sector, with a specific focus on understanding how bullying cultures are created and sustained in charities. This research should centre on the voices and experiences of those that have experienced harm or abuse.

Introduction

On 9 February 2018 the Times reported that, in 2011, a number of Oxfam employees based in Haiti were dismissed and others resigned for behaviour that included using prostitutes in Oxfam premises, downloading pornography and bullying[1]. At the time of the incidents, Oxfam conducted an investigation and released a statement confirming that six staff had been fired or had resigned due to misconduct that involved abuse of power and bullying[2]. However the exact details of the allegations were not released until after the Times report in 2018[3].

Shortly after the initial report on Oxfam, reports of sexual harassment and bullying taking place in other international charities were published in the media[4]. These reports understandably raised concerns about the extent and management of incidents of harassment, bullying and safeguarding in the charitable sector.

Speaking on The Andrew Marr Show shortly after the Times published its story on Oxfam, the Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, said:

> **"I'm very clear; it doesn't matter if you've got a whistleblowing hotline. It doesn't matter if you've got good safeguarding practices in place. If the moral leadership at the top of the organisation isn't there then we cannot have you as a partner."[5]**

Within the charity sector there has been broad agreement and recognition that robust, thorough safeguarding policies are essential. However to be utilised effectively they must exist in the right culture. If there is an organisational culture of unaccountability, indifference, bullying or aggression then even the best policies will be at best under-utilised and at worst meaningless.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility but leaders have the added responsibility of creating the culture needed for safeguarding policies to be implemented. A global review of safeguarding policies by 14 agencies found that:

> **"The most critical gap in organisation support to PSEA [protection from sexual exploitation and abuse] is that of visible senior management leadership..."[6]**

Leadership is required to promote the organisation's values, communicate policies, resource safeguarding and hold managers to account on implementation and in respect of any breaches.

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1 The Times 'Oxfam in Haiti: 'It was like a Caligula orgy with prostitutes in Oxfam T-shirts' February 9 2018
2 Third Sector 'Six Oxfam staff in Haiti found guilty of misconduct' 7 September 2011
3 Oxfam GB 'Haiti investigation Final Report: Investigation Report, FRN5 – Haiti'
4 The Daily Mail 'Oxfam GB and other aid charities pledge to eradicate unacceptable behaviour' 23 February 2018
5 The Guardian 'Oxfam told to show moral leadership or lost funds' 11 February 2018
6 Inter-Agency Standing Committee *Global Review of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN, NGO, IOM and IFRC Personnel* 2010

Safeguarding is a key responsibility for charity trustees, and trustees are responsible for proactively safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their charity's beneficiaries[7]. Boards should support and encourage the CEO and senior leadership team to actively prioritise the creation and maintenance of a safe workplace culture that values the physical and mental wellbeing of all those that come into contact with the charity. Good leadership is an issue universal to all charities. As the majority of charities in England and Wales are small, 91% are solely dependant on volunteers, we recognise that any new practical recommendations must be proportionate to the resource available to small organisations.

Scope of this work

On 5 and 6 March 2018 the Charity Commission and the Department for International Development held two summits on safeguarding, the first focused on the international charity sector and the second on the domestic charity sector. A number of commitments were made by charity leaders at the summits with the aim of disseminating best practice and rebuilding public trust.

This report is an outcome from the summit focusing on the domestic charity sector, although the learning in it is transferable to the international sector. The purpose of this paper is to examine existing best practice on good leadership in safeguarding and provide guidance for charity leaders working to create a safe organisational culture.

At the end of the paper there are suggested actions for charity leaders, statutory bodies and funders that will help to create an operating environment which enables and encourages good leadership to thrive.

This paper details good leadership practice and should be viewed alongside the overarching principles laid out in NCVO's charity code of ethics.

Definitions

Charity leaders – members of the executive and non-executive leadership team within a charity. This includes the roles of trustee, chair and chief executive (or equivalent).

Safeguarding – refers to action taken to protect young people and adults at risk from harm, including all forms of exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Charity – generic term for organisations delivering charitable activity.

Beneficiary – anyone who benefits from the activity of the charity.

Safe culture – a culture free of harassment, bullying, abuse or unacceptable behaviour.

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7 Charity Commission 'Trustee safeguarding duties explained'

Creating and leading a safe culture

The Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, said that for a charity to partner with the Department for International Development (DFID) it has to have 'moral leadership'.[8] There is no one description or definition of moral leadership but it can broadly be categorised as having the following characteristics:

> 1. **Being values led**
> 2. **Creating appropriate cultural norms by modelling ethical behaviour**
> 3. **Focusing on openness, transparency and continuous improvement**

The other significant point in the Secretary of State's quote is the reference to moral leadership needing to come from 'the top of the organisation'[9]. Culture is collective but it is modelled, and disproportionately influenced, by the behaviour of those at the top.

In this section we will discuss how charity leaders can lead with morals to create a safe workplace culture. Minimising the risk of future incidents of serious harm and sexual abuse involves "changing the policy agenda from reactive risk management to a proactive focus on safety.[10]"

1. Being values led

Values are the core ethics or principles which a charity will abide by no matter what, and the foundation for creating a safe workplace culture. They must be authentic, relevant to the work of the charity and resonate with the staff team.

Once values have been set, they have to be lived. This means that they have to be clearly articulated, communicated internally and actively demonstrated in the conduct of all those working in a charity. Values should be the golden thread that runs through all decision making in the charity.

Leading based on values means using as many opportunities as possible to communicate and model the organisation's values. Staff and volunteers should be able to name the charity's values and understand what practical action they can take to uphold those values in their day to day work.

This process should start at recruitment and selection. In 2009 NSPCC produced 'Towards safer organisations'[11], which discussed the benefits of value-based recruitment (VBR). VBR involves incorporating consideration of values and behaviours into the selection process.

8 The Guardian 'Oxfam told to show moral leadership or lost funds' 11 February 2018

9 ibid

10 McAlinden, A. 'Organisational sex offenders and institutional grooming' in Protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse after Savile' Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2018

11 Erooga, M. 'Towards safer organisations' 2009

For example at interview stage, rather than focusing on traditional competency based questions, a value-based interview will involve the assessment of motives, attitudes and behaviours against the charity's values[12].

Prioritising, communicating and embedding values in everyday activity will build a culture in which individuals feel comfortable reporting or challenging behaviour that doesn't fit the charity's values. This kind of challenge will prevent cultural slippage[13], in which low-level unchallenged breaches of values and boundaries can create a 'slippery slope' of boundary violations towards abuse[14].

Embedding values and creating a culture based on values will not happen if the leadership is not role modelling those behaviours.

2. Creating appropriate cultural norms by modelling ethical behaviour

Every charity has a culture. Culture is "a pattern of shared values, norms, and practices that help distinguish one organisation from another"[15], or more informally 'the way things are done around here.'

If a culture isn't consciously and decisively created by a charity's leaders then one will develop by itself over time. When a culture develops on its own there is a risk that it will be influenced and controlled by the norms, beliefs and experience of individuals rather than the values of the organisation. There is also a risk that a charity's secondary aims, such as generating income, will become more prominent than its primary aims, such as representing or supporting an individual or group of people.

Culture is created through action and this is why leaders have to model ethical behaviour. It is not enough to do a piece of work on values, put the values into policies and procedures and communicate them to staff but then take actions which counter those policies and values. How a leader chooses to use their time and distribute resources is noticed by the team. If safeguarding and safe culture is a top priority, efforts will be made to properly staff, equip and train those working in that area. On the other hand, if a leader says safeguarding is important, but those on the safeguarding team lack the resources and authority to take the action they need to, staff and beneficiaries will recognise this and cost or operational efficiency will be viewed as a greater priority.

Organisational messages and rules must be consistent and directly focused on the mission, vision and values of the charity. Beyond that, leaders must be visible and they must take action. Leaders cannot just tell people what is important: members of the team will decide that based on what they see the leader do and by what happens within the charity.

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12 Durkin, J. & Erooga, M. 'Savile and the National Health Service' IN 'Protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse after Savile' Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2018

13 Eastman, A. & Rigg, K. 'Safeguarding children: dealing with low-level concerns with adults' 2017

14 Erooga, M. 'Thinking beyond a single type of organisational sex offender' IN 'Protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse after Savile' Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2018

15 Higgins, James M., Craig Mcallaster, Samuel C. Certo, and James P. Gilbert. Using Cultural Artifacts to Change and Perpetuate Strategy. Journal of Change Management, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 2006, pp. 397-415

3. Nurturing a culture of continuous improvement

Moral leaders recognise that there is always room for improvement, both within their charity and as leaders. The way the charity operates - its processes and services - are not set in stone. Leaders and staff are open to learning new ways of developing themselves and the organisation they lead.

Moral leaders invest in developing the capability of others through coaching, development and training. In relation to safeguarding, leaders should articulate the creation of a safe workplace as an ongoing learning process, and not something individuals have succeeded at or failed at. Removing binary language of success or failure and developing an open culture of learning, not one of blame, will empower individuals to challenge unacceptable behaviour and cultural slippage.

When mistakes are made, leaders should facilitate an open reflection on the mistakes and discuss what action will take to subsequently address those problems. Equally important is highlighting examples of good practice and encouraging those that are doing well in the charity.

Leaders should encourage open, honest, constructive conversations about areas of disagreement which will enable each staff member to feel that their voice is valued and listened to. This will create a culture in which staff and volunteers are not afraid to challenge the status quo.

Challenges and barriers to achieving a safe organisational culture

Structural and situational frameworks

Structural challenges are the processes, behaviours and attitudes that are embedded in society and contribute to inequality. Leaders need to be aware of the structural and situational frameworks that can increase risk in order to mitigate risk effectively.

Gender inequality

The fact that the majority of the reports of misconduct and abuse that have emerged over the last six months involve a female victim and a male perpetrator could not and should not be ignored. In a study by Report the Abuse looking at humanitarian experiences with sexual violence, 89% of survivors were female and 92% of perpetrators were male.[16] Gender based abuse and gender inequality are global problems, and they are endemic in the UK. Last year in the UK 85,000 women were raped[17], 360 children were trafficked for sexual exploitation[18] and 1 in 4 women in the UK will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.[19]

Charities should be held to a higher account because they are values led, but they are part of society, not removed from it. This means that at times there will be inequality, and gender based abuse within charities. Recent reports need to be framed within a wider context of violence against women and girls, in which one of the main barriers to reporting is a culture where harassment by people who abuse their position of power is the norm.

Research looking at sexual assault in the humanitarian sector reported harassment and abuse occurring in contexts in which a macho form of masculinity is dominant. This form of masculinity is often both sexist and homophobic.[20]

Leaders working to create a safe and equitable workplace culture need to be aware and acknowledge the inequality that exists within the society they operate in if they are going to take a lead in changing it.

Lack of diversity in senior leadership positions

Like the public and private sectors, there is a lack of diversity at senior leadership and board level in the charity sector. A lack of diversity can lead to groupthink, a psychological phenomenon in which a group of people strive for consensus, often setting aside their own beliefs and adopting the opinion of the rest of the group. Groupthink is more likely to occur in groups where people share a similar background and experiences. When groupthink occurs, uniformity and consensus are valued over openness and constructive challenge. This approach is the antithesis of moral leadership.

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16 Norbert, M 'Humanitarian experiences with sexual violence: Compilation of two years of report the abuse data collection' Report the Abuse 2017

17 https://rapecrisis.org.uk/statistics.php

18 https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/child-sexual-exploitation-facts-and-statistics/

19 https://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/forms-of-violence-and-abuse/domestic-violence/domestic-violence-the-facts/

20 Mazaruna, D and Donnelly, P. 'STOP the sexual assault against humanitarian and development aid workers' 2017 Tufts University

Imbalance of power

Abuse and harassment is often linked with imbalance of power. Charity leaders should assess the situations in their charity where there is an imbalance of power and take action to reduce risk. For example, when one group has control of goods or services that are needed by another, or when one group or person has money that another needs. Imbalances of power create conditions in which that power can be used to exploit, harm or harass another. Where power imbalances are identified, consideration should be given as to how power can be more evenly distributed and how to mitigate the risk of misuse of power.

Models of leadership

The images of strong authoritative leaders have deeply gendered and hierarchical roots and are embedded in many societies' understandings of the kinds of leadership needed to bring about lasting change. This can include the definition of the leader as an individual, as a hero, as the person who creates and directs change. However new models of leadership focusing on collaboration, generosity, transformation and empowerment have started to come to the fore in recent years. Leaders seeking to create a safe, open culture should commit to learning about alternative models of leadership based on inclusive structures which seek to work collectively and mobilise others.

ACEVO believes that leadership is based on relationships, connections, authenticity, growth, commitment, trustworthiness and the desire to improve; it comes from both the head and the heart. Good leaders are:

1. Authentic
2. Open, honest communicators
3. Teachers. They drive talent and growth in their workforce
4. Influencers. They inspire an innovative workforce
5. Value driven and prioritising positive employee behaviour
6. Reflective and self-aware

Sector specific barriers

There is never an excuse for poor safeguarding practice and the sector has recognised that work needs to be done in order to ensure that the best practice that exists in most of the sector is universally adopted.

In order to enable and facilitate good leadership behaviour there needs to be an open conversation and shared understanding between the government, the Charity Commission, funders and charities of the operational environment in which charities are working in. This should include consideration about the challenges/barriers created by the operating environment that hinder good leadership and can be perceived as rewarding bad leadership practice.

Public perception

The public demonstrates a cognitive dissonance in some of its reactions to charity activity. The public quite rightly wants charities to be more transparent but reacts badly to disclosures of failures. Equally there is a lot of focus on as much money as possible going to the frontline without a sufficient understanding of the critical role of many 'back office' functions.

Increased demand and reduced funding

The Social Landscape Report 2017 found that 80% of charity services said demand for their services had risen and 85% of charities expect demand for services to increase in the next year. More than a quarter of charities have in the past 12 months either reduced staff numbers (29%) or reduced frontline services delivered (28%).[21]

Since 2010 there have been changes in the way local and national government funds charities. There has been a move away from grants and an increase in commissioning and procurement. The commissioning and procurement process has been criticised by charities who argue that small, specialist, community led organisations are often overlooked in favour of larger, less specialist national organisations, and that awarding decisions have been disproportionately focused on cost, causing a race to the bottom.

Small training budgets

73% of registered charities in England and Wales have an annual income of below £100,000.[22] This means that many charities are too small to afford to pay for expensive safeguarding training. In addition to this, in recent years government funded programmes like the Safe Network, which funded safeguarding training for local community voluntary services, have been cut.[23]

Government support

Government support for the charity sector is felt to be lacking. The Social Landscape Report 2017 found that over 70 per cent of charities were pessimistic about government support, significantly more so than in 2015[24]. A lack of support generates a fear of reporting because individuals or organisations are concerned about biased interventions.

Transparency being mistaken as poor practice

There have been greater calls for transparency, and these are to be welcomed. However, those reporting incidents are often perceived as being the worst offenders when in fact they may be demonstrating good practice.

Overreliance on DBS checks

There has been a lot of recent commentary on the role of DBS checks in charities. When reports were published about sexual harassment within charity shops, some commentators proposed that all charity shop volunteers have a criminal record check, when in fact this may not have been necessary or appropriate. DBS checks are one tool in effective safeguarding practice but a role should not require one unless an assessment has been made of its appropriateness.

Leaders should recognise that the fear of a DBS check, by people with and without a criminal record, can lead to people who would add significant value to the charity sector being excluded. There are over 11 million

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21 Charities Aid Foundation 'Social Landscape Report 2017'

22 Charity Commission, 'Recent charity register statistics' 31 March 2018

23 NSPCC 'Safe Network is closing' https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/news-opinion/safe-network-service-closes/

24 Charities Aid Foundation 'Social Landscape Report 2017'

people in the UK with a criminal record[25], of those approximately 60,000 are barred from working with children and adults at risk[26]. Leaders should understand that in the majority of circumstances it is OK to hire someone with a criminal record.

Prioritising 'hard' targets over 'soft' targets

An understanding at board/trustee level of 'soft' values (like being transparent or genuinely beneficiary-led) having the same weight as 'hard' values (such as financial stability or growth/income). Trustees should be inducted to value both as equally important for them to deliver.

25 Unlock http://www.unlock.org.uk/policy-issues/key-facts/
26 Unlock http://hub.unlock.org.uk/knowledgebase/barring-2/

Working towards better leadership together

No charity leader can promise zero incidents but leaders can and should promise zero tolerance. Zero tolerance does not mean that every report of unacceptable behaviour results in dismissal. It means that reporting is encouraged and that every report is treated as credible, investigated appropriately and necessary action is taken. Ultimately leaders must have a relentless focus on the needs, views and wishes of the charity's beneficiaries.

However, as we have seen in the section on structural and organisational challenges, charities do not operate in isolation; they are heavily influenced by other agencies and actors that operate in the charitable space. Charity leaders should always demonstrate moral leadership but those around them should also operate in a way which recognises good leadership and does not reward poor leadership.

In order to achieve these objectives we have outlined the leadership behaviours and actions required of those working in and with the charity sector.

Charity leaders can demonstrate good leadership by:

1. Involving beneficiaries at all levels of the organisation from programme modelling to trusteeship

2. Making decisions based on the charity's values

3. Evaluating the charity's success on the impact of the work, not solely on efficiency, growth or financial sustainability

4. Creating a culture of continuous improvement by openly reflecting on mistakes and subsequent learning

5. Modelling the charity's values through their actions

6. Resourcing safeguarding initiatives appropriately

7. Setting a culture of zero tolerance

8. Connecting all elements of the organisation to creating a safe culture and safeguarding so that it does not stand alone and is seen as part of core business

9. Put in place measures to support people who report incidents and those who have been directly affected by unacceptable behaviour

Funders can demonstrate leadership by:

1. Making more funding available to cover administrative/core costs and publicly talking about the importance of doing so

2. Providing funding for leadership development courses, including values based leadership programmes

3. Clearly setting out expectations in regards to safeguarding practice in funding agreements

4. Making evidence-based funding decisions directly informed by the needs of beneficiaries

The government can demonstrate leadership by:

1. Facilitating organisations working with each other through the creation of appropriate forums for the exchange of information on best practice and 'what works'

2. Building trust with charities by publicly supporting the need for charities to spend a proportion of money on administrative costs

3. Reinstating funding for safeguarding training support programmes like Safe Network. As 91% of charities are solely reliant on volunteers, these programmes should be free at the point of access

The Charity Commission can demonstrate leadership by:

1. Providing detailed advice to trustees about the expected safeguarding and HR activity and expected proportionate expenditure on such activity

2. Making it easier to report a concern about a charity

3. Taking action if safeguarding is found to be inadequate and explaining why

4. Promoting what works

How do we achieve these objectives? Next steps

This document outlines how leaders can create a safe organisational culture, the structural and sector specific challenges that can distance leaders from achieving best practice, and the actions that could help leaders overcome those challenges.

Following from this ACEVO recommends that a safeguarding centre for excellence is created as part of the civil society strategy. The centre should include the reinstating of the Safe Network training programme and the development of a programme of values led leadership training.

Further to this ACEVO recommends that research is commissioned to examine the state of leadership in the charity sector in order to understand how bullying cultures are created and sustained within charities, and what can be done to reduce the risk of them occurring. This research should centre the voices of those that have experienced harm.

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