

# Organisational development



## Description

Organisational development covers a variety of activities including the processes and results of consumer input into organisation/team plans, policies and procedures. Aspects include partnerships between consumers and providers; consumer input into needs assessment and evaluations of services; human resource development including assignment of consumer participation responsibilities to staff; access and equity policies and procedures; consumer participation policy and complaints handling mechanisms.

## How it works

Where consumer participation is effective it is not an “add-on” but fundamental to the planning, provision and review of services: all relevant policies and procedures reflect a systemic commitment to consumer participation.

To achieve this, planning processes reflect effective consumer participation practices and are described in an easy-to-use style incorporating plain English. Consumer participation principles and practice are embedded in service and accreditation standards, relevant accountability requirements and management planning and monitoring practices within organisations.

Portfolio responsibility for Consumer Participation is designated at a senior management level in each service type and provides a focus for all consumer participation approaches throughout the agency. Consumer access to managers is a key to ensuring consumer participation strategies do become embedded and is highly symbolic to other staff. Overt management support for consumer participation can include management participation in and resourcing of Consumer Reference Groups.

Specific staff roles may be designed to foster consumer participation or a commitment to CP may be included in essential criteria in all position descriptions.

There is usually a documented consumer participation plan or strategy and well-developed communication strategies to present the goals, intent, strategies and “big picture” of consumer participation to staff and consumers.

Effective response to consumers’ complaints is recognised as a vital aspect of consumer participation. An effective complaints system starts with a commitment from the organisation to fair resolution of complaints at all levels of the organisation. Key performance

indicators for complaints systems include how complaints are recorded, how quickly action occurs, feedback to the consumer and the recording of outcomes and any further issues.

## Degree of participation

Consultation.

## Timeframe

Ongoing.

## Resource level required

Initially high, then low.

As with everyday practice, organisational development requires an initial high level of resources to review policies and procedures and implement changes, but a relatively low level of ongoing resourcing. In consultation with consumers, resources are required for staff training and development, and policy and procedure review.

Networks—formal or informal groups of people with common interests—are critical to service development and change. Information and developments about particular issues can be fed through them and this can influence views of key people.

## Strengths

Management support and involvement means that all CP activities undertaken by the organisation are likely to be more widely accepted and valued.

A coherent organisational approach to consumer participation strengthens the organisation’s ability to take full advantage of its benefits and avoid concerns of tokenism.

Communication strategies can provide a shared basis for consumers and staff to work together to articulate recommendations, talk about difficulties and develop specific local approaches to consumer participation. Mentoring relationships may be established between experienced practitioners (both staff and consumers) and those keen to develop greater expertise.

Effective complaints processes ensure staff recognise consumer complaints, even if they are not presented in the language of the organisation. These processes have the capacity to identify systemic problems and help to monitor the organisation’s capacity to meet standards. In addition, there is a transparent relationship between complaints and satisfaction and feedback strategies. For example, complaints and

responses are publicised to all consumers.

## Weaknesses

To some extent the success of organisational development strategies may be influenced by organisational culture. Consumer participation will not be effective without the organisation being open to change; organisational change will not reflect consumer perspectives without their involvement. The process of engagement with consumers is crucial, right from the very beginning of the process.

## Example



One Melbourne-based agency providing services to homeless people monitored its existing complaints/grievance process and found that the 'threshold' was too high: the complaints process was complex and consumers were more likely to complain informally.

In response, a new process was developed in which staff record consumers' verbal complaints and concerns (including the nature of the concern raised, the response provided and all follow-up action taken). Themes are identified amongst these verbal concerns in much the same way as near misses are recorded in Occupational Health and Safety procedures. Consumers are always advised of the formal complaints process and the limits of informal complaints; but the organisation has started to take informal complaints seriously enough to respond to common grievances.

The complaints mechanism has thus been changed to accommodate the needs of consumers.

## Tips

☞ In developing consumer participation processes and policies, ensure that you involve consumers and gain their input from the outset.

## For more information...

- <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/publications/downloads/conspart.pdf>
- Networks: <http://www.participateinhealth.org.au/clearinghouse/#I>. "IMPROVING HEALTH SERVICES THROUGH CONSUMER PARTICIPATION: A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR ORGANISATIONS". p.90. Viewed November 2007.