

**Beyond Lockdown:
Observations and Support from Cranfield Trust**

May 2020



As we find ourselves in week eight of lockdown, we're starting to talk about the 'new normal' and what our world might look like as we come out of emergency mode and move back to some sort of normal activities.

It's hard to predict in a time of such uncertainty, but despite the hardship in many communities, and the stretched resources, we are seeing a number of positive trends, and some clear priorities amongst the charities we work with across the country.

One silver lining to the pandemic cloud is the high level of interest in **volunteering**. We're receiving a lot of new contacts from highly skilled commercial sector managers keen to give their time to support charities. Some of them are furloughed, others are taking the opportunity to volunteer in the time that they would normally spend commuting or travelling. People are volunteering for all sorts of activities – formally and informally, and we are finding ways of engaging them, and ensuring that we form longer term relationships that will keep their engagement going once the crisis is over.

Over the last twelve years, we've found that many charities have struggled to **plan ahead**. In a long period of austerity, during which we've experienced uncertainty created by a tough economic climate, public spending cuts, elections, and then Brexit, it's been hard for charity leaders to find indicators to help them set their organisation's direction. At Cranfield Trust, we're now seeing organisations keen to plan ahead, to develop recovery and rebuilding plans, prompted by the harsh environment, and setting out their agendas in a more positive way than in recent years.

Long term **remote working** has been a new experience for many of us, and there are positives. We're finding that internal communications are often stronger than before, as we pay more attention to keeping in touch, and that much can be achieved thanks to enabling technologies. It won't be the case for everyone, but in future, some organisations may find economies in having flexible teams, with more home-workers. We could find that we can engage with service users and other stakeholders effectively, remotely, and are free to work without geographical boundaries and to maximise our people resources across the country. We will all think carefully about our previous routines, rather than returning to them without question.

The challenge of **remote working** is one of the trends emerging from our client base of small to medium size charities, where we believe there will be a strong need for support in the coming weeks and months. For many organisations, adapting services to deliver remotely is a huge challenge, and having the technology, skills and capacity for substantial change to your business model is not easy.

Chief Executives report that they are spending much more time than usual maintaining contact with colleagues, and **supporting people through change**. People are anxious about their futures if they are on furlough, some wish they were on furlough, and can be frightened if their jobs involve direct contact with others, travelling on public transport, or otherwise feeling exposed to risk, often without suitable PPE. Mental health should be on all Chief Executives' agendas, any future plans will need to have a strong focus on supporting people through continuing change, and leaders will need to balance an organisation, internal focus with an externally oriented, resource generation role.

Developing **improved financial understanding** in charities is time-critical: many leaders and trustees are not completely on top of their cashflow forecasts, and not always clear about what their financial future looks like, and how long it lasts. Improving knowledge and skills in this area may not be the most enjoyable

experience, but it's critical now, and will stand Chief Executives and their organisations in good stead in the medium and longer term.

There is no doubt that there will be a dramatic (if potentially drawn out) reshaping of the sector as resources fall substantially, as need and demand for support from charities rises. It won't be clean and it won't be logical, but not all existing organisations will survive in their current form, and some of the excellent grassroots initiatives that have sprung up to support communities deserve to flourish and grow.

To achieve the most with increasingly limited resources, and to make the most of skills and knowledge, we all need to be thinking about the shape of our particular parts of the sector, and how we can **organise around needs and services**, rather than individual organisations. Merger has been an unpopular option for many charities, but must be considered, as there simply won't be enough funding to maintain every charity. We should plan ahead, with others in our own and related areas, to retain critical skills and local knowledge around key services. We will all need to stand back from our own organisations, and see the wider picture, whether it's of our local community, or community of interest.

How we can help: at Cranfield Trust, we're lucky to have over 1,200 commercial sector volunteers, giving their time to act as advisors, mentors and consultants – remotely. We are continuing to work with over 300 charities around the country as well as responding to many more who are contacting us now. Our volunteers are putting forward guidance and views on our website with tools and approaches to support charity leaders, and are taking calls to provide immediate help and advice.

For all of us, staying strong and supporting each other is critical. Contact us at Cranfield Trust if you would like some management support from one of our volunteers, we'd be happy to hear from you.

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