



Appointing an Operations Manager

Or reviewing an existing post

A38 Articles series: Structures

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The idea of a Church Administrator has become a normal expectation in all but the smallest churches throughout the UK. Now a growing number of larger churches appoint, in addition, an Operations Manager, or someone with a similar job title.

What is this appointment? What is the scope of 'operations' and does this apply just to larger churches? Is this just a trendy thing to do, or can it have real value for the growth and development of the church?

This article is written:

- benefiting from input from a number of those who work in this role in a range of denominations;
- working alongside 200 such 'senior managers' in the UK Church Administrator Network (UCAN) at the time of writing;
- having advised many churches on posts of this kind through detailed consultancy exercises.

It has been prepared for church leaderships considering such an appointment or reviewing an existing post, and also for all who work in church operations. I welcome email comment and will take this into account in future updates.

Throughout this article I use the generic job title of 'Operations Manager', occasionally abbreviated to 'Manager'. Churches use a variety of terms as described in Part 3.

This article covers:

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1: The concept of operations

We live in a complex world. Charities including churches are now expected to conform to a wide range of best practice in areas of life that were not even on the horizon when I was what would now be termed a church Operations Manager. The Charity Commission and HMRC now expect a wide range of policies to be in place and for there to be strict compliance with an ever-expanding and changing body of legislation.

Churches have also become more complex. There are now more large churches (over 350 weekly attendance, say) with diverse programmes – compared with an age when the congregation came for services and mid-week groups led by clergy and then went home again. There has been a move from a book culture with fixed liturgies to screens with innovative patterns of worship. The leadership of young people's work now requires specialists. People expect to be involved in everything and so need co-ordinating.

At the same time the pressure on people in the workplace has increased. In an age of comparative luxury, many couples will have both partners in paid employment with children offered a range of lifestyle options at weekends.

This means that patterns of volunteering have changed, with few people having the time and energy to front major projects in their spare time. Many are still willing to be involved but only if they are managed well and can see that they will be given proper support and encouragement. There are also extended families scattered over a wide area, with a lessening of commitment to an idea of membership or loyalty to weekly church attendance.

On top of all this there is a new culture which demands high standards of presentation, immediate digital communication, sophisticated technology and a wide range of choice for everything.

At the same time the UK now has a secular culture where Christianity is no longer the norm but the exception and where what feels right is seen to be right. So churches are having to adapt to an 'exile' environment if they are to survive at all. If churches are to be taken seriously in this new age, they can no longer appear as amateur institutions that expect people to come without questioning.

Welcome to the world of Operations!

Who could fulfil this role?

But who is to undertake this work of managing the operations of a church, the way we co-

ordinate all our people and physical resources and work within legislative requirements?

Ministers?

Ministers are ordained or appointed to provide churches with the gifts of leadership, teaching and disciple-making (or apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, teaching and pastoring (from Ephesians 4). The busyness of life today seeks at every moment to take them away from those priorities. So, over the past 40 years, the idea of Church Administrators has developed from tentative beginnings to become the norm. That is, the idea of skilled people who can undertake routine daily tasks and so free Ministers for the ministry they need to be focusing on if the church is to grow. This freeing up of the clergy is the same for operations but at one level up.

There is one area of exception: the idea of a few Ministers, within churches where there is also a Senior Minister, taking on what Americans would call the role of Executive Pastor. This involves operational responsibilities coupled with the normal expectations of a Pastor. But I believe this, though valid, should not become the norm.

Administrators?

So why not let Church Administrators take on operational responsibilities? This is, after all, a natural extension of an Administrator role.

That is true, and some Church Administrators move on to become excellent Operations Managers. But if you try to combine the two roles (which really need two different areas of gifting), the danger is that what is urgent will always win over what is important. Administrative work is often urgent rather than important, whereas operations are usually important rather than urgent. That means that if time is squeezed, and it usually is in church life, administration will always win.

And although one is a development of another, operations is more leadership than support. It may be trellis work rather than vine (to use an analogy from a widely read book) but it is still part of leadership. So it is different from administration and should be seen as such.

Volunteers?

Why not make Operations a church office just like Treasurer? Does it have to be paid staff? Well, no, some people are appointed without payment, usually in retirement from secular employment. But the work is at such a level and needs quantities of time every week that it makes sense for the norm to be seen as paid. It requires an energy that few can give while also in 'normal' employment.

So the concept of a church Operations Manager could be taken on by a specialist Minister (as Executive Pastor), could be a natural development of an Administrator role (but is at a different level of responsibility), and could be undertaken by a volunteer (with plenty of time to give). The norm, however, will be a paid, lay employee within the leadership of the church.

Operations v administration

This is an article on operations, not just administration. It is about designing the environment for administration more than handling daily detail. If your church wants a responsible administrator to manage the church office and to oversee the daily detail, that is fine but call them an Office Manager or Senior Administrator. This article assumes something that is more than administration.

It is vital for the church to fix the key elements of the post because otherwise the incessant demands of the daily detail will quickly bring the role down from a strategic level to one of daily maintenance and, worse still, unnecessarily taking work off volunteers.

This is how one church currently advertising such a post sum it up: "This is a senior role with significant responsibilities that cover most of the daily operations of church life... The Manager would support the elders in the vision-setting process by providing strategies and procedures that will give life and shape to that vision. As we seek to fulfil all that God has planned for us over the coming years, this role will be key in the life of the church."

Growing churches need to recognise that there comes a point where a Church Administrator post is no longer sufficient on its own and that an additional operations role is the next major step up to enable the growth to continue without strain.

This point must be recognised by the existing church staff and the main leadership body. For example, is there an automatic expectation that

"Whilst I find this job challenging, fairly all-consuming and sometimes downright irritating, it is also extremely rewarding."

A church Operations Manager

when the Administrator is away the Operations Manager will handle church reception? The answer to that is quite a give-away to the perception of this post.

Some churches advertise for an Operations Manager when they mean a Senior Administrator. This confuses the picture. It could be helpful to define generic levels of responsibility as follows:

- Church Administrator – managing a church office and daily, routine detail;
- Senior Administrator – including some operational responsibilities;
- Operations Manager – the focus of this article;
- Director of Operations – for large churches where there will be an organisational team.

Some posts of course seek to cover both Church Administrator and Operations Manager. I have one example before me as I write which includes both the running of the office and the church diary, and to oversee financial controls and act as HR officer and other such responsibilities. But there are immediate clashes between these two aspects of two rather different roles. Responsibility for strategic thinking and planning does not come easily when sitting at the church office reception desk.

This article therefore focuses on the role of Operations Manager and assumes a separate Church Administrator appointment.

Smaller churches

That last sentence may not be feasible in a medium-sized church and the idea of an Administrator alone will probably be sufficient in a small church. So some churches need to read this article with a recognition that they may need to compromise and appoint to a post somewhere between administration and operations. Or, better, they may have two quite separate part-time posts. Several Operations Manager appointments in large churches are also part-time.

2: A leadership role

I see many Operations Manager job descriptions but few spell out the key, strategic priorities clearly enough. Instead they move too quickly to responsibilities. The 'what could be' element of the role will quickly be consumed by the day-to-day detail unless the bigger picture is placed at the hub. So I start here with five key purposes I suggest for this role.

The purpose of such appointments

1 To turn the vision into reality

The post is at heart all about taking the church's vision and enabling it, under God. Visions need viable plans if they are to become reality. The Operations Manager may input into the vision process, but their role is to take the vision and to bring together all the resources available to bring it to fruition. This is done first by drawing up a strategic plan for leadership approval, and then by actioning the plan.

The role should be, primarily, enabling the church to move from vision to plan to achievement, and in all this to be continually reshaping the vision to make it attainable given the faith-level of the church and the resources available.

2 To enable continual change for effectiveness

If the first key element is the development and practice of a strategic plan, then the management of change will be the second.

The change in question involves monitoring and applying continuous improvements to ongoing processes. But as change in life is now the norm, the role has more to do with making change happen effectively and efficiently so that the church can grow. A post of this nature is not about maintenance but should be seen instead as a catalyst for change and growth.

The concept of guiding people through change should be central to the role.

3 To manage people well

The Operations Manager is responsible for ensuring the most effective use of resources within the church. The most important resource is its people, whether paid staff or unpaid volunteers. This means that the Manager needs to have all kinds of people-skills that an Administrator may not need in anything like the same measure. Managing volunteers in a church environment is one of the most challenging aspects of many of these roles. In

particular there will be the leading of teams in various operational areas.

The post will also include the management of church members and visitors by setting out the best-fit structures and systems so that pastoral care and evangelism can flourish.

4 To co-ordinate all aspects of organisation

Co-ordination is a surprisingly underused word in church operations, but it is of vital importance. Consider Paul's picture of the body. The ultimate co-ordination there is through the Head who is Christ.

Where many churches fail to maximise their opportunities is because effort is being expended in different directions all at once by a large number of, mostly, volunteers. The church's vision is one uniting factor but to have a member of staff who feels the responsibility for enabling all effort to be directed in one direction can have a profound impact.

5 To release the pastoral staff for church growth

The idea of releasing other staff for their work of ministry is one tightly bound up within the concept of a Church Administrator appointment. Here the focus is usually on undertaking work that the Minister and other staff would have to do if it were not for the Administrator in post.

This 'principle of release' in Acts 6:1-7 applies just as well to operations appointments, though here it is likely that much of the work they are doing would be simply left undone if they were not available.

Almost all of what is described in Part 4 as the scope of such appointments is now necessary, but while Ministers might worry about it and volunteers would cover some of it as best they could, much would be squeezed out by the pressure of the weekly programme.

An Operations Manager appointment, though, takes a huge weight of responsibility off the Senior Minister, provided he or she is prepared to relinquish this (see below).

These five ideas:

- Planning
- Change
- Management
- Co-ordination
- Release

will anchor this post correctly, whatever the detail of the job description. Sort the purpose before rushing in to plan the responsibilities.

The role's place within the church's leadership

It is vital to grasp that this is a leadership role, even though a support ministry. This kind of post needs to be seen in vocational terms. It is a calling from God, not just another job for someone to pick up. The gift translated 'administrators' or 'guidance' in 1 Corinthians 12:28 is a leadership term and fits the idea of operations much better than the UK idea of administration (which has its own gift in the list: 'helpers').

A member of the senior staff team

It follows that Operations Managers need to be part of the senior management team for the church, be this 'senior staff', 'eldership', or 'leadership team'.

This is both so that they understand and are involved in the leadership ethos and appreciate why decisions are being made, but also so that they can flag up operational issues at an early stage. People whose vision may at times run ahead of the practicalities are then saved from costly mistakes. There is also less chance of an unhelpful wedge being driven between the 'organisational' and 'ministry' areas of church life.

Long before the Operations Manager starts work the leaders and senior staff have to be enthusiastic for this appointment at this level. If the post is seen as a senior administrator, its strategic role is unlikely to flourish.

I often advise larger churches that a senior staff team consisting of Senior Minister, Associate Minister and Operations Manager is a healthy and stable structure to work towards. The Senior Minister can focus on leadership and teaching, the Associate on discipleship and outreach, and the Operations Manager on every aspect of organisation to enable church health.

But such a post requires the proper delegation of significant areas of church life. Many Ministers are not trained in this environment and may find

"This is from my experience an enabling role and needs tact and discretion to balance the needs to be hands on on a daily basis against remaining strategic."

A church Operations Manager

this difficult. This is not the same as an Administrator appointment – this is an executive appointment at leadership level. It can be very frustrating for a dedicated Operations Manager to find that the Senior Minister is seeking to micro-manage them or failing to give them proper authority for their responsibilities.

Within the governance structure

It is not wise for the Operations Manager to be an elected trustee but it is vital that they are present at meetings where strategic decisions are taken so they can advise on the operational implications. It is the role of the Manager to point these out at once and devise plans that work round any obstacle.

What needs careful thought is therefore the place on the trustee body, eldership, PCC or equivalent. The general rule of thumb here is for the Operations Manager not to be a member of such bodies but to be present at meetings and expected to take a full part, without a 'vote'.

It is also beneficial to be a member of other groups where there is an operational element, for example Premises, Finance, HR, to encourage 'joined-up' thinking for all such decisions. Whatever the structure, the Operations Manager needs to be given the necessary authority to carry out their role.

Relationships with other leaders

The Senior Minister

The relationship of Operations Manager and Senior Minister is a crucial one. The post can only work well if this relationship blossoms. This calls for considerable measures of trust and respect on both sides, plus a clear understanding of the scope of the Operations Manager's role and the nature of leadership delegation within this. The danger is that this relationship will not be considered in enough detail before an appointment is made, nor worked at with sufficient care once the person is in post.

It may work brilliantly though there are difficulties in the way. The most obvious of these is that there are likely to be two very different skill-sets involved. Another will be that the Senior Minister may have been used to taking overall responsibility for operations (even if he or she did not have the time to fulfil this role) and the appointment marks a major development.

The Senior Minister will normally line manage the Operations Manager, but the Manager may need to help the Senior Minister to do this well! It is all too easy for difficulties to arise, especially if the Senior Minister is unused to the idea of delegating major areas of leadership responsibility.

The pastoral staff team

It is necessary too for other staff to accept the new appointment and enable it to fly. My experience is that sometimes the pastoral staff are thrilled to have someone taking charge of the organisational side of church life because they can see major advantages for themselves.

I have also seen the opposite: of staff seeking to undermine the Operations Manager's authority or simply ignoring any systems or policies they set up and carrying on as before because ministry must be free, they assume, to determine its own way of working irrespective of legal or best practice needs.

Key volunteer leadership posts

The relationship with, for example, Church Wardens, Circuit Stewards or Church Secretary needs to be considered with care because it may not be obvious how work is to be allocated between them and the Operations Manager. Who is responsible for property issues, for example? More to the point, who is legally responsible and exactly what are they delegating?

The Treasurer

Here the issue will be the respective roles of Treasurer and Operations Manager in the area of financial management. Because the Manager will normally be paid by the church, they should not have overall strategic responsibility for finance. But they may have oversight of financial controls and management accounting. This is covered again in section 4.7 below.

Key committees

The Operations Manager's place on committees which relate to his or her work needs to be determined in advance. As mentioned above, where does the Manager fit with regard to the Finance Group, the Plant and Ground Group, the Staffing Group, and so on? Is the Manager a member of each of these, the convenor of each one, or will he or she disband them?

3: The post-holder

In this part I consider the person appointed to this role: the person profile, some inherent tensions and practical matters about employment.

Person profile

From all that has been covered so far it will be apparent that the person profile needs to be that for a Christian leader.

It should be straightforward to demonstrate the need for the post to have an Occupational Requirement (OR) for the post-holder to be a Christian, provided it is clear that the role involves sharing with the Senior Minister in the leadership of the church and the strategic direction it should be moving in.

Christian character and gifting

The person appointed should:

- be a mature Christian (OR in place);
- with some evidence of calling to this role;
- willing to become a member of this church, committed to its vision and values;
- with a godly character, satisfying the kind of standard laid down in 1 Timothy 3;
- able to work on their own initiative;
- with a servant heart, being a listener, a learner;
- with good experience of leadership and practical service in a (larger) church;
- displaying the spiritual gifts of administration/leadership.

The Manager needs to be highly disciplined and yet to be flexible when required, to be able to spin many plates, to cope with pressure and deadlines, to be highly organised and hard-working. Key abilities include being able to say 'no' to self and others and to manage conflict with church members and others.

The Manager needs to have worked out how to work in an operational role for a local church where Sundays sit in tension between work and worship, and where it is vital to be able to set boundaries so that there is proper time off for friends and family, rest and recreation.

Note: Churches differ on whether the post holder should have a separate area of ministry as a volunteer outside their operational responsibilities. This should be clarified before appointment as part of the recruitment process so that expectations are known and agreed.

Qualifications and education

Many churches expect a degree-level qualification and significant experience in operational work at a senior level. An MBA qualification is an advantage; it may also be helpful to have theological or Bible College training.

Experience

Experience within the Christian sphere is helpful whether in work for another church or with a Christian mission agency. There needs to be a good understanding of the denomination in question. There should normally be commercial or non-profit experience (note that people holding these posts come from a wide variety of business backgrounds in the commercial, public and charitable sectors). Then experience of all the relevant areas listed under skills and giftings below should include charity legislation and financial management.

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Skills

A general operational skill-set is more helpful than a narrow specialism within, for example, IT or HR unless the post demands such. Typical requirements include:

- leadership gifting;
- team leadership skills;
- people-management ability;
- ability to implement change;
- organisational skills at a high level;
- short, medium and long-term planning;
- strategic thinking;
- problem solving;
- policy making;

- excellence in communication;
- IT skills (as necessary);
- ability to network;
- ability to work under pressure;
- project management (as necessary);
- any specialist requirements to fit particular aspects of the job description.

Tensions inherent in the post

The role of a church Operations Manager calls for someone who can cope with a ministry that exists in tension in a number of ways. Here are some examples.

The application of professional management training within the theological entity of a local church

This calls for good business experience, an understanding of what a church is, and an ability to live in both worlds at the same time. Work within a church is closer to working in a charitable organisation than in a commercial enterprise. Yet a church is so much more than a charity.

The aim is not to find the solution that offers the best return but the one that is the will of God. Wisdom comes from God and not just from human experience. Someone coming out of the business world into this role, even if they are well used to church life as a volunteer, has plenty of unlearning to do in the first few months.

Being highly organised while allowing a considerable measure of flexibility

Churches, and especially larger churches, are significant operations working within a national context that is becoming increasingly structured. But this role is unlikely to fit someone who loves to have everything in neat boxes. The workers are mostly volunteers, not under any obligation of contract. They have their own theological understanding of church, much of which may simply ignore over-stylised regulations to revert to doing things the way they have always been done. However tight the organisation, there will be frequent occasions when a Plan B has to be put into place, or a neat process set aside.

Working with a senior staff who may not understand operations

The role of an Operations Manager in a church's small staff team (small compared with many commercial enterprises) can be very different from a typical managerial position. The CEO

equivalent, the Senior Minister, is more likely to be a pastor/teacher than a business manager and so the language of strategies and systems, of policies and plans, may be foreign to them, as may be the concept of delegation in such areas.

So in terms of the senior staff team the Operations Manager may be on their own in terms of gifting and needing to justify areas of their work or the need to keep within agreed guidelines.

Having high standards but working with the people who are available

Most of the 'workers' available to the Operations Manager will be volunteers. And most of these will not have been selected from a regional or national talent-pool but from the church's present membership. This means that there is always tension in standards, from doing things at what would be considered normal quality in the commercial world and involving people who are available in the church. Larger churches will be able to maintain higher standards, partly because of more paid staff and partly because of the larger pool to fish in for volunteers. But you do not select members of a church; they select you.

Keeping clear of administrative detail but 'mucking in' when required

Having made the point that this is a post about strategy and overview rather than hands-on, administrative detail, there are going to be times in most churches where everyone has to lend a hand. There will be chairs to put out for Sunday late on Saturday night, the non-appearance of the sound desk operator on Sunday morning, the awkward visitor who has dropped in to the church office, holiday cover for the Administrator.

It is also vital for the Operations Manager to know from experience what it is like to get a room ready for a meeting, to cope with a plumbing emergency, to answer the church phone with a welcome while juggling three other jobs. But beware of these becoming the norm or being allowed to take over from the strategic.

Being a leader and a servant

No more should need to be said.

Practical details

Employment

In most cases the employers will be the trustees/PCC and the line-manager will be one of these if they are the Senior Minister. This is

where things are not quite the same as in the commercial world and this point can pose some difficulties.

Job titles

Here are the most commonly used job titles:

- Operations Manager
- Director of Operations
- Head of Operations
- Church Manager
- Church Business Manager
- Executive Pastor

There may also be specialisms added in such as Centre Manager, Finance Manager or Resources.

Hours

Some Operations Manager work full time (say, nominally, 40 hours per week although many find themselves, like other church staff, working well over this). Others are contracted to work more like 30 hours per week, some of whom will have taken early retirement and others having family responsibilities.

Remuneration package

Salary scales vary widely, but a typical salary being offered for a full time post of this kind is often in the £30,000 - £35,000 range. Most people applying would probably earn double this in the secular world but there are real issues if one member of staff is paid far more than the Senior Minister and other staff members. If expecting someone to move house to the area concerned, there can be problems in places of high house prices unless the church can offer an equity scheme or provide tied housing.

Pension packages vary widely. The UK Church Administrators Network (UCAN) has the results of member-surveys which show what churches are paying among many other factors.

A few work voluntarily because they have a pension package or other income. This is of great advantage to the church, but problems can arise when the person gives up and there is a need to appoint someone else who will need a salary.

Office accommodation

It is important that the Operations Manager has a desk away from the reception area if work is to be done. This is not a Church Administrator appointment. Some people work part of their hours from home although the trend in larger

churches now is to have all the staff working from one base.

Sunday worship

It is hard to see how an Operations Manager can not be a member of the church they work for (unlike some Administrator appointments where this can be possible).

Sunday is a key issue for both Administrators and Operations staff. Some Operation Managers will have Sunday as a working day, or at least part of it. They will have some kind of front-of-house responsibility for ensuring everything works smoothly so the leader and the preacher can focus on their priorities.

Others will have Sunday as a day off and in these cases church worship can be difficult. For a start, they are church staff and so the servants of the church membership. Secondly, most people will only have an opportunity to do business with the Manager on Sunday.

So does the Manager come to church on Sunday as a member of staff or as a church member? This needs sorting out before the appointment is made. The important point is to recognise the issue and address it.

Work boundaries

Working for your own church, especially in an operations role, is very different from working for even a Christian mission. The Operations Manager may feel they rarely leave their work-base, and those they have had to reprimand on Friday kneel beside them for Communion on Sunday. Although many secular managers are now available by phone and email 24/7 and even when away on holiday, the church Operations

Manager has to physically meet up with 'colleagues' every weekend.

This is another issue that needs to be recognised and discussed. There need to be some boundaries in place to allow proper time off (including from phone calls and emails) but these will have to be created.

Selection

Advertise widely and provide a thorough selection process, even if there are good candidates within the church. Do not proceed unless the church is certain this will be a good appointment. This is such a key role and a poor appointment can have a serious impact on church life.

Ongoing personal development

It is important to build personal development into the post: skill training, leadership training, contact with operations staff in other churches, spiritual formation, Christian conferences and courses, mentoring from outside the staff team.

Joining UCAN

The UK Church Administrators Network (UCAN) has a large membership of people employed in church administration and operations. Of this figure about 200 classify themselves as senior-managers, usually with a title such as Operations Manager. Anyone taking on an operations role within a local church in the UK is strongly advised to join UCAN to benefit from a wide package of benefits including the *Cutting Edge* annual conference for managers and some local groups for operations staff.

Join online at <https://www.churchadministrators.net>.

4: The scope of the post

The scope of this role, even in a medium-sized church, is considerable. What follows is a list of 18 possible areas of responsibility within the five purposes already outlined. But this is a huge range. Different churches will need to prioritise within this in different ways at different times.

Note this article covers the issues but does not attempt a sample set of job papers for a post of this kind. This is because, as explained, there is no one typical post and the job needs to be shaped around current needs and the five purposes already listed in Part 2.

Priorities

The temptation is to get involved in the detail of the 18 points that follow. Many people will assume that is what the Operations Manager is paid to do. But what matters is co-ordinating oversight and strategy, not day-to-day detail. The latter should be undertaken by administrative staff, by volunteers or through outsourcing. So the Manager needs to protect time for what should be priorities such as thinking, planning, policies, legal compliance, setting up better systems, being strategic, prayer.

When appointing it is essential that the church determines the priorities it wants for the job. If they fail to do this the post-holder will shape the role to fit his or her own abilities and interests.

It is essential to bear in mind when selecting priorities from this list that these will change as the church develops. One year it will be on staff recruitment and a building project, the next on volunteer mobilisation and a new IT system. So there needs to be considerable flexibility within this list. Any new post should be carefully reviewed after a few months and the job description amended as necessary.

1 Administration/office

This article has clearly made the point that operations is more than advanced administration. The Operations Manager, however, needs to manage the administrative function within the church to ensure it is working towards the church's vision and enabling other ministries.

This means that the Manager might have overall responsibility for the work of the church office, while delegating the day-to-day detail to the Administrator or others. The Manager should line manage the Administrator (and in some cases other administrative staff) and should in this be a role model for other staff of what good management should be.

There is also opportunity here to demonstrate what good delegation should look like so that other staff and leaders within the church can see this worked out in practice.

“In six years in this post my church's priorities have changed significantly and rapidly over time. So my primary focus has at different times had to be on vision definition and roll-out, staff recruitment and reorganisation, team building and church volunteer culture change.”

A Church Manager

2 Church services

Some job descriptions include the responsibility for all operational aspects of Sundays and of any weekday services too. Once again the idea is not to get too involved in any one aspect but to maintain an overview of all that is necessary for a service to function effectively. This would include:

- welcome ministry – with oversight of teams of hosts, stewards, welcomers, etc.;
- unlocking and layout – the general preparation of the building which may involve setting out chairs if a building is hired or in multi-use;
- sound, heat and light – those responsible for the sound desk and practical aspects of the building;
- visuals – operators for projection display and cameras;
- music – any technical issues for singers and instrumentalists;
- refreshments – teams for preparing and serving coffee;
- clearing up – the necessary work to be done after the service.

Some Operations Managers appoint duty managers for each service, so that they can be freed up to take an overview. The point here is to release the church's spiritual leaders for their ministries of leading, speaking and welcoming and to take off them all concerns for the practical and technical aspects of any service.

3 Commercial

The most common commercial operation that a Manager might oversee will be the letting of rooms. Is the priority role, for example, to bring in income, to serve a local community, to see this as part of the church's Christian outreach or to offer a resource to other churches?

Other commercial interests may include:

- a church coffee shop;
- a bookstall or bookshop;
- visitor ministry for some tourist buildings;
- a venue for local, regional or even national events;
- a schools projects run by the church;
- church playgroups run commercially;
- a community hall used for sports or other activities.

The Operations Manager will be concerned with commercial purpose and vision. So the letting of rooms may require a Bookings Secretary, a

Receptionist and a Caretaker to handle the day-to-day requirements. Sometimes a Church Administrator covers all these three needs. The Manager may however need to take an interest in one-off systems and the drawing up of terms and conditions. If teams of volunteers are necessary (for lettings, cafés, visitor ministry, etc.) the Manager may have oversight of mobilisation, training and care.

A few Operations Managers also have 'Centre Manager' or similar built into their job title, because a major part of their responsibility involves overseeing the use of a building open to others.

4 Comms – internal

In most churches there is a wide range of means used to put messages across, but often the means used are not appropriate for either the message or the recipients. So the task of the Operations Manager is to ensure that messages are put in a form that people need, are put across using appropriate means (usually, several different means), in a way that minimises distortion of what the sender intended, and so that the recipient actually takes the message in and then acts upon it.

The most common means would include:

- printed newsletter or magazine;
- weekly news-sheets;
- individual emails and letters;
- website;
- social media;
- text messages;
- oral or screen-based notices at services;
- notices through a small group structure.

Most churches will have individual members responsible for one of these: a newsletter editor, the Administrator perhaps for emails, a Small Group Co-ordinator. But what is needed is a comms supremo, someone who can think about the whole rather than one part.

5 Comms – external

This is a different issue from internal communications, even if some of the means used are the same. Communicating the church and the faith to those outside church membership should be seen as part of an outreach strategy.

Issues here include the concept of branding, of putting across messages in a language that those of no faith will understand, of using opportunities to make contact with those who are

not naturally going to initiate the linkage. External means not already listed include:

- signboards;
- banners and car stickers;
- doorstep distributions;
- displays;
- information or welcome packs;
- the appearance of the building inside and out;
- church members by their behaviour.

The point here is less on co-ordination and more on strategic use of means within a plan to lead to a vision. Once again, it is overview rather than detail that matters.

6 Decision-making systems and structures

Churches, by tradition, seek to take everyone with them and so move slowly on deciding on matters of key importance. But the need today is for greater speed and risk-taking in the mission situation that exists.

The Operations Manager may therefore be expected to oversee the governance structure of the church, seeking to minimise waste of energy and maximise output. This will involve the organisation of church membership meetings, the working group or committee structure reporting to the main Council or other decision-making body, the purpose of different decision-making bodies to minimise duplication, the accountability and reporting structure throughout the church, the role of the staff team within this, and so on.

Within this structure there will then be a range of systems with the aim of enabling all business to move to wise decision-making in an appropriate way. The role will involve improving all existing systems and developing new ones to promote effectiveness.

7 Financial management

An Operations Manager should not be responsible for financial strategy: that role belongs to the Treasurer who, especially in a larger church, should be freed from daily management to focus on the bigger picture and the giving of financial advice. It should also be noted that as most Operations Managers will be paid from central church funds, there would be conflicts of interest in that they also held strategic responsibility.

With a range of financial operations carried out in a church office, often by an administrative member of staff responsible for book-keeping, some Managers take responsibility for particular aspects of their management under the Treasurer. They may even have 'Financial Director' within their job title. Examples include:

- oversight of payroll (PAYE) and pension provision, whether handled internally or outsourced;
- purchase of utilities, supplies, buying schemes;
- budget controls;
- production of monthly or bimonthly management accounts;
- oversight of systems for handling cash;
- business accounts for any church commercial operations;
- means of developing new financial systems for use of cards, phones, etc.;
- limiting risk by setting up appropriate controls;
- oversight of all insurance policies.

8 HR

Few Operations Managers are going to be HR experts but they should know rather more about what is required, and what level of flexibility would be sensible in a Christian environment, than most other church staff.

There are, today, major issues associated with compliance with legislation and best practice in:

- recruitment and selection of staff;
- training of staff;
- staff handbook and all associated issues;
- employment in a non-profit setting;
- dismissal and redundancy;
- mobilisation of volunteers throughout the church;
- selection and support for volunteers in specific roles.

Once churches start to employ staff of any kind, this is an area that has to be taken seriously.

There may well be an HR expert in the congregation to act as adviser, or expertise may need to be bought in, but the Operations Manager needs to keep the overview to ensure that the church becomes a model employer. Sadly, many churches fall well short of this standard.

9 IT strategy

A few Operations Managers have hands-on responsibilities for IT within a larger church, but most will outsource this work to a specialist firm or to skilled members of the congregation. The Manager will need to grapple with areas such as:

- the most effective use of IT in the mission of the church;
- the networking of computers for the staff;
- best use of church management systems and other church-based software;
- the supply of IT back-up and support: internal or outsourced;
- security, confidentiality and data protection / GDPR;
- the purpose and overall design of the website;
- the use of social media within church life;
- text and email messaging to the membership.

10 Management: staff

Staff management is an area where churches are notoriously weak. Many Ministers are self-starters and not line-managed themselves, so find it hard to understand why this is needed. But most people need good management if they are to shine, and line management at its best is not about supervision or review but about developing people to be the best that they can be.

It may be that the Operations Manager advises and trains other staff in how to line manage those they are responsible for, while role modelling how to do it well themselves.

But there are examples of churches where the Manager's job description includes the management of most other staff, ministry and support, so that the Ministers can focus on priorities for them. The Manager may also have oversight of any interns, perhaps even of the running of an intern scheme.

As important as line management itself is the church's staffing structure. No one should be managing too many other people, and all should have training in how to do it well.

11 Management: volunteers

Coupled with this is the mobilisation, training and support of volunteers – the introduction, perhaps,

of a system so that people's gifts and passions can be harnessed for the service of the church. This needs an effective database of members which includes details of their areas of service, their capabilities and their availability. People will volunteer provided it is for manageable amounts of time during which they will be supported and resourced.

This point may be a key role for some Operations Managers: the mobilisation of the entire church work-force and the co-ordination of everyone's effort towards the vision. The aim will be to create an environment where people can flourish and see their potential maximised.

12 Networking

One often understated aspect of an Operation Manager's role is to maintain helpful links with external sources. The idea is to keep the church in question on the map in the local area. The list that follows is far from exhaustive, and other members of the church's staff or leadership may take responsibility for particular elements within this. But once again, it is helpful to have one person who feels the responsibility for oversight of the whole.

- other local churches in the area including Churches Together;
- denominational links in the area and region;
- Operations Managers in other churches, perhaps through UCAN*;
- national church bodies;
- Christian organisations locally and regionally;
- the local Council and other statutory bodies;
- the local Police including neighbourhood officers;
- local community associations;
- individuals who play key roles in the community or area.

**see final point in Part 3 for details.*

13 Plant

Some Operations Managers have specific responsibility for the buildings and housing stock that the church owns or manages. Where this remains the responsibility of a specialist working group it is probable that members of staff will be those on hand when issues arise. When vandalism is discovered at 9.00 am. on Monday,

"I've identified three critical actions in my first year in post: (1) devise a framework of policies to define and enable all our work (the work now); (2) devise a framework of strategies to give direction as we plan and move forward (the work ahead); (3) identify ways of making the work of the church sustainable – no longer dependent on key individuals (continuity). Everything else flows from these three."

A church Operations Manager

the members of the Plant and Grounds Group may all be far away at their workplace.

It will be Administrators who handle much of the day-to-day aspects of this but the Operations Manager will be involved at risk management within health and safety compliance, in managing contractors on site, and in decisions about budgets for staff housing,

In Anglican churches the Operations Manager will often arrange any faculty applications.

14 Policies

Only a few years ago this heading would not have even been considered, but today churches are required to show that they have clear policies in place on a wide range of issues. The Charity Commission and HMRC will both be checking up on this. See Training Notes TN111 for a detailed checklist.

Several items under this heading are already covered elsewhere in this list, but it is perhaps helpful to give an Operations Manager overall responsibility for writing and then maintaining and reviewing all the policies now expected.

Churches are in general now used to the requirements in both copyright and safeguarding, although policies on vulnerable adults are a recent additional requirement. What they are not so up to speed with are policies on the use of volunteers, contractors on site, lone working, use of social media and a wide range of other issues. To have one person responsible for all this best practice and legal requirement makes sense, and for many Operations Managers it is a key element within their job.

The benefit is not only compliance with national requirements but also an effective way of managing all the church's workers so that they feel confident that they are involved in a set-up that is professionally sound.

15 Projects

Operations Managers can easily be sucked into major projects within the church and it is important to determine whether these are part of the job or not. For example, a church weekend away should normally be handled by the leadership and the organisation of it by administrative staff.

A major global mission initiative, such as sending out teams to a Third World country for a project there, should only come the Operation Manager's way if this has been clearly assigned to their role.

On the other hand a major building project might form a significant part of a Manager's job description for a limited time. Unless there is someone in the church who can play this role voluntarily and who can be on site at short notice, it is helpful to have someone available with the authority to take immediate decisions when builders meet unexpected obstacles. There will also be strategic issues of fund-raising whether from external trusts and/or from the congregation, although again the detail of these should be handled by administrators.

If a project is part of the role the wise church will ensure that this is highlighted, its impact on other aspects of the role carefully calculated and understood, and the time that this applies for clearly documented. See Article A44 for details.

16 Risk management

This heading is closely linked to No. 14 and overlaps with other items. The role of an Operations Manager is to manage risk wisely within church life, whether in health and safety, employment, governance, food hygiene, safeguarding, data handling, event management.

This includes compliance with all necessary legislation, the current requirements of the Charity Commission and HMRC, and an approach that takes all such requirements seriously without being over-pedantic in a soul-less way.

17 Strategic plan

This has already been listed as one of the five purposes for a post of this kind, and it remains as a backdrop to everything on this list. But for churches that have just produced a vision for the future (which may have taken weeks or months to define and express), the Operations Manager now has the job of working with other leaders to devise the strategic plan to enable the church to focus its efforts on working towards that vision. A vision without a plan remains a wish list.

The three key stages are as follows.

- 1 To devise the plan – which needs to be realistic for the resources available yet challenging so that people put their trust in God rather than in their own ability to achieve it.
- 2 To put the plan into operation, using all the elements in this listing.
- 3 To monitor and adapt the plan year by year as necessary. This is the ultimate responsibility of the key governance group within the church but it will be the Operations Manager who guides them on this.

18 Systems

Churches are, in general, poor at implementing and updating systems to ensure that everything works smoothly. The reason is often that no one is responsible for such things or that different people look after different areas with little co-ordination.

The Operations Manager is the member of staff that can take an overview of systems and ensure they are all working together for effectiveness. Here are three examples:

- 1 A 'front door system': the linkage from new arrival on a Sunday, meeting Newcomers' Team member, newcomer's information processed, home visit, invitation to welcome lunch, allocation to a small group, membership application.
- 2 A 'back door system': someone who has missed three Sundays noted by small group leader or pastor, home visit, (if leaving church) – exit interview, lessons learnt to membership group, report to leadership.
- 3 The use of church management system software to oversee the work of all church volunteers.

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So there are 18 operational areas in church life. Only some will be priorities and these will change over time. But the Operations Manager will need to keep an overview of all 18 in some way. Their own involvement will depend much on the availability of others within the church, with what they outsource, and on their own gifts and experience.

This will be seen most sharply when one Manager hands the role over to another. The

new post-holder is sure to have a different skill-set from their predecessor. It is therefore important that any job description recognises what the post-holder can and cannot bring to the

role, what they fulfil themselves and what they delegate to others, and then to review the job description after a few months and adjust it as necessary in the light of experience.

NOTE

Many areas in this article are covered in other Articles and Training Notes on this website. For example, see article A17, 'Staff selection, step-by-step'; A28, 'Rooms to let'; A32, 'Be creative as a line manager' and A44, 'Making things happen'. In the Training Notes series, TN12, 'Twenty ideas to help people change'; TN31, 'Affirming volunteers'; TN58, 'Beware committees'; TN87, 'What to look for in your leaders, TN92, 'How genuine are your GORs?', TN111, 'A church policies checklist', and many more. See also the 'Church Health Review', HC5, sections on Leadership and Support.

Since writing this article I have published Article A42, 'What do Church Administrators do?'. This investigates the role of an employed Administrator working for a local church. The boundary between a Church Administrator and an Operations Manager is not that distinct. Some Administrators have to take on some responsibilities that more naturally fall to an Operations member of staff.

I have also added Training Notes TN126, *The small-church administrator*, which takes an operational line for smaller churches.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A38. For appointing a Church Administrator see Article A42, *What do Church Administrators do?* and Training Notes TN40, *Appointing an Administrator*. You might also be interested in the items listed in the NOTE above and many more on the website.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A38 under Structures with a link to Administration.

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