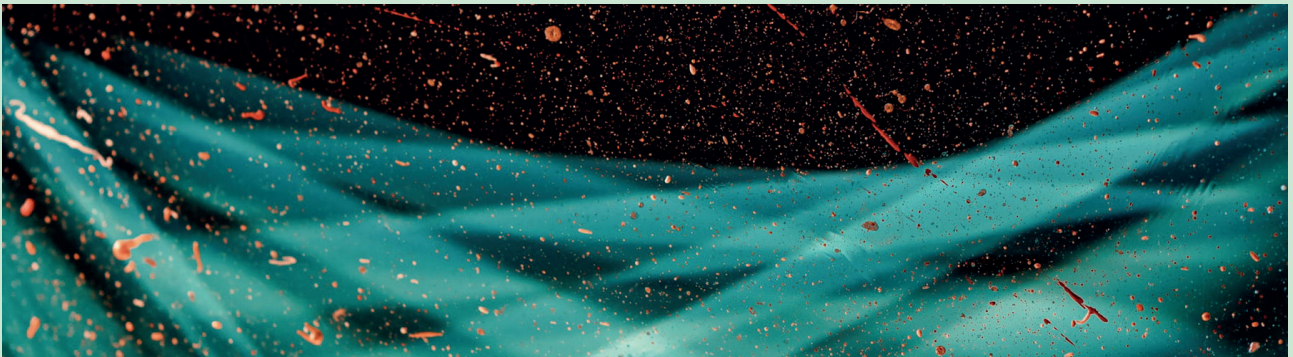


# Managing an Association and its Board Trends & Dilemmas for Non-Profit Managers

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The world of work is changing. New shifts and megatrends in the way we see, look at and are influenced by, technological developments, social shifts and cultural changes appear to become more pronounced by the minute. Researchers agree to disagree on the details but are united in their perception that fast-paced change and agile adaptation are bringing about a new equilibrium in the way we look at work and our free time. Lines are blurring, social and societal purpose move to the foreground, the concept of the 'alpha-leader' is largely disappearing and hierarchies are flattening. What does this mean for associations, their managers and leaders at board level?

*Words Christoph Raudonat*



In their research on *Work 2028 – Trends, Dilemmas and Choices*, Vogel et al. (2018) look at various factors influencing the world of business and the world of work as we know it. For the purpose of this article we will aim to highlight but a few of the key points raised in this research and bring them into the context of not-for-profit management.

## CRUCIAL TRENDS IN SHIFTING SOCIETIES

Under the title of 'ubiquitous digitalization' Vogel et al's (2018) research places the trends that already affect our industry today. Ever increasing use of new technologies on the one side supports our daily working lives and improves many routines that in the past may have been lengthy and complex. Blockchain

technologies and the processing of big data have potentially an enormous impact that we cannot fully foresee at this point, but we do know that change is coming. On the other side of the coin, Vogel et al's research also raises the question as to the possible downside of such ubiquitous developments. Resulting in even complex tasks being taken over by advanced technologies will see a shift in professions with

many current jobs disappearing or losing relevance.

For the not-for-profit sector the concept of relevance has long been at the forefront of the discussions with many articles being published on the topic. Remaining relevant when technology supports faster access to instant gratification is one of the crucial influences faced by association leaders, managers and boards alike. Is it enough to employ a talented millennial to do your social media outreach when the older members of staff aren't fully comfortable digitizing their lives?

A dilemma arises when we look closer at our tech needs and know that we need to update our expertise but how? Technology we have heard of for the near or distant horizon: ubiquitous people-machine interaction, dominant voice control, machine learning, artificial intelligence, autonomous transport solutions, virtual reality meetings, etc. The professional term for the concept of 'not exactly knowing' in this context is called '*informed disorientation*,' where we know we need to change but are as of yet unsure in which direction it will take us.

The respondents to Vogel et al's (2018) research raised questions such as how to update and sustain key decision makers' expertise on technology's possibilities and controversies? How to include tech-savvy contributors across organizational levels and boundaries in investment decisions? For the not-for-profit sector we might even need to go as far as to consider the implications of smaller organizations being run out of a home office that do not have the luxury to invest time in reflecting on needs. Will they be left behind and does that mean they are losing their relevance?

### CALLING FOR SOCIETAL PURPOSE

Especially not-for-profit organizations, by definition of their DNA, have an intrinsic responsibility towards society/societies. They are at the forefront of creating

societal purpose and meaning. Utilizing this strategic pole position can offer a wealth of engagement opportunities, not only with members of target groups but also with other partner organizations on the B2B side. It might be that professional (and not so professional) associations need to rethink their sometimes decades-old business practices to re-evaluate their purpose and thus re-define their societal relevance. A good place to start the discussion is to widen the circle of people with whom to discuss your organization's societal purpose.

### PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS, EPISODIC LOYALTIES AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

Also the not-for-profit world, or perhaps *especially* the not-for-profit world, is affected by episodic loyalties. Increasing trends in blurring the lines between private lives, working hours, the fulfilment of the self and giving work a meaning and social purpose might inspire us to rethink the way we look at our work relationships and engagement with our organizations. In practice, we often look at two contexts:

- Internal episodic loyalty: regularly changing identification following tasks, projects or roles, and
- External episodic loyalty: staying outside the organization but regularly engaging in mutual identification inside its boundaries (Vogel et al. 2018)

For the not-for-profit sector this may not seem like anything new as we deal with a variety of engagement possibilities during our working days. Looking, for example, at the relationships and influences a volunteer board and their (paid) managers will often emphasise the differences and gaps of perception of what is of importance and relevant to the organization. Bridging these gaps is an increasing challenge in the future within frameworks such as informed disorientation, organizational purpose formulation and a personal need for belonging.

Vogel et al's (2018) respondents put forward feedback questions for further debate: 1) What will serve as employees' anchor for loyalty: the organization, overlapping purposes, the meaning or the societal contribution of the work? 2) What will serve as organizations' anchor for loyalty and how can they reflect, communicate and act upon this with clarity? and 3) How to balance episodic loyalty with organizations' long-term activities and the need for knowledge-retention?

Reflecting on these questions will provide the not-for-profit leader with an indication of, and the interplay between, the various relationships at all levels of the organization. Association Management Companies (AMCs) and Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs) will appreciate this reflective exercise as episodic loyalty situations meander throughout their organizations like a thick web. Managing the different personal and professional relationships can often be a daunting task requiring time and effort and authentic engagement on all sides.

In closing, we looked at but a few immediate trends in managing associations with a forward-thinking approach in mind. From tech developments to purpose formulation at societal level towards bridging personal interest and loyalties we see that our race for relevance may only increase in speed and complexity. However, as not-for-profit organizations we can often count on guidance from a wide range of partners, friends and supporters. Our position within social and societal purpose equips our organization with a pole position that can be invaluable in navigating the stormy seas of the future of work.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers, author Christoph Raudonat, Business Development & Association Director, International Conference Services Ltd, on behalf of IAPCO President, Mathias Posch. IAPCO represents today 135 companies comprised of over 9,100 professionals.  
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