

## **Organising Activities and Services In Community Buildings**

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### **Summary**

The UK government has been urging 'the community' and community sector organisations (CSOs) to 'do things for themselves' for the last decade, and the new Coalition government's Big Society agenda looks set to continue this approach. However, there is little understanding of how small-scale, locality-based CSOs operate or of their capacity to take on service delivery. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by charting how 'community building organisations' such as village hall committees operate and are developing their roles from simple premises provision to enabling or even delivering services. It elaborates on three in-depth case studies to analyse the different roles which these organisations, as small-scale CSOs, play. The analysis highlights the importance of the different motivations of each organisation and the factors that enable or constrain their development opportunities.

## Introduction

"The village hall! That abiding icon of associativeness, conviviality and the volunteering ethic; of 'community'; a physical, if usually humble, focus of much of the traditional, 'unofficial' life of a village and its hinterland" (Ray, 2003, p.3). Village halls typify the 'community buildings' that form the focus of this paper. The term is used to encompass a group of organisations that are managed by a voluntary management committee, are run for public benefit and are host to a range of activities for a range of users (Marriott, 1997, p.1). They provide a hub for local community life, providing at minimum a building where local people can come together, often in formalised groupings as clubs and societies. Even in this minimalistic conceptualisation there is an organisation behind the premises provision and where wider provision is made, additional management functions are undertaken.

The need to understand these *organisations* is particularly pertinent now, given the renewed focus in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century on the ways in which CSOs – including community buildings organisations – are called upon by government to help resolve many societal problems. This agenda gained momentum with the introduction of the Active Communities Unit in the Home Office in 2001 for a three year period and the role of CSOs continued after that time to be an important strand of the Labour government's thinking as part of its 'Third Sector' (e.g., Communities and Local Government, 2007; HM Treasury, 2002; HM Treasury/Cabinet Office, 2007). This agenda for active communities looks set to continue as part of the Coalition government's Big Society agenda (Cabinet Office, 2010). This approach is also evident in many other European countries (Hautekeur, 2005).

The need for a better understanding of CSOs by government was recognised in the Code of Good Practice on Community Groups (Home Office, 2003b) in which useful contrasts with the larger voluntary organisations are drawn, typifying CSOs as:

- member-led
- focused on a neighbourhood or community of interest
- with a less formal structure and lower (or no) income
- membership-based
- with an ethos of self-help and mutual support
- providing informal and independent services
- representing community interests and residents (p.4).

The third sector has been conceptualised by policymakers as central to the building of 'strong, active and connected communities' (e.g., HM Treasury/Cabinet Office, 2007) where "people increasingly do things for themselves" (Home Office, 2003a, p.6). There is a role for CSOs as both the 'doers' in the locality, and the supporters of individuals and small groups who are the 'doers'. In this respect, the government (HM Treasury/Cabinet Office, 2007) describes how 'community anchors' perform both these roles (and more), how they "deliver services beyond the capacity of smaller groups, operate as a platform for community activity, facilitate wider community forums and networks and can negotiate on behalf of the local community sector" (p.40). These are normally 'large neighbourhood based organisations' which own or manage an asset base. In many smaller and more rural communities, though, the nearest approximation would be a small-scale community building organisation. This paper studies the extent to which such organisations might provide a 'platform' for rural community activity, enable the provision of activities and services by other organisations or deliver them themselves.

### **Understanding community buildings as organisations: recent literature**

Community sector organisations are mainly small-scale, and represent communities of place or interest (Harris, *et al.*, 2001). The majority of CSOs are dwarfed in scale and profile by the contrastingly large, professionalised voluntary organisations with their 'mission statements' and 'logos' (Deakin, 1995, p.62) with which they are categorised as the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The result is that if the VCS "is considered as an iceberg, then the great majority of writing about voluntary organisations over the last thirty years has concentrated on the tip of this iceberg to the exclusion of the nine-tenths of its organisational population that is hidden beneath the water" (Rochester, 1998, p.4). This paper seeks to address this gap in the academic and practitioner literature by analysing community building organisations as archetypal small-scale, locally-based CSOs.

Within the limited CSO literature, community buildings feature more than many other forms of CSOs. However, most studies have tended to be concerned only with the buildings' physical state or usage rather than with the organisational and management aspects (Brown, 2003). There have now been a few large-scale surveys that have also endeavoured to investigate some organisational and management aspects (Action for Communities in Rural England, 2009; MacMillan, 2004; Marriott, 1997) and have captured some useful facts and figures: that the average annual running costs in rural areas are less than £10,000 (Action for Communities in Rural

England, 2009); that between a quarter and a third of the community buildings have no paid employees and where there is an employee this is most likely to be a Cleaner (MacMillan, 2004; Marriott, 1997); and that "a tremendous amount of voluntary effort goes into the management and running of community buildings" (Marriott, 1997, p.23). Although tiny and predominantly run by volunteers, they are formally constituted: MacMillan (2004) found that almost all the community buildings in his survey were run by a formal Community Association or Village Hall Trust with, on average, 13 people forming the Management Committee. Income was mainly derived from a mix of rental income, fundraising, and grants (Action for Communities in Rural England, 2009).

These surveys also asked questions about plans for change and financial sustainability. MacMillan (2004) reports that 65% had plans for new facilities, 59% were planning for new projects, and 62% reported plans for new activities. ACRE (2009) is concerned that many community buildings organisations do not undertake financial planning but reports that, despite this, 68% think that they will remain financially sustainable.

The dominant regular usage is by independent organisations that arrange their own activities (Marriott, 1997). Typically these would be the clubs and mutual aid leisure organisations 'based on enthusiasms' (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986) and meetings of the more formal CSOs and parish councils (Action for Communities in Rural England, 2009). The role of the community building organisation here is as 'host' to other CSOs (Marriott, 1997). This 'premises management' role is important to the concept of community anchors as 'platforms' for other community activity (HM Treasury/Cabinet Office, 2007) and is not an insignificant task, as the Carnegie Trust makes clear in its listing of the technical skills required for physical asset management by CSOs (Carnegie UK Trust Rural Programme, 2009). The extent to which community building organisations might also act in a wider sense as community anchors by enabling the provision of, or delivering, services is difficult to assess from the existing literature. The large-scale quantitative surveys discussed above have difficulty in differentiating what is provided *in* the buildings from what is provided *by* the community building organisations and do little to analyse how and why these organisations take on wider roles. Qualitative literatures that might help in understanding how they organise themselves, what motivates them, and what service delivery roles might be appropriate are either out of date or highly descriptive (e.g., Beaton, 1993; Cumberland Council of Social Service, 1959; Smith, 2002). Smith's outline (2002) of the purposeful origins of many community building organisations "in the activities of priest

and church workers; of mutual aid and friendly societies ...; of early social work organizations ...; and in the development of adult education" (p.1) is suggestive of wider roles than just premises provision being taken by some community building organisations.

Investigating how and why such organisations go beyond basic premises provision for their neighbourhoods is the subject of the rest of this paper. The three case studies described below used an exploratory, interpretive approach and qualitative methods to allow the capture of the "everyday theories used by ordinary people" (Neuman, 1994, p.75) in community building organisations. The case study organisations were chosen because they had a 'modernising' agenda (all three had developed access to the public for computing) and could thus demonstrate the organisational challenges of doing more than simply caretaking their buildings.

### **Understanding community buildings as organisations: the case studies**

The empirical research for this paper was undertaken in 2004/5. All three community buildings were situated within the boundaries of one local authority, which was the CASE partner for an ESRC PhD studentship award. The local authority was situated in the north east region of England and had a number of wards which were experiencing high levels of deprivation.

*Bix Centre* was in a victorian building that was extensively refurbished in 1995, providing a variety of accommodation. It was open from 9 am until the middle of the evening on weekdays, and at some times during the weekend. Its annual running costs were c£40,000. It employed a part-time Co-ordinator for its programme of classes and a part-time Gym Supervisor as well as a part-time Caretaker and Cleaners. About 40 regular events were on the programme each week. It was the only village in the study which had a parish council. It had a population of c4,000 and acted as a service centre to its rural hinterland. As such, there were a number of alternative venues and meeting places where the types of activities provided from the Centre could take place.

Rockville Centre had been built in the 1990s to replace a dilapidated 'hut'. It was a functional, rather than attractive, building with a hall and two smaller rooms. It was open when events were running in the Centre, or by arrangement with the Caretakers. Its annual running costs were c£10,000; it employed two part-time Caretakers. There was a weekly programme of about 20 regular events. Rockville had an industrial past and a population of about 3,000. The Centre was not the only meeting place in Rockville, but was the one with the most flexibility over availability.

Markston Centre had been architect designed and opened in 2000, replacing a condemned old 'hut'. It had a hall, and a range of smaller rooms. It was open from 9 am to 9 pm all week, and for some of the weekend. It employed a full-time Manager and a part-time Receptionist as well as part-time Cleaners. Its annual running costs were over £50,000. It had a weekly programme of about 20 regular events. Markston had a population of about 3,000 and an industrial past. The Centre was the only venue in the village in which all sections of society would be welcomed or feel comfortable.

The organisations running all three Centres were legally constituted as Community Associations; the three Community Associations chose to confine their activities to running their Centres. All had Management Committees made up of the Honorary Officers (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer), representatives from their 'affiliated groups and sections' (the clubs and societies that were member organisations of the Community Association), elected representatives from the general membership, and representatives from relevant statutory authorities. In all cases, some of this group were 'committee-people' while a smaller grouping from the Committee were very active in running the Centre and providing its programme of activities. In this they were helped by their staff and by other volunteers forming, *de facto*, wider 'management teams'.

In terms of the activities run from these Centres, it is important to make the distinction between those that were provided *in* the Centres and those that were provided by the Centres' management teams. The former were provided by independent organisations that used space in the Centres but managed their own provision – the Scouts, a badminton club, a doctor's surgery, for example. In this situation the Centre management teams' role was as premises provider. Other activities, though,

involved them in providing not only the venue, but also in managing the provision of activities, sometimes as enablers and sometimes as deliverers. Each of these roles is now discussed in turn.

*Premise provision* was seen as the primary function of management in all the Centres. Some of the activities provided in the Centres were organised by the affiliated groups and sections, but others were provided on a regular basis by organisations with less formal association to the Centres: exercise groups, and organisations running health and well-being activities, for example, which rented space rather than being members. Some organisations provided explicit services: the Credit Union's weekly visit to Rockville Centre would be an example of this.

Rockville and Markston Centres also had long-term tenants which contributed to the welfare of the residents: a day care centre for people with disabilities rented a room in the Rockville Centre, and an environmental Trust was a long-term tenant of a room in Markston Centre. These two Centres' management teams also rented out space on a more commercial basis to organisations not offering direct benefit to the residents for meetings.

In all three Centres what was provided for other organisations went beyond the provision of the space. Office equipment, such as photocopiers and computers, and teaching aids, such as digital projectors, TVs, DVD/video players, were made available to users of the building. The Centres' facilities had to be maintained and scheduled carefully: at Bix Centre the dog training sessions meant that time for thorough cleaning had to be organised before the subsequent activity. The computers were mostly secured in their location, so if an activity wanted use of these then the schedule would have to reflect this. The Markston Manager explained how the need to adjust his schedule for this, and other activity demands for add-ons like catering was "just juggling all the time".

As well being provided with well-maintained facilities in an orchestrated manner, to differing extents the organisations using the Centres could expect help from the hosting management team. In Markston Centre, which had a full-time Manager, groups using the premises received a degree of advice or signposting over issues such as funding or regulations. This service was less evident in Bix Centre – it was only available when the part-time class programme Co-ordinator was present, or an experienced member of the Committee. In Rockville Centre, the only person that

user groups met on a regular basis was the Caretaker; although very willing to help, his expertise was more limited.

In all three Centres the management teams regularly took on an *enabling role*, in terms of activities and services provision: they were active agents, assessing local need, initiating certain activities, marketing others, and making arrangements with delivery organisations. Examples of this type of enabling role are the development of a Post Office in Markston Centre, of the programme of educational classes in all three Centres, and of the youth club provision in Rockville and Markston Centres.

The first example is of the arrangements made by Markston Centre's management team when the Post Office in the village closed. Their modern building had been designed to incorporate a space that could be developed as a self-contained unit and, in conjunction with the Markston Partnership (later to become a Development Trust), they negotiated with the Post Office for the franchise and then ran the Post Office from Markston Centre.

The second example is of how all three management teams played an enabling role in terms of the educational courses run from their premises. In their own ways they considered local need, checked for alternative local provision and negotiated with educational service deliverers. Having secured a course, they were involved in promoting it locally, and in ensuring that sufficient numbers were enrolled to make it viable.

A third example is of the provision of youth clubs. In Rockville Centre, following vandalism during a volunteer-led youth club session, the Committee was split over whether they should continue to provide specific activities for young people. The management team struck a compromise, and negotiated with the County Council's Education in the Community Department for a structured 'youth project' with professional Youth Workers. The management team in the new Marston Centre initially delivered activities for young people, but the village then became eligible, as a very deprived area, for funding for youth provision from the government's Children's Fund. The management team were involved in setting this up, meeting with the Fund staff and orchestrating sessions between the children and the Fund and once the youth club was running, liaised with the professional Youth Worker provided by the scheme, and organised enough volunteers (often parents) to achieve the necessary adult to child ratio.

This description of how the management teams at Markston and Rockville enabled youth provision also refers to a period when they, themselves, were delivering youth activities. Although out of the ordinary, there were examples of other substantial activities and services being *delivered* by the management teams. Bix Centre provided a gym for its residents, employing a qualified supervisor; the full-time Manager at Markston ran the Credit Union alongside the rest of his job.

All three Centres' management teams were also delivering computing activities. At two of them (Markston and Rockville), they were delivering only a small proportion of the computer activities run from the Centres, with external training providers and the various clubs and societies providing most activities. However, in Bix Centre their own volunteers delivered all the computing sessions provided.

The computing activity that all three management teams delivered themselves was supervised sessions when residents could attend for supported help in using the computers. Each Centre arranged this rather differently. Markston Centre already had an open-door culture, enabled mainly by the presence of the full-time Manager, and people who wanted some informal support with computers were generally helped by him. Some just wanted to address a very specific aspect of their use (e.g., how to set up a spreadsheet), but others needed one-to-one mentoring. Some of his clients were regulars who had little intention of going on-line themselves, wanting him, for example, to get them information from the internet or to email some photographs.

By contrast, the other Centres had to make special arrangements to deliver supervised sessions. Bix Centre worked around its access, security and personnel availability issues by insisting that computers were only used while volunteers were present; people could 'drop in' to use them, but only during the scheduled sessions (three a week). At this Centre, the highly qualified lead volunteer also delivered regular digital photography classes. Basic skills, though, were only addressed on a one-to-one basis: more formal courses were provided by the Bix outpost of a Further Education College. Rockville Centre was not permanently open throughout the day, and supported computer access was reliant on volunteers. Their system was that clients contacted a Caretaker who then arranged them a one-to-one session with a volunteer at a mutually convenient time.

All three Centres' management teams had, in the past, been focused almost exclusively on premises provision, but while they continued to see this as their primary function, were now developing their enabling and delivery roles and introducing new activities. All had had an imperative to make changes – during the 1990s the state of

all three buildings was such that new Centres had to be provided or the facility would have ceased to exist. This caused an organisational hiatus in each Centre: substantial funding was needed, along with people with energy, useful networks and networking skills, and the ability to project-manage. To different degrees and at different rates this had brought new people into the management teams along with new skills and ideas. The development of the new buildings had also brought fresh organisational relationships and implicit commitments to those that had helped the Centres. The running costs of the new premises were higher than those for the old buildings, necessitating an emphasis on generating income.

Although each Centre was forced to change, each management team had a distinctive approach to the challenge, and came to different conclusions about what new activities warranted more effort on their part than simply providing the premises. This was highly influenced by each organisation's ethos.

In Bix Centre, the emphasis was on organisational professionalism: the Chairman had a hierarchical structure to his Committee, and regularly compared running the Centre to running a business. For him, running the building and activities in as 'business-like' way as possible was of prime importance and made a significant contribution to Bix village. Rockville Centre was very different: the Secretary/Treasurer, with help from her husband (both busy people with full-time jobs) and the senior Caretaker were the *de facto* organisers in the Centre. They were pragmatic about the limits to their capacity, but also had a clear philosophy: they should provide the venue and sow the seeds of new activities, but it was then up to other people to run the activities. The organisational focus was on developing the federation of smaller clubs and societies that managed their own activities. Markston Centre was different again. Here the management team was focused on making a difference to Markston by playing their part in alleviating the high levels of deprivation. They were particularly concerned about the poor level of educational achievement (their ward was shown to be in the worst 1% nationally in the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation) and the limited opportunities for their young people. The Centre, for them, was embedded within its community - hardly surprising given that the Honorary Officers and Manager of the Centre also held all the Honorary Officer positions on the Markston Partnership.

The difference in ethos of each management team was evident in how each shaped their provision. An example is educational provision and, relatedly, youth provision. Bix Centre was funded as a Hub Learning Centre: they provided an extensive

programme to their residents, and supported other 'satellite' Learning Centres across the County. One of their two part-time 'management' posts was dedicated to fulfilling this contract, which involved them in meeting targets and progress reporting. This was a major income-earner for them, and a significant part of their programme of events was taken up by courses. They were concerned to provide a positive experience to their existing and potential clients, who might come from well outside their local community. Their consideration of a youth club was influenced by this priority: what would young people do to the building, and how secure would adult clients feel?

In Rockville Centre, the management team were happy to try to provide educational activities that people said they wanted. The introduction of a new course was always triggered by a resident, or member group, interest. Laying on courses for local people was seen not only as an educational end product, but also as a means of developing new self-help clubs and societies within the Association. The art club and the local history society both had their origins in courses delivered by the local College in the Centre. Vandalism during the youth club had split the Committee over their priorities: maintaining the Centre for others, or providing for the young people. A compromise was reached with the structured youth project.

The Markston Centre management team wanted to play a part in improving educational attainment, but were also aware that the people that they needed to target were unlikely to attend formal courses voluntarily. People must first be attracted into the Centre, then introduced to education in a non-threatening way. There should be no formal educational prerequisites, and classes had to be free of charge. In practice, the management team would wait for someone to show an interest in a course, and then work hard not only to get it delivered, but also to actively engage and register other residents. Getting courses provided free of charge usually involved asking the local College to deliver 'taster courses' in the Centre. These were very short courses (usually four sessions); the Manager would therefore be active in meeting with the class during an early session to discuss their interest in an 'improvers' taster course which he would negotiate with the College, so securing a more substantial learning experience.

Another priority for the Markston management team was to provide for the young people who were 'hanging out' in the village in the evenings. As soon as the new Centre opened, they laid on daily events for them, in the shape of youth clubs and computer clubs and viewed occasional damage to the Centre as a price worth

paying. The computer provision (and in particular the computer games) provided a strong attraction, and sometimes up to 35 young people turned up (for 10 machines). However, this level of provision by volunteers became unsustainable, and the advent of the Children's Fund provision was timely. The Manager was in no doubt, though, that if they could not get external support to follow on from the time-limited Children's Fund provision then a team of volunteers would provide youth activities again.

## **Discussion**

The descriptions of the case study organisations above stresses how difficult it is to establish who really 'organises' in community buildings and proactively shapes what is provided. It also emphasises how each organisation has its own ethos which permeates its priorities and decisions. This could lead to the conclusion that all that can be known about community building organisations is that they are all different. However, some common patterns did emerge from analysing how decisions were arrived at in the organisations. There were a number of common tangible factors that were considered by each in terms of their willingness to develop a new activity.

Uppermost in their minds was always the building. There were two main aspects to this: its immutability and the need to keep it viable. The building was non-negotiable: it was shaped as it was, and it had the space that it had. They had to keep it physically and financially viable: it would be impossible to develop activities without it. However, there was a balance to be struck between keeping their asset viable by using it to earn them income, and using it for new activities. Rockville and Markston Centres both had long-term tenants in parts of their buildings and Bix Centre's main spaces were dominated by the courses which underpinned their overall viability, so limiting the space available for the development of other activities.

The concern over viability had wider applicability: the costs of the management or of activities were scrutinised. Rockville Centre had very low costs, achieved mainly by employing only two part-time Caretakers, but this meant their staffing capacity for the development and provision of new activities was limited. Even mundane costs were of concern and influenced how activities were developed: paper for the printer (Rockville) and computer games (Markston), for example.

The existing usage and users of the building influenced what new activities were developed. Apart from reducing the space that could be scheduled for new and desirable activities, the views of existing users were important to the management

teams' decisions. Bix Centre, in particular, gave this priority as evidenced by the decision over the youth club.

The need, or market, for a new activity was part of the decision-making process by all three management teams. The management teams in both Markston and Rockville were embedded within their communities and were well-versed in the formal expression of local need through the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and used informal networks to keep well-informed about what residents wanted. The level of local deprivation significantly influenced Markston's decision-making and they were evangelical about developing and, if necessary, delivering appropriate activities. The management team in Rockville were pragmatic about their limited capacity to take on significant endeavours. Bix's management team considered what was wanted by the residents by reflecting on the results of the Bix Partnership's need survey and deciding what was practicable for them to undertake. Apart from assessing their internal capacity and inclination for new developments that locals wanted they also assessed whether another local organisation might be a more appropriate provider.

The availability of personnel to deliver new activities and services was the final common factor that formed part of the decision-making. Sometimes external delivery organisations were available to put on the activities the management team were hoping to develop. Markston's management team were adamant that courses and youth clubs had to be free of charge to the user and as such only used external delivery organisations if this requirement could be met. Rockville's management team did not make their approach to pricing so explicit, but when the publicly provided youth project was closing there was no effort to find a private alternative. Bix used a large number of external tutors to deliver their courses to fee-paying students.

The existence of appropriate external delivery organisations gave the management teams the choice of acting as an enabler or a deliverer. Sometimes they chose delivery, but sometimes they took on the role by default, because there was no other delivery organisation. Bix's delivery of computing services was an example of the former, Markston's proposal to run the youth club after the Children's Fund regime finishes an example of the latter. If the management teams took on the delivery of activities they had to provide appropriate personnel.

Employing a full-time Manager in Markston Centre meant that he could assimilate within his job the delivery of smaller services such as the Credit Union or *ad hoc* computing support. There were also enthusiastic volunteers who helped him. Rockville Centre had to make special arrangements with a limited number of volunteers to deliver activities. Bix Centre employed a part-time Gym Supervisor, and called on its active team of volunteers to provide computing support on a regular basis.

The volunteer workforce for activity provision differed in the three Centres. Markston's were a tight-knit group, mainly from the Committee, linked with the Markston Partnership, and also linked socially. They would turn their hands to almost anything that, in their view, needed doing. They were generalists, whose collective commitment helped keep them going. At Rockville Centre, the main volunteer workforce for activity development was little more than the Secretary/Treasurer, her husband, and the senior Caretaker (working well beyond his contract). They were generalists and pragmatists who recognised their capacity limitations. Bix village, according to its Partnership, was well-endowed with volunteers. The Centre's Chairman was able to draw in appropriate voluntary 'staff' whom he gave 'portfolios' of responsibilities, appropriate to their skills. The computing volunteer, for example, was chosen for her previous experience as a college lecturer in information technology. She, and her team of volunteers, were far more specialised than in the other Centres, having good computing skills, but also dedicating themselves to the computing activity. Such specialist services delivered by volunteers, though, could only be provided at scheduled times when these people were on the premises. 'Drop in at any time' services therefore need to be more generalist in nature and integrated into the work of a full-time employee, such as the Manager at Markston Centre.

### **Concluding comments**

In the context of current exhortations to CSOs to take on enhanced roles, a greater understanding of how the organisations running community buildings manage themselves and their activities is timely. The use of in-depth case studies allowed the complexities of these tiny organisations to emerge, and an exploration of what motivated their leaders to develop their premises, their activities and new roles.

The key points that emerged were how the organisations were effectively managed and guided by a sub-group of Committee members together with employees and

volunteers as a 'management team', rather than by the formal Committee. Much of what these teams had to grapple with was complex: getting new buildings constructed, and keeping them viable, for example, while developing new activities and new ways of working. Each organisation had its own ethos which was important in determining what developments were prioritised. All three, though, were successfully safeguarding their premises and introducing new activities and developing their roles beyond that of premises provision.

Much of what they did reflected aspects of the government's agenda for CSOs, but the government's agenda was not a specific factor in their decision-making. Instead this was mainly influenced by local people and local needs, the necessity to keep the premises viable, and organisational capacity issues.

In the final analysis, these community building organisations still saw their primary role as premises providers. They also acted as enablers of certain activities, and all delivered some themselves. This was challenging for such small organisations, and a critical factor here was the availability of personnel, as staff or volunteers. Delivery often called for specialist skills and some forms of delivery needed personnel to be on hand when a client called, both of which could be demanding for community buildings organisations.

The achievements of these three Community Centres reflect the dedication and motivation of the management teams. However, it is clear from recent surveys (MacMillan, 2004; Marriott, 1997) that many Committees have little inclination to change, and therefore may not take up the challenge of enhancing their roles. It is interesting to note, though, that prior to the hiatus caused by the demise of their old buildings, the Committees of these Centres also showed little inclination to change – they were catapulted into action by their crises, and managing the ensuing developments brought about substantial changes to their organisations.

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