

STRATEGIC PLAN - WHISTLEBLOWERS ACTION GROUP (WAG)

Prepared for WAG by Ian Godbold, June 1994

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 A strategic planning exercise, facilitated by the writer, was conducted on 30 May. The results of this are shown in the addendum under the headings: Mission Statement; Product; Product Benefits and Beneficiaries; Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.
- 1.2 The WAG organisation was formed following definitive research by Dr William De Maria. A paper on the subject was released by him in April 1994, and follow-up papers are in production to a set timetable. Research for these papers is conducted by Cyrelle Jan.
- 1.3 WAG members are all bona fide whistleblowers. The Executive, chaired by Col Dillon, were voted into office by members. Non-voting Executive members are Dr William De Maria and Cyrelle Jan.
- 1.4 A number of whistleblowers and Executive members have participated in a Senate Select Committee hearing on Public Interest Whistleblowing. This is seen as a prelude to legislative protection for whistleblowers.
- 1.5 WAG, while having a relatively high public profile (particularly as a result of publicity given Col Dillon (President), does not have the resources or structure to implement any of its objectives.
- 1.6 The systemic corruption WAG is targeted to prevent is at this stage operating to minimise funding and publicity for WAG; in the same way it has dead-ended efforts of individual whistleblowers.
- 1.7 Essentially the only services presently offered to WAG members is research/counselling (Cyrelle Jan) and limited case management (Gordon Harris). Regular group meetings are also held to provide a moral support base for whistleblowers. Research grants for Cyrelle Jan will cease at the end of June.
- 1.8 To date no funds have been obtained from outside the WAG membership.

2. KEY ISSUES

The following key issues emerged as critical for WAG in the short term:

- 2.1 Critical lack of funding.

- 2.2 The need for full-time staff - Executive overworked and members too dysfunctional to assist significantly.
- 2.3 Communication - external and internal.
- 2.4 Lack of support services (products) for whistleblowers.
- 2.5 Research/database essential for long term success.
- 2.6 Legislation - to control the process of whistleblower protection legislation.

3. OVERALL STRATEGY

Clearly the initial strategy of WAG must be to ensure long-term survival through obtaining sufficient funds to operate as an independent organisation. At this stage this goal must supersede all others.

However with this in mind the key objective must be to take the fight to the opposition with the objective of proving the existence of systemic corruption. Plainly once systemic corruption is proven and its methods detailed, onus of proof of innocence moves to the system rather than the individual whistleblower. The key to the proof is obviously the research which, regardless of the worth of individual whistleblower cases, can demonstrate consistent dead-ending of whistleblowing attempts along regular departmental patterns.

Thus the big objective is to put the system in a position where it has to prove itself not corrupt on the basis that corruption is assumed to be endemic.

The introduction of systemic whistleblowing similar to or as a part of the TQM (Total Quality Management) push would seem to be an appropriate next step.

- 3.1 Under the umbrella strategy we have short and long term organisational strategies which will be dealt with under the key issue headings shown previously.

(i) Short term

* Critical lack of funding

Having established itself as a bona fide charity with tax free donation status, WAG is legally entitled to solicit funds from individuals, trusts, and companies. In essence the strategic approach to fundraising should be to emphasize and actively create a benefit for the donor. This should be in some visible form that is of tangible value to them. For a company sponsor the pledge of a 'corruption free organisation', internal whistleblower protection and use of a suitable symbol (WAG or a specially created one) could be appropriate and would be used for PR/image purposes.

In the short term all donations, no matter how small, could be used to build a promotional campaign. Perhaps the membership could participate in this investment in fundraising.

When sufficient funds are in place to employ a staff member, fundraising should be passed to them as a key job task.

* Need for full-time staff

It is recommended that a full time staff member be employed as soon as a minimum of three months salary is raised in funds. This person should be employed on a full-time casual basis. Primary responsibility would be administration, fundraising and internal communication.

* Lack of support services/products

This issue should be addressed immediately through contact with like-minded groups and information sharing, specifically the issues of support counselling services and legal services should be a priority.

Further to this a definitive whistleblower package should be developed containing relevant information and first level advice. Legal material particularly on laws regarding defamation, employment rights and obligations, options under industrial relations legislation, and clear warnings about the effect on families and their needs. It is envisaged that this could be sent to potential whistleblowers along with details of WAG as an organisation.

Perhaps an interim 'associate' membership group could be established from the potential whistleblower/concerned employee group without the need to prove whistleblowing status.

On this note I would point out a concern that membership rules may be too stringent. A set of guidelines met, with appropriate proof attached would seem a simpler and fairer way of recruiting members than a requirement for interview and executive council selection. Only marginal cases which conflict with this policy would then come before the executive.

* Communication - external and internal

External

Regular press/media releases combining individual case experience with research data to support the systemic corruption thesis.

e.g. Fred Jones retrenched after exposing x,y,z. This is the 49th case since 1992 where a local government employee has been retrenched following whistleblowing. The fact that Fred,

along with thirty of the others, brought his case to the attention of the government ombudsman prior to receiving retrenchment notice is a cause for concern. etc. etc.

Regular press releases dealing with the number of calls received by WAG detailing systemic or corrupt activity since January 1994 was Of these were government, private industry. Use should also be made of the research papers produced by Dr De Maria to obtain media time/space.

Internal

A monthly newsletter to tell members what WAG is doing: press releases sent. calls received, meetings planned, next paper issued etc. Plus encouragement/advice/success stories.

* Research/data base

The key to proving systemic corruption lies in the research, data collection and analysis presently being undertaken by Dr De Maria and Cyrelle Jan.

Plainly this must continue, despite loss of research funding for Cyrelle.

It is recommended that other sources of research funding be investigated. Two possibilities are suggested:

- (1) Similar direction research conducted by other universities. I have had occasion to refer to WAG a group from Griffiths University undertaking a study on 'workplace bullying'. Doubtless other similar groups exist elsewhere.
- (2) Funding from the Senate Select Committee on Whistle-blowing - the availability of definitive research is clearly an advantage to them in their determinations. The objective nature of the research would avoid systemic corruption even when funding came from government sources.

The present restricted focus of research could be expanded to isolate potential whistleblowers or their information (to add to the data base).

Also the cost to the community of systemic corruption should be calculated and used as a PR tool.

It is my belief that information on corruption will be forthcoming should the opportunity be made available to employees. This information will prove a valuable overlay to proven data from actual whistleblower cases.

* Legislation

Whistleblower protection legislation and/or the formation of an independent body to assist whistleblowers is a key objective.

Judging by the Hansard transcript, a stumbling point for a whistleblower organisation appears to be the issue of avoiding corruption when funds are made available from government sources.

A possible strategy is to take the tack that workplace corruption is both expensive and inefficient. The stamping out of systemic corruption is therefore a part of quality management practice. Thus the adoption of systems for workplace whistleblowing could be a requirement of the TQM certification presently being pushed at department and government supplier level. (This is a concept only, which I believe merits further discussion at executive level.)

(ii) Long term

* Need for systemised ongoing funding through a regular income stream.

A planned fundraising and sponsorship programme under the control of a full-time staff member is essential to achieve this objective.

* Full-time staff and office facilities structure.

The effective case management and support services for whistleblowers envisaged requires a central location and staff structure to be successful.

An in-house legal service and financial support for cases is also desirable.

The existence of staffed office facilities which incorporate research staff/data base, phone, fax, photocopying and other facilities would be the most efficient.

* Communication - external and internal

Communication must be planned and structured to achieve key communication objectives. It is recommended that an annual communications plan and budget be drawn up and results monitored for effectiveness.

Internal communication with members should be included in this annual plan.

* Support services for whistleblowers

It is recommended that exterior services be maintained as long as practicable. The relative cost of moving all of these in house could prove prohibitive. Similarly the goal of 'draining the swamp' could be subsumed in the task of 'dealing with the crocodiles' of whistleblower personal, financial, and employment problems. Better in my opinion that WAG facilitate the solving of these problems by liaison with other appropriate bodies and by the setting up of 'mentor' groups of members.

* Research/data base

Long term it is suggested that a 'J. Edgar Hoover strategy' be adopted to force systemic change through a comprehensive 'wrong-doings' data base. However this aside, the overlay of data over long periods and the capacity for whistleblowers to access this data will be a major contributor to the public good.

* Legislation

Good legislation for whistleblowers is going to be a long term, on-going project. Even when reasonably satisfactory legislation is in place, there will be a requirement to see that it is administered without being prey to corruption in its own right.

4. SUMMARY

The foregoing gives an outline of an overall strategic direction which I believe will achieve WAG's mission and objectives while supporting those who have been disadvantaged through whistleblowing.

Without funds nothing can be achieved. This task should be the number one priority for the WAG Executive team.

Members should likewise be organised to fundraise for WAG, for even small amounts can be of value in generating donations of larger amounts from others.

I would suggest that the Executive team debate the practicality of the strategic plan and resolve to adopt it in whole or in part.

Once adopted, written action plans must be prepared which commit responsibilities to individuals

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