The Challenges of the Nonprofit Boards

Núria Valls, Pau Vidal

Observatorio del Tercer Sector, Barcelona, Spain

Introduction and Objectives

The proper operation of the board is a key aspect for the development of the nonprofit organizations missions. Still, in many organizations, the management of the board has not been prioritized due to the pressure of the management of activities.

This investigation has interviewed leaders and managers of different nonprofit organizations about the principal challenges of the management of the board. The objective of the investigation is to understand the situation of the boards and promote solutions to improve their operation.

Development

The nonprofit boards work to guarantee the completion of the mission of the organizations; they ensure their proper functioning and accountability. The board is perceived as responsible for the maintenance of the institution’s values. It is not sufficient only to show that things are progressing accurately and at a high quality, but rather it is necessary that what is being done is in accordance with the values and mission of the entity.

That is why it is very important to work on the proper operation of the boards. Proper operation includes organizational decisions such as the appropriate number of members, what type of profiles they should have, how many meetings are needed, how to manage information, what are the different roles in the board, the functions of the members...

During the investigation, eight principal challenges of the boards have been identified:

1. The organizational commitment
2. The functional strategy
3. The relationship within the directive team
4. The diversity of the profiles
5. The renewal of the board
6. The management of information
7. The culture of transparency and accountability
8. The culture of evaluation
Methodology

The methodology used in this investigation is the following:

- Analysis of scope of study: to identify different organizations typologies and the key persons to interview. Secondary sources were utilized, such as directories, web pages, collection of papers, calls to entities...

- Investigation of international references: an international search was performed of current publications related to experiences of the operation of the boards in different countries.

- Interviews: 18 people that form part of a total of 31 nonprofit organizations were interviewed.

The profiles of the interviewees are people who participate in the board of a nonprofit organizations with different roles. It is assumed that some of the interviewees are directors and leaders in different institutions. Generally, of all the people interviewed, 3/4 are men. This is because the boards are still comprised of a majority of male members.

- Analysis and elaboration of improvement proposals: from the interviews and a work group of people related to the world of the nonprofit organizations, solutions for improving the management of the boards have been created.

Conclusions

This investigation has served to create a preliminary picture of the situation of the boards to identify their principal challenges, and make an initial proposal of ideas for improvement. The organizations are becoming increasingly more relevant and the proper operation of the boards is essential in order to guarantee their impact on society.

References


Cabra de Luna, Miguel Ángel; Fraguas Garrido, Berta. (2005) ¿Qué son y qué quieren ser las Fundaciones Españolas? Barcelona: Fundación Vodafone España.


