

All to give

In a recent report from the Cabinet Office the Prime Minister sets out a vision of how the state and the third sector can work together to bring about real change. This relationship will depend upon the individual participants in the sector having the skill and experience to deliver.

The skills and experience of the members of the Institute of Management Services have a significant role to play

The third Sector is booming. That is the sector composed of charitable and 'not for profit' organisations from which many people in our society benefit. To put this sector into some perspective there are currently in excess of 160,000 registered charities together with another 55,000 social enterprises, these involve 20.4 million people doing voluntary work at least once per month. Charitable giving was about £9 billion in the last financial year. The turnover of the sector is estimated to be in excess of £27 billion. To put it another way it is big and the government wants it to get bigger.

So what has all this to do with IMS members? I firmly believe our professional skills and experience are needed. Many of the large charities are well run and deliver services to their beneficiaries effectively and efficiently, however, many more struggle. There are clear differences of emphasis between the private and third sectors. In the latter's emphasis of the quality and reliability of the service provided, rather than cost effectiveness and productivity. The majority of the services provided are by volunteers who may be less easy to manage than might be imagined. But these differences are evident and I do not expect any IMS members to find the change of ethos difficult.

There is a need within many third sector organisations for some objective assessment of their performance, methods and achievements. The trustees, or in some cases directors, of a charity give generously of their time because they are committed to the objectives of the charity. This does not necessarily mean that they have experience of governing and directing the management of an organisation so that it achieves its objectives effectively and efficiently. Many do not and their governing bodies recognise this need but tend to focus, when seeking new trustees, on individuals with specific areas of expertise not currently available to the trust. This is often coupled with the practice of recruiting trustees by word of mouth from amongst the friends or acquaintance of existing trustees; although this is now being discouraged by the Charities Commission. Where vacancies are advertised they tend to

specify a particular professional expertise ie financial, legal, HR or similar backgrounds which the trust believes would benefit the management of the organisation but the skills required to improve the governance and effectiveness of the service that is provided goes largely unrecognised.

Skills shortage

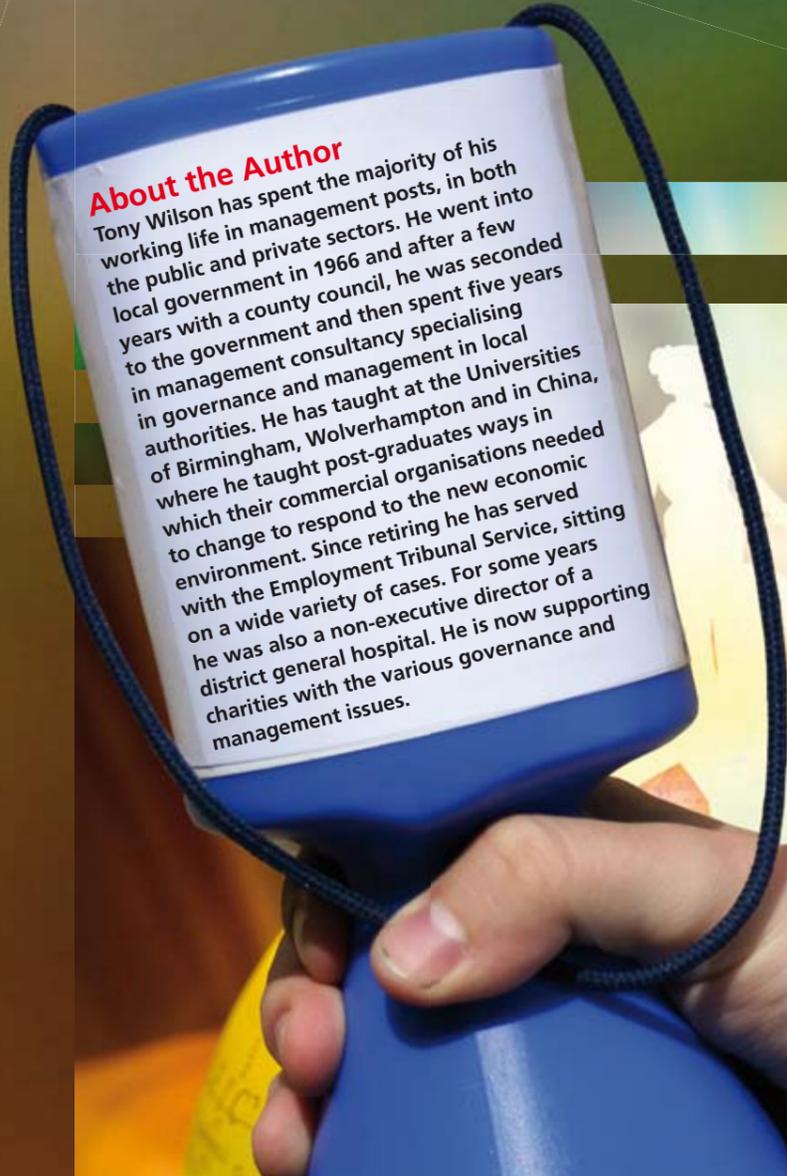
There is a major shortage of individuals willing to become trustees, or directors. Many members of the public don't understand what is involved and are apprehensive of the commitment and legal implications and liabilities of doing so. The new Charities Act 2 will introduce over the next few years significant changes that will clarify the liabilities of trustees and directors, as well as creating a new form for charitable organisation which afford more reassurance to the trustees.

There are some organisations within the sector that help and support charitable and voluntary organisations in dealing with these aspects of running a charity. The advice they provide is authoritative and reliable but the implementation of that advice can be costly and there is a real difficulty in that the trustees of a particular charity may either not seek that support or not wholly understand the implications of following it. Speaking

from my own experience there are few small charities that possess the governance skills and experience to make good use of the support available to them. Many recognise this gap but find it difficult to articulate their needs.

I recognise that there may be a number of Institute members who are already involved with a charity or voluntary body and it would be useful to us all if they would use the pages of this journal as a forum for discussing issues and sharing experience so as to build the Institute's body of knowledge in dealing with our core expertise in this sector. The information will be useful to other members who may be considering becoming involved with the governance and management of a charity or voluntary body.

This is a large area of activity to which the government has committed, as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, £500 million to strengthen and increase the capability of organisations in the sector. The government intends to invest in the sector to develop partners who are capable of delivering services to the public. It is vital that those partners have robust, stable, effective and efficient organisations; the skills and experience of the members of the Institute of Management Services have a significant role to play.



About the Author

Tony Wilson has spent the majority of his working life in management posts, in both the public and private sectors. He went into local government in 1966 and after a few years with a county council, he was seconded to the government and then spent five years in management consultancy specialising in governance and management in local authorities. He has taught at the Universities of Birmingham, Wolverhampton and in China, where he taught post-graduates ways in which their commercial organisations needed to change to respond to the new economic environment. Since retiring he has served with the Employment Tribunal Service, sitting on a wide variety of cases. For some years he was also a non-executive director of a district general hospital. He is now supporting charities with the various governance and management issues.



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