

# Does the chemis work for you?

**T**he difference in perception between a recently elected president of an association and its full-time salaried secretary general, can be marked. And yet, until recently, nobody has really bothered to find out why. Now MCI, the global association management company, has been monitoring the interaction between elected and salaried officers of associations in a bid to discover what makes associations tick.

In a straw poll of the association community, MCI established there were perceived as well as real differences between the two positions. In some cases elected officers felt that salaried officers were slow to respond to new ideas with a handful actively blocking progress. In some cases salaried officers felt that the elected officers were simply hell bent on change.

None of the associations spoken to believed that the executive and the salaried had different motivations or desired alternative outcomes. It was just that some people operated in different ways,

came from entirely different disciplines and were following different career paths.

The straw poll identified some common challenges.

► **Salaried officers** saw themselves as running a company, constantly monitoring the bottom line and considering the proper and effective use of resources. Some felt that their elected counterparts did not prioritise in the same way. Indeed, some believed that elected officers brought neither business or association management experience to the role and, as a result, were prone to stray from the strategic into the operational.

► **Elected officers**, on the other hand, because they were experts in their own field, were inclined to feel there was sometimes a lack of understanding of those areas by their salaried counterparts. Some suspected that the salaried staff did not understand the specialist environment in which they worked. Indeed, some felt that salaried officers without such knowledge were able to bring little added



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## IN THE LABORATORY, IMPRUDENT MIXTURE OF UNTRIED ELEMENTS CAN HAVE AN EXPLOSIVE EFFECT. FOR AN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION TO BE SUCCESSFUL IT MUST ENSURE THE REACTION BETWEEN THE TWIN ELEMENTS OF ELECTED AND SALARIED OFFICERS IS IN EQUILIBRIUM

value to their role within the organisation. However, the MCI straw poll was able to show that the situation wasn't all negative or even critical and practical solutions to some of the challenges were offered by associations taking part:

- ▶ establish a rolling board including past, current and future presidents
- ▶ ensure constant communication between elected and salaried officers
- ▶ appoint an advisory council for safe middle ground and impartial advice
- ▶ launch a board area on the website for newly elected officers to browse the archives
- ▶ identify elected candidates who are not simply experts in their own field but also good leaders
- ▶ put in place a clear succession plan for both roles
- ▶ use your advisory council as a training ground for potential candidates

The question to be answered is simply this: In the world of associations is good human relations practice enough or will it always come down to chemistry? Ultimately, as with any organisation, good governance and good HR practice have a dual role to play. MCI found that

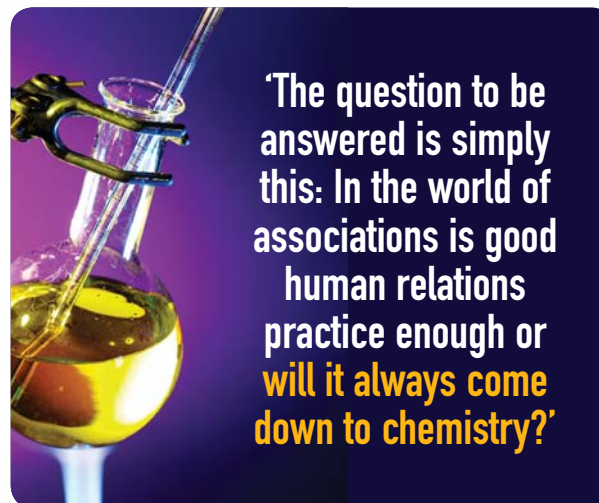
where elected and salaried officers worked effectively together, leading examples of best practice in relationship management were also to be found. But, it should be recognised, passion as well as politics is often at work. Jobs within associations are often related to good causes, and people, particularly volunteers, sometimes

Many of these learned experiences have been captured in the straw poll by MCI. But it is only a taster of things to come as MCI move into the second phase of their enquiry. En route they will be asking even more questions about these often fragile relationships.

MCI will be publishing the results of its expanded research next month but in the meantime associations might care to consider the following:

- ▶ Is your association clear on the time commitment required from their elected officers?
- ▶ Does your association have a long-term vision beyond any officer's term of office?
- ▶ Does your association have an induction programme for both officers that includes, as a minimum, the history and the present strategic plan for the association?
- ▶ Is your association clear on its policy should clashes of interest occur?
- ▶ Are there clear role definitions in place for both salaried and elected officers?

For more information or to receive a copy of the research referred to in this article please email: [julia.phillips@mci-group.com](mailto:julia.phillips@mci-group.com)  
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find it difficult to be objective.

The less romantic should consider exit interviews, the resolution of issues within 60 days, induction and probation periods, impartial mentors and even fixed contract periods for salaried officers to lessen the challenge.

Jennifer Jenkins, (left) managing director, and Julia Phillips, programme manager, of association management specialists MCI, were asked by the Institute of Association Management to prepare a paper exploring how effectively presidents and chief executives work together. By expanding their own research through a straw poll of association contacts, the findings were sufficiently complex and interesting to persuade them that further research on the topic would be meaningful.

