



VALUING THE WELL-BEING: *A Response to Fraud Case in the Philippines*

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Questionable entries of expenses, same writing stroke in attendance sheets and inconsistent contents of reports by the Community Development Officer (CDO) caught the attention of the Project Coordinator. These instances led COSE to investigate the situation to clarify and validate the information accurately.

The Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. (COSE) is a Non-Government Organization working with and for the older persons both in urban and rural communities through community organizing, advocacy and networking and capacity building. COSE is currently implementing a 2-year project “**Enhancing Access to Social Protection Programs through Older Persons Engagement**” in three municipalities in Region III with funding support from Voice, an initiative of and financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands as part of their overall policy framework ‘Dialogue and Dissent’.

Investigation Processes

COSE took the case seriously. The management readily discussed this alarming concern and agreed on the methodology and plans of investigation.

Previous and current documents submitted by the involved CDO were reviewed by the finance manager and the Project Coordinator, which somehow confirmed the initial theory that a financial fraud had been committed. The team validated the information through field visitations and discussions with community leaders. The investigating team did not directly ask them about the suspected fraud case per se. The inquiries focused on the activities that were supposedly conducted and how it was done by the said Community Development Officer—more like a post-activity assessment procedure. However, COSE was not contented on this alone; instead it also relied on social media to validate other information and circumstances that could disprove the claims and alibis of the staff involved and further corroborate the fraud theory, which is becoming more apparent. Aside from that, the Project Coordinator also visited the CDO at his house to gather additional information by asking him the status of the pending activities, especially those activities with the corresponding budget already deposited to his account.

After the collation of evidences, a face-to-face interview with the CDO was done by the team wherein he was asked about the financial fraud that he had committed. This also gave him the chance to provide his side. After a series of questions, he did admit that some activities were not conducted yet, but he submitted cash liquidation reports and other related documents anyway just to show that he had already accomplished them. Despite the clear evidences that were presented to him, he did not readily confess the full extent of his wrongdoings.

With that, COSE consolidated all the evidences and served him a Notice to Explain and provided him 72 hours to respond. When COSE received his response, an internal hearing was done by the management to discuss the case. After a thorough analysis, it was concluded that the CDO had indeed committed fraud. A Notice of Termination was immediately issued to him. The decision was made in accordance with the existing national laws and internal policy of the organization.

Valuing the well-being

Fraud is a crime. But humanity is another thing. COSE as a humanitarian organization handled the case carefully by ensuring that there will be no human rights violated along the process or that we will not be damaging the dignity of the involved staff along the way. COSE took the investigation process confidentially without disclosing any information that can affect or harm both the accused and the organization except if a legal procedure requires it. Investigators directly asked questions and validated information only to the most pertinent individuals. COSE assured to responsibly use the information gathered.

COSE provided several spaces for the erring staff to admit or even to honestly tell the truth – *validations, home visitation, and face-to-face interview*. In fact, the Project Coordinator even had a heart-to-heart talk with the concerned CDO and explained to him both the positive effects and ramifications of his action. He was also advised to share his problem to other trusted individuals so that he has somebody to lean on while he is resolving the problem. After the issuance of the termination notice, COSE regularly monitored the CDO's actions and actuations to ensure that he will never do anything harmful to himself. COSE believes that humanity is paramount and should be respected at all times.

Learning

The incident provided several learnings to COSE as an organization. It helped the organization to realize that the existing monitoring system is not enough to prevent such instance of fraud from happening. Social media can be a great tool to validate information related to a person's whereabouts and social activities. In dealing with fraud cases, the technical approach can be effective. But if we include compassion and a broad understanding of the circumstances and motivations of the person involved, then it becomes even more facilitating – such approach encouraged him to be more open and expressive of his feelings and emotions about the situation and how and why it happened.

Recommendation

COSE needs to revisit its internal policies and review its gaps. Regular field monitoring by project coordinators must be intensified. Their involvement in financial related concerns of the project must be increased. COSE realized the need to improve its staff recruitment system to ensure that all the incoming staff are screened carefully especially in finance related policies, management, and accountabilities.

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