

THE BUDDY SCHEME

A Discussion Document

What is the idea?

In recent discussion within the communications working party one of the themes is that involvement is important for members and membership. Why is this? Very clearly it allows members to do what they want to do (network, learn, air issues, make business contacts etc.) regardless of the type of event. The idea behind buddying is to make the path to such involvement easier.

The aim behind the buddy scheme is to encourage new members in particular to get more involved in AMED at as early a stage as possible by providing them with an AMED contact (or buddy) when they join. It aims to develop an active membership by encouraging such new members to participate in a wide range of a AMED events. If effective it is also likely to encourage such members to generate ideas and events themselves to make their involvement sustainable.

How does it work?

As with many things the start up is critical. If new members can be encouraged at an early stage to participate and get the benefits then this is likely to be self-perpetuating. This is where the buddy scheme really comes into its own by helping members get over any initial reluctance or inhibition.

New members when they join are told who their buddy is and that some time in the near future they will be contacted by them. They are paired off with an existing (and willing) member whose responsibility is to contact the new member as soon after they have joined as possible, meet up and network, and encourage them to attend an AMED event. There is no reason why things should stop there. The pair could visit each other's site for a guided tour (if that were appropriate).

Administration

As ever it is likely to be the administration of the scheme which will prove most intractable. However, once the initial assignment of existing member to new member has been made then relatively little administration should be necessary since most of the responsibility should fall on the member and to some extent on the recruit.

The points of administration would be about assigning the recruit to an existing member so that both are geographically close and in different sectors i.e. independent, academic, local council, large organisation. The member would also have to be willing to get involved and should probably be involved in the assignment process. After this there may need to be some indication on an existing database of who has been assigned to whom.

When new members join they do so for a number of reasons. Do we know what those reasons are? Can we extend the range? Assignment of buddy to new member is almost certainly critical.

There are a number of variables: geography, experience level, life experience, seniority, type of organisation, reasons for joining AMED etc. Where possible a mix (rather than match) strategy should be used except for geography i.e. ideally buddy and member should live reasonably close to encourage more contact.

Benefits

Benefits to the new member include the following:

- They immediately gain a new contact
- They have a comfortable way into AMED with a higher possibility of involvement
- They have the possibility of exchange visits. This should be encouraged between say academic, research-based and pragmatic, independents.
- They have the possibility of a mentoring relationship. (Perhaps this is what the buddy idea is about anyway?)
- Others...???

Benefits to the existing member include the following:

- They automatically gain a new contact
- It almost certainly encourages them to make more use of AMED since there will be slightly more pressure on them.
- They have the possibility of adding value by choosing to buddy a new member in a different type of Organisation to their own
- They have scope for developing a mentoring relationship

Benefits to AMED:

- It presents an opportunity to increase the membership in a time when it is down
- It presents a vehicle for encouraging more active membership
- It provides a platform to network
- It provides a support mechanism for members
- It is the natural precursor of a mentoring scheme within AMED

Likely scenarios

I have tried to draw out likely scenarios.

It may well be that when the buddy gets in touch, the new member wants nothing to do with the scheme and is quite happy doing his or her own thing and does not need or want any support. I think this is unlikely unless the recruit has already been a member of AMED in the past in which case there is no problem

The second scenario is where the member takes on the responsibility to get in touch but fails to do so. This could be for a variety of reasons including workload, personal reasons (e.g. death in the family), repeated unsuccessful attempts to 'phone.

The member gets in touch and strikes up a working relationship which proves beneficial to both parties. Ideally, the relationship goes beyond the initial idea to the point where there are exchange visits, collaboration, mentoring, joint activities, etc.

The member gets in touch and the start goes well but then gradually the contact diminishes. This may be due to issues such as diaries (can't find mutual dates to meet due to business pressures), insufficient overlap of interests, too much overlap (and maybe a commercial threat), mutual dislike etc.

Nothing happens and the whole thing dies.

The Communications Working Group

Purpose of the Group

At the last meeting of the group there was some considerable confusion about what we were trying to achieve. If you don't know what you are trying to do then how can you achieve it? I thought I would commit to paper and suggest some ideas.

- 1. To encourage active participation in AMED**
- 2. To audit what is currently being done within AMED to foster communication between member.**
- 3. To develop new ideas to foster communication between member.**
- 4. To understand why members join AMED and how we can turn this into a more active participation.**
- 5. To produce guidelines on the type of networking available.**
- 6. To target specific networking practices and see how we can support and enhance them.**
- 7. To create working groups like this one with a sole aim of giving members a reason to meet**
- 8. To establish a buddy scheme for new members**
- 9. To consider mentoring as a possible strategy for supporting members**
- 10. To resolve the dilemma between acting as a "counselling" body to support members in need versus more pragmatic, hard-nosed business networking.**
- 11. To simply have fun meeting each other.**
- 12. To cross tabulate members needs with organisation type and consider setting up working groups to meet each identified cluster. (See 7 above)**
- 13. To educate ourselves by having a short presentation by a group member on issues which they see as important. (This would occupy say, a half hour slot at each meeting before the business started).**
- 14. To foster and encourage members to visit each other in their "home" site - or find mechanisms for encouraging this.**

IAIN R. GRAYDON

Iain Graydon is an independent management trainer and consultant who runs his own business 'People: Development & Growth'. He holds a BSc and a PhD in Psychology and is a Chartered Psychologist and full member of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Association of Management Education and Development (AMED).

He spent five years as a research assistant at Aston University where he worked on Information Display in the Applied Psychology Department. He was then head hunted into GEC's Hirst Research Centre and worked as a research psychologist on Computer Vision and Advanced Artificial Intelligence.

Having tired of research, he moved to the GEC Management College at Dunchurch as a Management tutor/consultant where he worked for four years. He then became a Director in a small company specialising in communications skills before finally setting up his own business which he now runs in partnership with his wife, Susan.

He has had considerable experience in the field of Management Development and designs, develops and runs training events and workshops from interviewing to negotiating, facilitation and influencing skills. Increasingly he is being asked to develop customised "one-off" workshops at more senior levels. He also acts in a consulting capacity to a number of organisations and helps them determine their management and Organisational Development needs and the solutions to those needs.

At 41, he is happily married with a young family and lives in Warwickshire.