

Report on my stay at the Greater Stellenbosch Development Trust February 18th to March 25th 2013

by Irene Glück, March 25th 2013.

O. Preliminary remark

On my arrival, a new intermediate trust manager (staff member of partner Vision Africa) had just started his work 3 weeks previously after a 3 month period of vacancy. I was asked to assist the Trust in achieving the strategic aims and intermediate challenges mentioned below. Within the following weeks I had the chance to talk to trustees, trust manager, staff members, ambassadors and the manager of partner Vision Africa. After 4 weeks working in the trust I had a final meeting which was attended by Ilzemarie Knoetze, Jan Schliemann, Brian Joorst, Hannes van Zyl (trustees), Bernie Treptow (trust manager), Esmeralda Michaels (staff member) and Gerrit Laning (operations manager Vision Africa).

1. Strategic aims and intermediate challenges of the Greater Stellenbosch Development Trust

Strategic aims:

- Improve quality of education program continuously
- Improve sustainability of programs
- Become a strong organization, rooted in the community

Intermediate challenges:

- Renew system of mostly German individual sponsorships
- Solve structural and other problems to ensure quality after-school teaching
- Find a workable solution for managing the Trust

2. My report at the final meeting

At the final meeting I shared the following ideas, hypotheses and thoughts on the topics mentioned above. I divided my remarks into resources, challenges, risks, chances and concluding tips and explained them as follows:

2.1. Resources

I want to start with the resources, the potentials, the Trust can count on. There are many:

- The building: friendly, bright, clean with lovingly decorated rooms for crèche and aftercare. You get a good feeling, when you enter it.
- Trust manager and staff members with knowledge, skills, potential, who love their work, most of them rooted in the community.
- An office team which works together quite well and is able to handle unexpected situations.
- Volunteers with time, willing to share their knowledge, skills and ideas
- Committed trustees with a lot of knowledge, experience, contacts
- Ambassadors with many ideas, wealthy people, willing to help, with many contacts to possible sponsors
- A strong partner: Vision Africa
- A good reputation in the community
- Kids who like to be in the Trust.
- Parents who appreciate the work of the trust so much, that they are willing to pay.

In summary I would say. The conditions to achieve the aims are good.

2.2. Challenges

In my opinion, in order to achieve the aims, the challenge is, to keep different needs in balance. Such needs are:

- freedom and security
- dynamics and stability
- speediness and sustainability

2.2.1. Freedom versus security

There is a lot of freedom in the trust. Employees can decide how they want to do their work. They can implement their ideas and use their skills. In the aftercare e. g. they are free to try new games, methods, tools, to create their program as they like. In this regard the Trust is a great place to work. It is also a great place for visitors. They can come whenever they want. Staff members are friendly, even if they are very busy.

There are few formal structures. To get things done quickly shortcuts are allowed. Trustees and ambassadors can address staff members directly and staff members can do this also the other way round. Ambassadors can do the work of trustees and trustees and ambassadors sometimes seem to act like trust managers. Communication works mostly informal. There seems to be less rules and boundaries.

In summary I would say, working in the Trust is lively! Doubtless, this is a strength!

On the other hand his informal way of doing things might cause a lack of security and reliability to the people working in the Trust. It is not clear who is authorized to make a decision on which topic, who can ask or has to be asked for advice, who has to be informed about what by whom,

who can give directions to whom. This way of doing things also causes a lot of interruptions and makes it difficult to plan.

In my opinion currently freedom carries more weight than security. To balance out freedom and security, I suggest negotiating a structure, setting up rules, and having them followed.

In my opinion the new (intermediate) trust manager has started to work on that topic already, and as far as I understood, the trustees agree and support him.

2.2.2. Dynamism versus stability

It is similar with dynamics and stability. To me it seems like there is more dynamism than stability.

The Trust is a very dynamic organization. Within 10 years it has developed from a few people's ideas of "wanting to help poor children" to an organization offering high quality education, and more: The Trust has started various projects and countless activities.

In spite of all the changes there is stability. Some trustees and ambassadors have been active almost the entire time. Not so staff and the trust managers. As far as I know there have been 6 trust managers during the last 10 years. Just lately the trust manager had to leave, as well as the educational expert. Changes like that very often cause insecurity. Staff doesn't know what will happen next and acts carefully.

To achieve stability the Trust needs staff members and above all a trust manager who stays at least 2 years. I think the Trust needs a trust manager who is there 100 % with time and heart. In my opinion this is important to achieve quality and sustainability.

Actually I think the trust does not need a manager but a leader, a person with commitment to the trust who is able to win staff to share the vision and to employ staff and the many various types of volunteers efficiently, allowing them to use their skills and potential to the best. - Maybe you've found that person already. But maybe it is not a bad idea to take your time to come to a decision. To promote stability and security I think it would be wise to give the staff information on the state of the decision-making process.

2.2.3. Speed vs. sustainability

There is a third pair: speed and sustainability. You are high speed people and you are very busy. Maybe this impression is so strong to me, because I left my work and I-phone at home. Since I have been here I have time. You haven't. But not only you are very busy, the staff, at least the office staff, is also very busy.

Speed is good, because you can get many things done. But there is also risk in being so very busy. Probably you are familiar with the story of the woodcutter who had no time to sharpen the saw because he thought he could not stop cutting wood.

To achieve sustainability you need to step back once in a while and sharpen the saw:

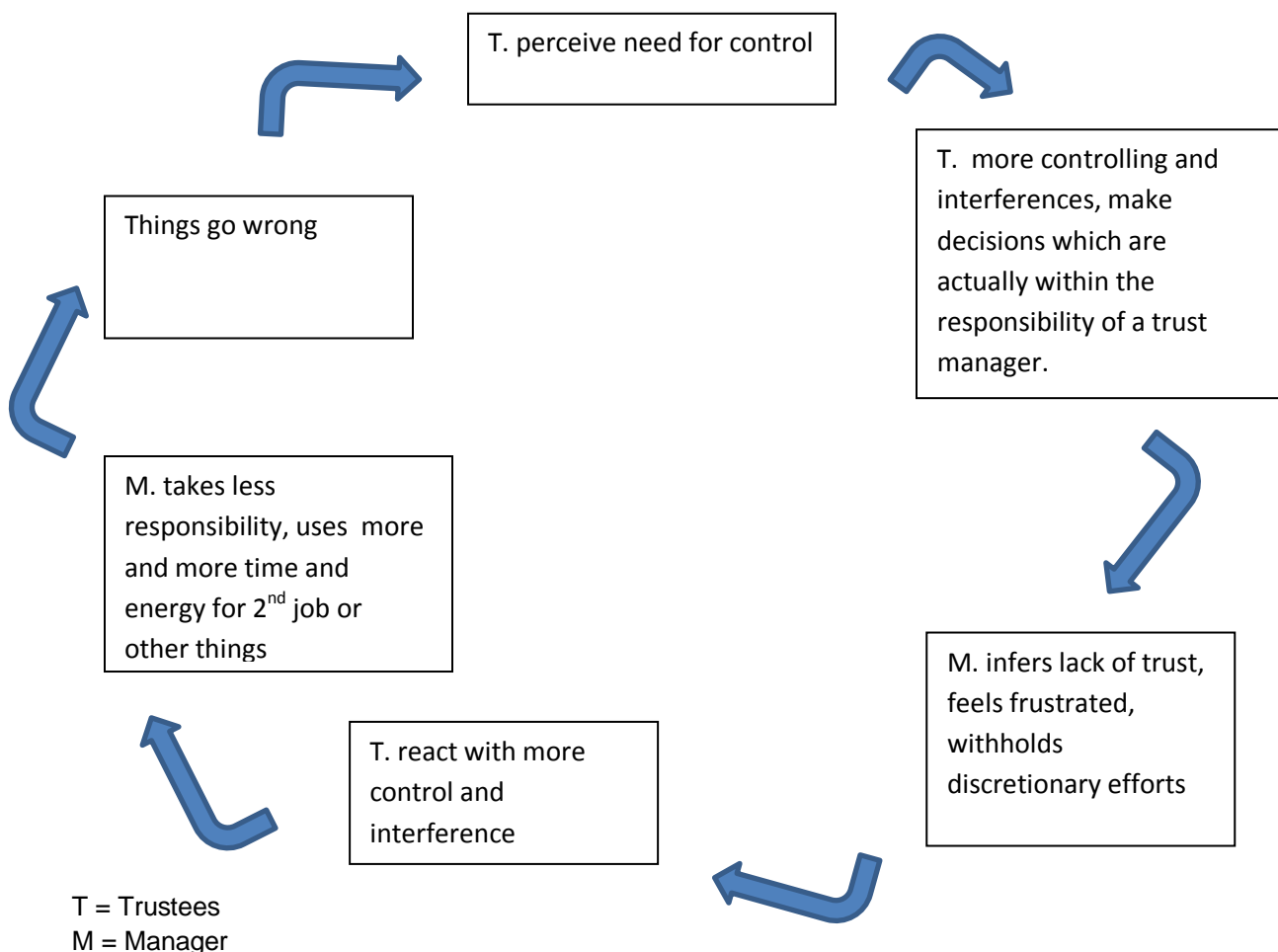
Compare your goals with your results: Do they match? If not: What has to be done to make them match? Did you choose goals which are not supported? Do you have to change your goals?

This target-performance comparison is only possible if you have defined your goals carefully before you started. If you find out that you have not, you need to go back: Define your goals. You can use the SMART formula or define indicators or set up a priority list. If you want to start or renew a project, I recommend to start with this steps.

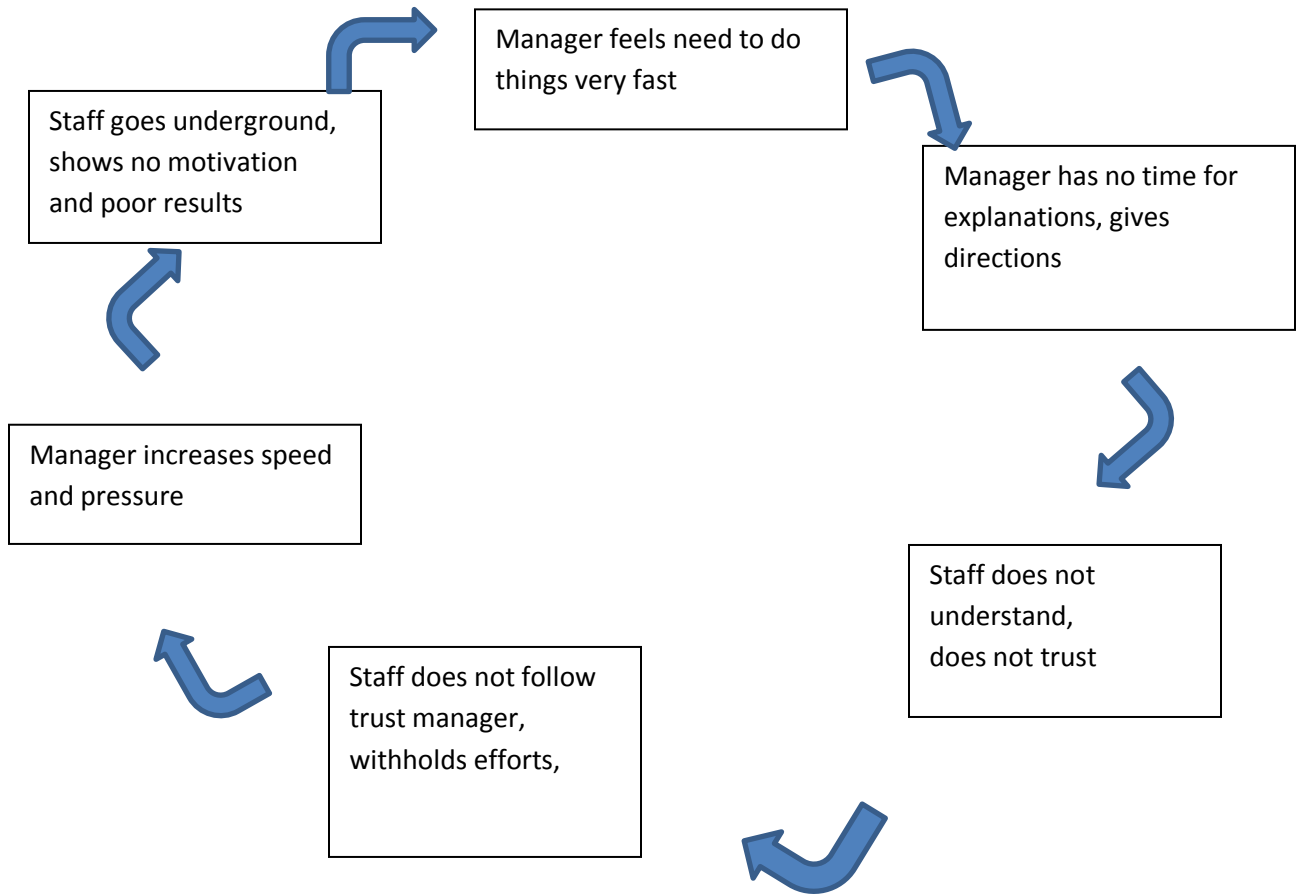
2.3. Risks

There are some. They have to do with vicious circles you might get into and find yourself caught. Maybe you will not step into that trap, but I think there is a certain danger. That's why I want to show you two examples. Actually they are not circles but a spiral.

Vicious Circle Example 1:



Vicious Circle Example 2:

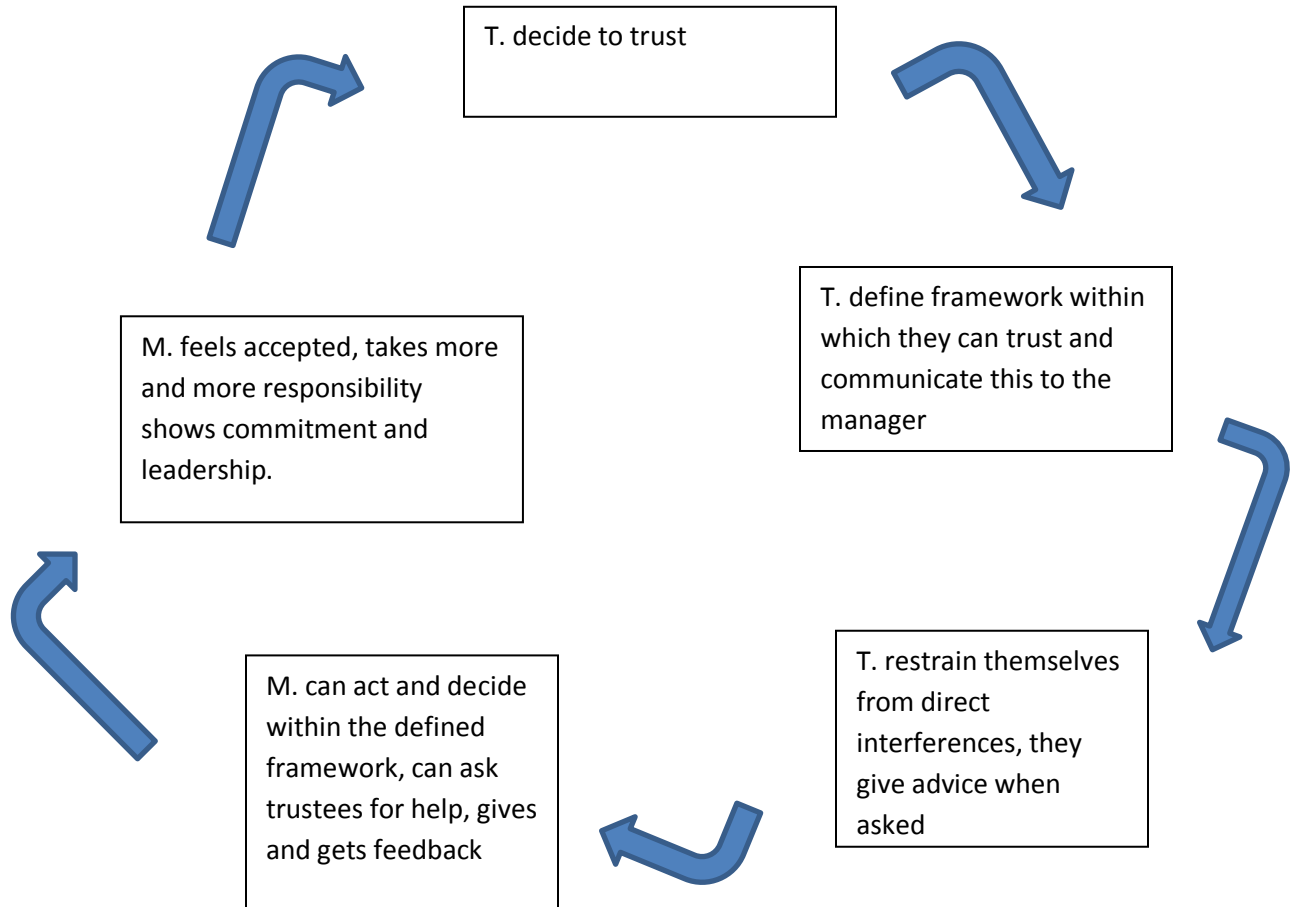


To get out of a vicious circle: Do not go on. Do something else!

2.4. Chances

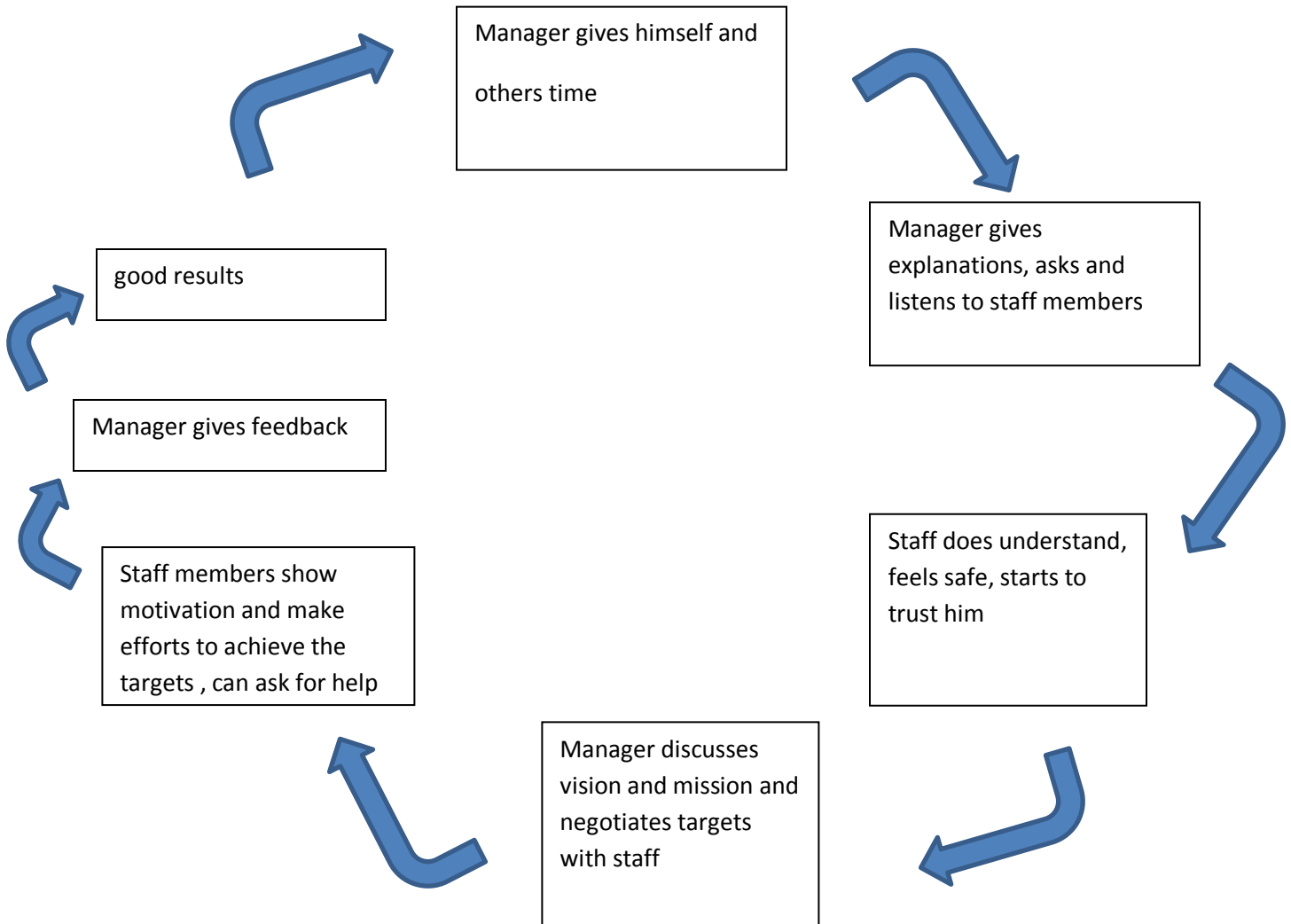
Knowing about this, there is a chance to avoid vicious circles and promote virtuous circles. Actually they are also not circles but spirals.

Virtuous Circle Example 1:



T = Trustees
M = Manager

Virtuous Circle Example 2:



2.5. Concluding tips

1. Give yourself time.
2. Strengthen the leader.
3. Help staff to build a team.
4. Communicate.
5. If something doesn't work, do not do more of the same. Try something else!

2.6. Postscript

One more thought I would like to mention: There is an imbalance between the people “outside” (trustees and ambassadors who live more or less far away from Kayamandi in a totally different environment) and the people “inside” the (Trust manager and staff members who live mainly in Kayamandi). New ideas, philosophy, vision, targets, decisions and also money come mainly from the “outside people”. Mainly they decide what the people of Kayamandi need and what the trust offers. Shouldn’t it be the other way round? Shouldn’t the “inside people”, the ones who do everyday work and who mainly live in Kayamandi make the decisions or at least participate? Shouldn’t they step by step take more and more responsibility and finally run the trust? Shouldn’t the trust become their project? If you wanted to go in that direction, what first steps could you make? At present, there is no person who could become the trust manager. But maybe in a few years the situation will be different, if the current trust manager starts now to look for people with potential, and works with these people continuously. As Vision Africa is working that way, the Trust has got the chance to adapt it.

Annex:

- Suggestions to renew the system of godparents
- Suggestions to work on the topic after care (after school teaching)