

THEORETICAL ASPECTS CONCERNING THE MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

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Abstract: *The initial motivation in volunteering involvement is not a guarantee of the activity continuity, and the reasons to disclaim this concern might be various. The organizations, in which volunteers are working, can prevent to a certain degree the volunteers leaving, by taking two steps: understanding what volunteering and the group of volunteers generally requires, especially (motivation, costs incurred and expected benefits) respectively the assuming of an efficient management. The present paper aims a short overview of the main elements of volunteer management, as they are illustrated in the literature.*

Key words: *motivation, management, volunteers.*

1. The need for management

Why is it necessary to address this topic, related to the volunteer management? The dominant idea is that the lack of attention due to the problem of volunteer management has as consequences a low/an unsatisfactory level regarding the recruitment and the retention of volunteers.

The first volunteer manager establishment in the UK, in the 1960s, and the call addressed by Noyes Campbell and Ellis (1995) cited Rochester (2010) [7] to institutions in order to take responsibility for volunteers managing are both examples of an increasing trend of a systematic thinking regarding their organization. Currently few people argue that volunteers should not be coordinated, it is accepted that in order to attract and retain volunteers successfully, the organizations should not abuse the time provided by volunteers, but to use their time rationally, with careful implementation and support effort.

But the way in which those should be managed raises some questions. What is a good practice in volunteer management and to what extent can it be flexible enough to be implemented in different types of organizations? Is there more than one pattern of thinking regarding volunteer management?

There are some organizations, often the small ones, and especially those that are run by volunteers, which avoid the management idea or at least they are not aware of its relevance. However, it is interesting to know whether this implies the absence of any management or the existence of an alternative form, convenient for the organization.

The importance of this issue is underlined by the conclusions of several studies in the field, one of them commissioned by the UPS Foundation in 1998, showing that two-fifths of the volunteers stopped working for an organization, at some point, because of one

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or more poor management practices [3]. Among the reasons given by them there was the inefficient use of volunteer time, of their talents or the lack of tasks transparency.

In order that the coordination of volunteers to become professionalized, specialists have turned their attention to improving the capacity of the host organization to receive volunteers. In general, practice is focused on providing support for the involvement of volunteers, especially for a leader or a manager appointed for surveillance and for providing a set of practices and appropriate procedures to manage the volunteer program.

These views on the need for effective means for supporting and maintaining volunteers were also confirmed by other studies, Grossman and Furano [1] identified three essential elements for a successful volunteer program: the potential volunteers screening in order to ensure an appropriate integration and placement within the organization, the orientation and training in order to provide to volunteers with skills both the needed expectations and the continuous management and support of the paid staff, as an ensuring that the time spent volunteering is not wasted.

Also, two of the leading thinkers, practitioners and authors of good practice guides for volunteer management, argued that when an organization receives a volunteer it is required to provide him support. They argue that, "in the situation of the paid staff this fact is usually self-evident. Any staffing needs a based planning and management related to the workspace, to the monitoring and to the record keeping. And when it is working with volunteers, many of the same responsibilities are applied" (Noyes Campbell and Ellis, 1995, p.2 cited. [7, p. 148]).

2. Models of volunteer management

I will continue to present two models of volunteer management: a modern / formal one (the workplace model) and a less formal one (the home-grown model), analyzing the strengths and the weaknesses of each.

2.1. The formal model (the workplace model)

For many organizations, the assuming of this model in the activity of volunteer management is regarded as the most effective. This idea that volunteering is seen as an activity similar to the paid work, but unpaid is based on two key elements.

Firstly, organizations operate in an environment where they are signaled that if they do not adopt a more formal voluntary model they risk to lose the potential volunteers. In this regard, I have mentioned above that volunteers expect their work to be organized properly. The need for organization / coordination the volunteer work is also underlined by the fact that organizations, with the role of service providers, found that eligibility for funding requires demonstrating how volunteers can contribute to the work of the organization.

The second key factor in explaining the growing interest of organizations to management is their tendency to have the necessary means to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency as potential providers of public services [8]. To be competent in providing social services, voluntary organizations must certify to potential donors that a service is reliable and cost-effective in terms of costs. Once voluntary organizations are service providers and they are paid by legal sources, it is right and equitable that such organizations to be responsible for managing the received money.

If, for example, an organization is contracted to provide a service and if it needs to recruit volunteers to perform a part of the work, the focus will be inevitably placed on the management of volunteers.

2.2. The informal model (the home-grown model)

Although the workplace model seems to gain widespread acceptance, there are alternatives. The organizations that involve volunteers varies enormously, as long as we can find them not only in the third sector (the non-profit sector), but also in the private or public sector. The model previously presented seems to fit with the organizations that involve volunteers in the same way that involve the paid staff.

In an attempt to extract the essence of different patterns of involvement of volunteers, Zimmeck [10] analyzed a series of research studies that show the roles performed by volunteers in organizations and the manner in which the organizations have conceptualized volunteers. To the surprise of the author, in the interpretation of results, only two models were highlighted regarding the

volunteer management: the formal model (workplace model) and informal model (home-grown model). Although, logically, the various types of involving volunteers in organizations should have generated various volunteer coordination models adjusted to their characteristics, this did not happen.

The formal model is characterized as being applicable to larger organizations with a hierarchical structure based on rules and division of labor. In contrast to this perspective is the bureaucratic *collectivist-democratic* one. As the name suggests, this perspective implies equality between the organization members, a less bureaucratic structure and a minimal application of rules and procedures. Based on that distinction, Zimmeck defines the characteristic features of each type of management, presented in Table 1.

This is a scheme that perfectly describes the volunteering literature from an organizational perspective, highlighting the elements of contrast between the organizations that involve volunteers, largely as a mean to reach a purpose, and the organizations that involve volunteers more as an essential expression of the values.

Models of management volunteering

Table 1

| | Formal | Informal |
|---|--|---|
| The purpose of organization | Very well structured and with efficient bureaucracy | Full expression of principal values |
| The form of authority | Formal and universal: the continuing application of rules and procedures | Informal and ad hoc: the continuing application of values |
| Volunteers/employees role | Employees and volunteers have both equal roles | Basically different, but practically they can be equal |
| The distribution of authority between volunteers and employees | Hierarchically, with volunteers subordinated to employees | Authority shared between volunteers and employees as partners |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The control | Direct, formal | Indirect, free |
| Social relations | Functional relations with the manager and employees | Permissive boundaries, personal/ functional relationships between volunteers, and between volunteers and managers, employees, customers, members, etc.. |
| Recruitment and promotion criteria | Process based on equal opportunities and on risk management | Intuitively: ideals and common interests, friendships |
| Reward method | Intrinsic, focusing on employees with similar responsibilities (expenses, training) | Intrinsic, focusing on achievements |
| Tasks building | Maximum division of labor | Minimum division of labor |
| Survey building | Specialist | General |

Source: Zimmeck, 2000

Based on the distinction between the two models made by Zimmeck, [7] suggests that organizations should consider the volunteer management issue in terms of congruence or otherwise, to choose the model that fits the institution profile. Although the general trend is that the coordination of volunteers to become more formal, for some organizations this might be counter-productive. For example, in a study of small groups of volunteers, the researchers found that *the informal* is the functioning key of those groups and despite the fact that they knew of the existence of formal volunteer management systems; survey respondents claimed the irrelevance of those.

In addition to the researches that support the informal or formal model of volunteer management, there are studies that aim highlighting the strengths and limitations of each of the two models. In the following lines, I will present, synthetically, key

elements captured in these studies, which should be taken into consideration when talking about volunteer management.

• **Volunteers wanting more management**

The fact that 71% of volunteers say that their work could be better organized is likely to be an indicative of the need for management [9]. However, other evidences indicate that the excessive management and bureaucracy can surprise the volunteers in a hard way. The mediation between these findings is performed by Gaskin researches [2], which clearly states that volunteers want a combination of the two antagonistic positions. They do not want wasting time in the absence of their assigned tasks, but with much less a faithful replica of a job.

This indicates not only different strengths to the idea of formality, but also the need for this formality to be tempered. Also, there should be bear in mind that

within one organization there is a diversity of roles that volunteers can take them. The experience in this field shows that different types of volunteers need different management styles, and the inability of the organization to be flexible in this regard it is seen as a weakness.

The strength of informal management model is flexibility, but it cannot be ignored the lack of a very clear specified/ coded practice of this model and neither the lack of rules regarding the performance of a task.

• **Bureaucracy is not always harmful**

Zimmeck [10] argues that the problem of *the bureaucratic model* lies in the fact that it is a model without limits, exercising its influence on all aspects of the organizations and often regardless the purpose of obtaining a better result.

On the other hand, Weber argues that bureaucracy is the best model for organizational effectiveness because it contributes to the stability insurance and it guarantees impartiality. The echo of this idea can be found in the today good practice guides; the urge to all organizations is to build policies on volunteering, because, although volunteering is flexible and spontaneous, organizations must have procedures and rules, instead of the simple approach of overcoming possible ordinary situations.

The existence of volunteer policies/ strategies involves the building of a general framework of the activity organization, the definition of the roles that volunteers can have, and the presentation of elements regarding the volunteers recruiting and support. Machin and Paine [4] argue that the existence of such strategy demonstrates the organization commitment towards its volunteers, the organization can assure them of the position held within it and it can provide

consistency / weight for the decisions taken within the group of volunteers. While recent studies suggest that large organizations are more likely to have strategies for recruitment and maintenance of volunteers, this principle can be also useful for many smaller organizations, in the sense that guarantees the existence of some reference points which ensures volunteers that they can be treated and considered equal with the members of staff.

• **Volunteer comes first**

Evidences suggest that *a poor management* might cause volunteers to leave an organization, without making clarifications on what entails *a good management*. In a study of volunteers which were belonging to social excluded groups, it is suggested that the organization can help them not only by matching the volunteer with the assigned role, but by taking a middle path. In certain circumstances, it is important that the role to be built from the person which wants to become a volunteer.

There are organizations that claim that their goal is to provide services to their customers and, in this situation, the volunteer is a person who helps the organization to do more having his support, in this case, volunteers being rather a support for the paid staff. The entire focus on meeting the needs of clients/ beneficiaries implies that the organization is not able to provide a range of opportunities to volunteer neither to teach them how to contribute to its work [7].

Based on the above, it can be noticed that each of the two management models have both strengths and limitations, but the most likely for problems occurring is the moment when a model is applied in an inappropriate framework. The studies

show that the formal model tends to become the dominant approach of volunteer management, but its application in an informal setting can be dangerous.

3. The process of volunteer management

In order that the volunteer can have a successful experience in the organization where he is acting it is absolutely necessary to take into account a number of aspects of management. The effective management of volunteers requires a planned and organized process, similar to that required by any organizational project.

According to McCurley and Lynch [5], the successful coordination of volunteers involves the following eight key areas:

3.1. The evaluation of the needs

Before creating new opportunities for volunteers, it is important the examination of each organization regarding the specific skills that are required, the period for which it needs the support of volunteers, interests, attitudes and other qualities they are looking to find to a volunteer. In other words, when an organization wants to create new volunteer opportunities it should answer the following questions: Why does it need volunteers? Which of them have exceptional talents or expertise in the field? Which of the organization needs have to be achieved? Where could be reevaluated the skills / talents of volunteers?

3.2. Volunteers recruitment

Volunteer recruitment is the process through which the organization promotes its activities and invites people to get involved in its efforts as volunteers [6].

Recruitment remains a challenge for all coordinators, who are bound to find the right volunteer. When it comes to recruiting volunteers, it must be remembered the following aspects that motivates people in this regard:

- Organization mission - the loyalty towards their relationship with society
- Personal contact – a staff member contacts the volunteer personally to present him an opportunity
- Expectations communication – the organization presents clearly its expectations to the volunteer
- Advertising - the leaders publish the free positions for volunteers
- Community events – the members feel that they belong to the group by attending the meetings and the special events
- First impression - a warm welcome offered to volunteers

3.3. Volunteers matching/ selection

The selection refers to the process of identifying the appropriate volunteer for the activities in which the organization wants to involve him. This step requires organization knowledge of the volunteer needs and also of the abilities or skills that volunteer can acquire. In this way there can be used the appropriate methods that fit volunteer position which was offered in the organization and that meets his interests and talents. The selection activity is closely related to the recruitment, a good selection may be a premise for maintaining the volunteer motivation and thus increasing his performance.

3.4. Volunteers orientation/training

Volunteers should be familiar with their new position by providing information regarding the services / departments within the organization, their role within

the organization and the resources they can use. Also, the organization must train the volunteer by educating and giving him the information support that he needs.

Synthesized, those steps involve the approach of the following aspects:

Table 2

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mission - patrimony - management - the round seat of the institution |
| Volunteer role | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - role specificity - the purpose of the role - policies and procedures - the way in which evidence is kept - expected outcomes - activities calendar/ schedule |
| Resources available for volunteers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff - the web site of the organization - the list with volunteers contact details - initiatory meetings - previous achievements |

According to *The instrument for volunteer management*, a handbook conducted by Pro Vobis National Volunteer Center, the stage of volunteer orientation and training involves the following factors: organization presentation, volunteer program, volunteer law, presentation and signing the voluntary agreement, the signing of parent or legal representative agreement (if the volunteer is minor) and the presentation of the job description.

3.5. Motivating the volunteers

In order to motivate volunteers it is necessary that the organization to consider the complexity of reasons for which people choose to give their time and available resources. The key to success is considered to be "the correct identification of motivational factors of each volunteer, to offer exactly that kind of motivation that is most relevant to the volunteer" [6, p. 35].

The organization can be successful in maintaining the interest and enthusiasm of

volunteers, if the coordinator shows its continuous availability and if he establishes an inclusive environment. In this respect, the coordinator can provide the list with contact details of volunteers, he can provide information regarding the agenda of meetings with volunteers, he can keep track for the past and present volunteers.

3.6. The recognition/appreciation

The recognition of volunteer merits is not just an event, a diploma or an award given as a reward for their contribution, but it is a process, an attitude which should exist in everything that is done by the organization, in order to attract and retain volunteers.

It is very important to be shared to the volunteers assessments both formal and informal, and to communicate the value they hold in the organization.

Here are some examples that are recommended in this regard, as rules of recognition: providing frequent feed-back,

in various methods, assessing how volunteers accomplished a task, involving volunteers in some decision making, interest in their personal lives, symbolic rewards offering (a diploma or a trophy), providing opportunities to take on additional responsibilities (where applicable), the appreciation of loyal volunteers.

3.7. Supervision

Monitoring and supervision are the activities which are held especially by the volunteer coordinator, who must ensure that: volunteers involvement is conducted under normal circumstances, the proposed objectives were met in the prescribed time, the volunteer is integrated in the working group and he is accepted by the other volunteers, by the staff members and beneficiaries, and that he likes the activity he performs.

3.8. Evaluation

Evaluation can help the organization to determine the success of volunteers and at the same time, to establish new goals on short term and long term. This evaluation should be carried out regularly within some pre-set meetings, which are attended by all volunteers, and where feedback is both offered and received from the volunteers.

Also, the constant evaluation of the individuals helps the organization to avoid or correct the possible mistakes in good time and to demonstrate the benefits that volunteering can have on the organization and on the community.

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