

Volunteers within an Organizational Context-One Term Is Not Enough*

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Abstract: Volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization. The most obvious formal characteristic is the absence of pay. Volunteers gain their income from another job. Within nonprofit organizations volunteers perform work in different levels of organizations and tasks or jobs. They can work only for projects or act in long-term assistance, e.g., daily, weekly, or a longer period or they even lead such an organization in the function of a board member. Volunteers can assist paid staff as well as provide services like paid staff because of the absence of paid staff. The English language uses only one term for different assignments of volunteers in organizations even the meaning behind is very broad and not restricted. The German language on the contrary provides at least two different terms implicating different meanings when talking about volunteers “Freiwillige, Ehrenamtliche”, although the discussion about a common meaning is the same. The contribution of this paper is the idea of an advanced nomenclature for the term “volunteer” within an organizational context. It presents new terms for different groups of volunteers in relation to their commitment.

Key words: voluntarism; volunteers; nonprofit organization

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1. Introduction

Nonprofit-Organizations are an important social, political and cultural part of a civil society. The nonprofit-sector has become an important part of the society as third sector in addition to the profit sector and the government sector. It covers requirements which are disregarded by public or profit organizations. These organizations close this gap and justify therefore their work field (Anheier, 2005). When talking about nonprofit organizations and their staff it is obligatory to talk about volunteers. Looking for an all-embracing definition for the term nonprofit-organization is not possible because of the wide range of the whole sector and the different point of views from which definitions are made. The term volunteer faces a similar challenge. Different approaches to volunteers result in various definitions. This paper looks at volunteers from the organizational point of view and tries to explore a new concept of terms.

2. Definition

Volunteering is an important component of civil society all over the world. Politics are aware of the importance of this sector. In Europe, again after 2001 the year 2011 was proclaimed as “European Year of

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Volunteering” by the European Union, see <http://europa.eu/volunteering/en>. What is volunteering about?

“Volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization” (Wilson, 2000). German scholars add another feature to this definition: Volunteering will take place outside the own household (Fischer, 2004). Following there are further explanations to the given definition: Volunteering means that the activity will be done freely (Wilson, 2000) and without coercion as well as it does not include unpaid work because of legal obligations, i.e., military service, civilian service. Time is given freely will mean that volunteers perform work not for pay. Donating time to a worthwhile cause is a powerful motivation for volunteers. It is not enough to reduce the definition of volunteers to the absence of pay (Michelutti, Schenkel, 2009). It is useful compared to paid staff. Volunteers gain their income from another job. Out-of pocket expenses on travels, telephone, etc which may be reimbursed are not considered as income (Badelt, More-Hollerweger, 2007). To benefit another person, group, or organization excludes unpaid work within the own household (Wilson, 2000).

Above definition provides a first borderline. To come closer to what could be meant by volunteers within an organizational context it is necessary to narrow the meaning of volunteers again: It is to distinguish between formal volunteering and informal volunteering—formal volunteering meaning activities within organizations, associations, institutions and informal volunteering meaning neighborly help, mutual aid without any institutional framework (O’Regan, 2009). This article concentrates on formal volunteering.

The term volunteering, volunteer covers a wide range of meaning: “It is extremely difficult to define what is meant by a volunteer as there is no standard practice in volunteering” (Bussell, Forbes, 2002). The English language uses only one term although the meaning behind is very broad and not restricted. The German language on the contrary provides at least two different groups of terms implicating different meanings when talking about volunteers “Freiwillige”, “Ehrenamtliche” (Heimgartner, 2004). The definition “Ehrenamtliche” has a long history starting in the Middle Age. The meaning changed throughout the various historical areas. Even today the meaning is subject to the changing society (Nowotka, 2007). In the absence of a more contemporary term it is still used for a special kind of voluntary work. Volunteers as “Ehrenamtliche” work in charitable organizations, associations or as functionaries in political, social and churchly boards (Bock, 2002). Volunteers as “Freiwillige” provide self-determined activity on common welfare without financial reward (Kegel, 2002). In the German language there does not exist an overall term as “volunteers”. Although the contradictory meaning of such a term, it would be an advantage for general public relations on volunteers (Heimgartner, 2004). In the absence of an all-embracing meaning of volunteers in the German language scholars recommend either to use the old-fashioned term “Ehrenamtliche” till a new overall expression has been found because the term “Freiwillige” being not a suitable equivalent (Notz, 1999) or they recommend the terms “Freiwilligenarbeit, Freiwilligenengagement” as best equivalent to the international term “volunteers” (Bock, 2002).

According to the different German terms the allover English term “volunteer” will be adjusted by specific titles to make their meaning more concrete in an organizational context.

3. Motivation of Volunteers

As already mentioned volunteers will give time freely without an adequate financial reward. Consequently altruism must be the central motive where the reward is intrinsic (Bussell, Forbes, 2002). Volunteers get involved for tasks which correspond to the personal interest and circumstances (Nowotka, 2007). They, as well, hold paying jobs, so their volunteer work may fulfill only those motivational needs that are not being met at work (Phillips, Phillips, 2010).

The literature on the motivation of volunteers focuses on identifying the nature of the benefits of volunteering. Within this context Leete presents a useful taxonomy for volunteer motivation (Leete, 2006): At first benefits are divided into extrinsic and intrinsic ones: Extrinsic motivation is seen as a result from the work itself while intrinsic motivation arises from the volunteer activity itself. The author presents scientific papers confirming that volunteers may especially be recruited to do tasks for which a demonstration of intrinsic motivation is important. Nevertheless much more material and theories are available dealing with extrinsic motivation subsumed in four groups. By instrumental motivations volunteers will donate their time in order to increase the supply of public goods. Psychological motivation stresses personal values of volunteers, e.g., enhanced self-esteem. Motivation concerning human-capital and rational-choice perspective consider the connection between human capital and both the costs and the benefits of volunteering. The final fourth group focuses on developing and maintaining social resources and connections, meaning social networks, organizational memberships, prior volunteer experience, etc.

There exists a lot of more scientific work about the motivation of volunteers, e.g., see article of Wilson (Wilson, 2000) using different angles to consider. But it is not only to look on motivation of volunteers there are also demographic aspects to consider when talking about motivation of volunteers: age, gender, paid work status, educational background (Phillips, Phillips, 2010). These aspects may differ from country to country as well within the various fields of nonprofit work.

People are more likely to volunteer if they can afford to do so, and they are less likely to volunteer if the opportunity cost of their time is high. They are more likely to volunteer if the work and worktime characteristics of their workplace facilitate volunteering and do not pose barriers to volunteering (Gomez, Gunderson, 2003). Leete also talks about such an effect in another context by using the calculation of the wage elasticity of volunteer labor supply as relationship between the value of an individual's time and the extent to which they donate their time to volunteering (Leete, 2006). People within active work places volunteer more than people without employment even they might have more time reserve. Unpredictable working hours have a negative effect on volunteering. Better education also may have an impact on volunteering (Gomez, Gunderson, 2003).

The following survey will show empirical evidence to this field: Statistics Austria ("Statistik Austria") made a survey in 2006 to find out motives and other attributes of volunteers. When talking about motives the most reasons to work as volunteer are (1) having fun, having a good time, (2) helping other people, (3) meeting new friends. These three motives are not an Austrian specialty. Nowotcka presents another survey about motives of volunteering in Germany in 1999 and 2004. The motives are the same (Nowotcka, 2007).

In Austria, 4.6 millions of people over the age of 15 years are involved in volunteering in various fields producing 14.7 millions of hours of voluntary work.

The survey considers also formal and informal volunteering: 27.9% being busy in association, organizations (formal volunteering), 27.1% of people are busy in neighborly help (informal volunteering). Concerning *age* it is 43.8% of the Austrian population at the age of 15 years volunteering in different areas. Within this group 47.1% are men and 40.7% are women. Especially motivated are people within the age of 40 to 59 years. Also people within 20 and 24 years and 30 to 39 years do much of voluntary work. Regarding the marital status married people and single people take an active part with 46% each, widowed people represent only a small part. The educational background is also an important attribute when talking about volunteers. Higher education favors volunteering. This is also shown by this survey: 60% of volunteers have a degree of pedagogical school, 54% a degree of a university.

4. Typology of Volunteers

Within the chapter—definition—the broad range of meaning of the term “volunteer” was narrowed to the understanding within an organizational context of nonprofit organizations. The connection to German idioms should sensibilize for different meanings of “volunteer” also in the English language. When talking about associations being the most important legal framework within nonprofit organizations in Europe (Freise, Pajas, 2004) volunteers donate their time in different hierarchical levels of such organizations. They can work only for projects or act in long-term assistance, e.g., daily, weekly, or a longer period. Volunteers can assist paid staff or provide services like paid staff because of the absence of paid staff or even act in leadership positions in the function of a board member.

To specify the meaning of “volunteers” and to discuss implications and consequences on different groups of volunteers more precisely new terms are presented: Distinctive features are time and frequency of engagement, qualifications needed, position within the organization, function, responsibility of a voluntary position, procedure of appointment. The higher the position and the commitment the less it is possible to talk about a volunteer in the original sense:

The meaning of these terms will be shown by an example of nonprofit organizations—Alpine Clubs: These organizations are dependent on a lot of volunteers to provide their services to their members. The Austrian Alpine Club (“Oesterreichischer Alpenverein”) an association with 400.000 members can be proud of more than 22.000 volunteers. The major part of them—12.000—are volunteers, 6.400 operate as unpaid staff, 2.600 as honorary managers (Alpenverein, 2011).

The distinctive features of these groups of volunteers are shown in table one and explained the following in detail.

Table 1 Typology of Volunteers

	Volunteers as <i>Volunteers</i>	Volunteers as <i>Unpaid staff</i>	Volunteers as <i>Volunteer leaders</i>
time frame/ frequency	project-related assignment/short-term	regular assignment	term of office, normally for four years
qualifications needed	no special qualifications; personal qualifications sufficient	special qualifications needed to do the job	leadership qualifications
position within the organization	temporary jobs, less commitment	integrated within the organization	member of an executive committee
function, responsibility	responsibility limited to the project	responsibility like an employee	leading body
procedure of appointment	no procedure of appointment; no obligation	no formal procedure of appointment; limited obligation	appointment at the annual general meeting of an association

Source: own table.

4.1 Volunteers as Volunteers

This category of volunteers represents the most ideal type of volunteers and can be compared with the German term “Freiwillige”. These volunteers put effort in projects only. They make use of their qualifications from their paid job or their personal qualifications. It is not necessary to look for further education to execute the required job. Such tasks are considered as temporary jobs. There is no further engagement needed if a project is finished. Responsibility is limited to the correct execution of the assigned task. Hiring is not dependent on a special procedure.

Examples within Alpine Clubs are: Preparation of the annual general meeting needs a lot of help. Big

renovation of huts up to the mountains requires professionals as well as a lot of help to keep cost affordable. Various festivities throughout the year can only be arranged by the assistance of volunteers (Alpenverein, 2011).

4.2 Volunteers as Unpaid Staff

Volunteers as unpaid staff (Drucker 1989) implicate a different mindset. These volunteers operate like paid staff in for-profit companies. To consider volunteers as unpaid staff it is useful to find criteria to describe distinctions and similarities between paid staff and volunteers as unpaid staff. Mayerhofer derives her idea to identify volunteers as unpaid staff from characteristics like mission/goal setting, cooperation, organizational context, products, services for the market: Both, paid and unpaid staff act as followers not as leaders, i.e., they do not have the right to make ultimate decisions. Products or services offered are a result of cooperation, teamwork. Volunteers as unpaid staff are integrated in an organization like employees. Product, services are offered at the market (Mayerhofer, 2003). With these arguments volunteers can be classified as (unpaid) staff of a nonprofit-organization.

The most important difference is the remuneration. Paid staff will have an equivalent in money for the invested time, unpaid staff does not. They contribute time and energy to the organization's mission. Their motivation is not to earn money although they will have reimbursement of out-of pocket expenses and non-financial forms of remuneration but not as equal to their investment of time (Badelt, More-Hollerweger, 2007). Comparison of commitment between paid staff and unpaid staff shows that volunteers as unpaid staff may be even higher although their stick to an organization is not a paid contract (van Vuuren et al., 2008).

Within associations many volunteers are required to offer services to the members of their club. These volunteers often work also regularly like their counterparts in for-profit organizations. To do most of such jobs it is necessary to acquire specific qualifications by attaining special education offered by the organization being one aspect of non-financial remunerations. Volunteers as unpaid staff is integrated in the organization like employees. It is inevitable to be aware of processes of the organization. Responsibilities can be compared to paid staff (Liao-troth, 2001). It is to consider that these volunteers do not earn their livelihood with these jobs so their donated time for services to offer is restricted.

In some nonprofit-organizations volunteers and paid staff work complementary and therefore the maintenance of services may be guaranteed or even restricted because of limited availability of volunteer. In other organizations, e.g., Alpine Clubs, the offer of services is dependent on active participation of such volunteers otherwise services cannot be offered. To replace volunteers by paid staff is often not possible because of financial reasons. Volunteer management has to put great emphasize on this group of volunteers. Details will be discussed in a later chapter.

Examples within Alpine Clubs: The most unpaid staff is required to perform different activities to members as tour guides, i.e., mountain trips, hut tours, climbing tours, camps for children, etc. Administrative personnel are required for management of memberships, publications on internet as well as regular magazines of the association (Alpenverein, 2011).

4.3 Volunteers as Volunteer Leaders or “Honorary Manager”

This group of volunteers does not represent the common meaning of volunteers although the characteristics of the definition are met: Being a volunteer leader is not the principal source of income, time is given freely without any equal remuneration and the work done is to the benefit of an organization. Compared to the German language we talk about Honorary Functionaries (“Ehrenamtliche” or “ehrenamtliche Funktionäre”).

The biggest difference to other groups of volunteers as depicted is their very high level of commitment first

and foremost in time. Volunteer leaders work for a nonprofit-organization, e.g. association usually at least for a term of office with a normal duration of four years (Siebart, Reichard, 2004). Their investment in time is a resistant one as they act in a leadership position as member of an executive committee, executive board. Volunteer leaders' ultimate task is to look at the fulfillment of the organization's mission. They are responsible, accountable for the performance of an association as well as represent legally their organization (Axelrod, 2005). Volunteer leaders play a critical role in the success of nonprofit-organizations. It is the affective commitment, i.e., emotional attachment, identification with, involvement in the organization, which makes a nonprofit-organization successful (Preston, Brown, 2004). When talking about volunteers in its original sense it is to point out that this group of volunteers invests a lot of risk—liability for an organization—when volunteering. This paradox could be explained by a look at their motivation, their affective commitment as already mentioned. The appointment as volunteer leader is a formal procedure: It is dependent on the votes of the members of an association at the annual general meeting (Siebart, Reichard, 2004).

These “honorary managers” operate like managers in for-profit organizations although volunteer leaders face various obstacles in doing their job: Because of not being employed they are not available for regular working hours. If they are not retired time for working for an association is restricted. These volunteers are not in a steady process of thinking about goals, problems, business-fields. They may have a lack of continuous information for decision making. To face these obstacles the emphasis has to put on excellent communication (Axelrod, 2005). The most important difference is the remuneration compared to manager of for-profit organizations. The range of tasks and duties, strategic knowledge and accountability is the same. Considered objectively these facts might be obstacles. It is again motivation and commitment which makes these volunteers donate time for a good cause. A representative function might be one non-financial reward for these “honorary managers”. Big nonprofit-organizations support their executive committee or board by an employed manager, as Secretary General but with restricted rights and duties or Chief Executive Officer (Siebart, Reichard, 2004). The challenge is again on communication and division of tasks.

Examples within Alpine Clubs are: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer (Alpenverein, 2011). The law on associations defines exactly the duties of these functions.

Within a further chapter the impact of the changing society on volunteering is discussed. This group of volunteers might not be in trend of today's volunteering habit. Consequently volunteer management has to put much effort in motivating volunteers for such functions.

5. Consequences on the Typology

5.1 Impact of the Changing Society as Well as Changing Face of Volunteering

Volunteering has changed within the last 20 years. The changing demographics have a great impact on the number of available volunteers: The increasing number of older people is a phenomenon of many countries. The positive aspect is the availability of more retired people being motivated for a voluntary action. Further demographic aspects having an impact on volunteering are for example: a lower birth-rate, smaller household size, an increasing number of people living alone, smaller number of marriages, high rate of divorces, increase in part-time work by women, etc. (Rosenkranz, Görtler Edmund, 2002).

How about is now the changing face of volunteering? In the science there is an obvious discussion about an old form of volunteering and a modern form of volunteering: The old form of volunteering can be equalized with

long-term volunteering. It is distinguished by a high level of dedication to and a strong sense of affiliation with the organization. The modern form of volunteering is also known as short-term volunteering (Rochester et al., 2010). Traditional volunteering focuses on an altruistic, selfless motivation. The voluntary action takes place in traditional organizations (Reifenhäuser et al., 2009). Traditional volunteering is time-driven, modern volunteering is cause-driven (Rochester et al., 2010).

Due to the changing society people prefer short-term volunteering to long-term volunteering. Short-term or episodic volunteering “is just one of a number of ways in which people choose to use their leisure time; it is a commitment which is clearly limited in its scope and the length of time involved” (Rochester et al., 2010).

Volunteering is no longer only to the benefit of another group motivation is also grounded in self-interest, i.e., having fun, having a great time, take over responsibility, acquiring additional education, meeting new friends. Volunteering today is also dependent on a so called biographical fit: People are no longer available as volunteer the whole life cycle as well as are only willing to volunteer for special tasks according their personal life cycle (Nowotcka, 2007). One important fact is also that voluntary action today is characterized by professionalism (Delschen, 2006). On the one hand it is often necessary to acquire additional education on volunteering and volunteers today are motivated in volunteering by gaining such education. On the other hand volunteers want to be “knowledge workers” also when they contribute to society (Drucker, 1989).

Looking at the presented typology of volunteers and the changing society volunteer management which will be discussed in the next chapter has to be aware of this progress.

5.2 Volunteer Management Not Only for “Service” Volunteers

Volunteer management is not a very common topic. In the not-too-distant past there was the discussion about whether volunteer management is necessary while personnel management for paid staff has already been usual practice. Throughout the literature there is stated a manifold need for volunteer management: It is the nonprofits in general that want to maximize the contribution of volunteers. The desire of a better management comes also from volunteers themselves (Rochester et al., 2010). But recruiting of volunteers is still often at random without checking necessary qualifications of volunteers and needed qualifications (Krönes, 2003).

When talking about volunteer management in nonprofit-organizations it makes sense to be aware of the three different groups of volunteers as they require different approach. Existing scientific papers concentrate on “service” volunteers”, i.e., volunteers as unpaid staff (Brudney, 2005). Volunteer programs for volunteer leaders might be much more specific and dependent on the requirements of a nonprofit-organization, an association as there are widespread problems organizations have in renewing their leaders (Prouteau, Tabaries, 2010). The question is how volunteer management could take place. It is only to copy the human resource management-philosophy for paid staff or it is to develop special tools?

Kaltenbrunner presents a simple and straight model for volunteer management with three major steps: recruiting, retention and parting of volunteers. Recruiting of volunteers has to consider the motivation of volunteers, their qualifications, the organizational context they are needed for, as well as the impact of changing voluntary actions (Kaltenbrunner, 2006). Methods for recruiting have to be adjusted to voluntary action needed and voluntary groups, see table one (McCurley, 2005). It might be easier to recruit volunteers for projects, i.e., as volunteers or unpaid staff because of the changing habits towards volunteering. Consequently recruiting of volunteers for long-term assignments as “honorary manager”, is a more challenging task. *Retention* of volunteers is “more than satisfying motivations”. This task is the most neglected in volunteer management (Kaltenbrunner, 2006). Volunteers who are motivated by an emotional attachment to their organization are more likely to continue

serving and to be more satisfied with their volunteer position (Preston, Brown, 2004). Satisfaction and integration within the organization have an impact on the duration of voluntary actions (Nowotka, 2007). *Parting* of volunteers might occur either because of the end of a term of office or occasionally e.g. in case of conflicts. Because of declining numbers of volunteers and the respect about people volunteering saying goodbye to volunteers might be not done actively (Sozanská et al., 2004).

5.3 How about the Value of Volunteers for Nonprofit-organizations and How to Measure It?

Performance, accountability has become normal also for nonprofit-organizations. Standard financial statements according to accounting standards do not express the value of volunteer contribution (Mook et al. 2005). The question is about measuring the impact of volunteering, measuring the value of volunteers.

When discussing the impact of volunteering there is the first question to answer: To whom? Rochester et al present according to a study of the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) four stakeholder groups upon whom all volunteering is likely to have an impact: volunteers, organizations, service users and communities. Further they categorized the impact volunteering has in five areas or types of capital: economic, physical, human, social and cultural capital. Further explanation is concentrated on the organizations as stakeholder: Economic capital tries to find an equal value if volunteer workforce must be purchased in the market. An easy method could be to total the number of hours volunteers donate to an organization multiplied by an average wage. The result can only be an approximation. Additional to this calculation the investment costs, i.e., costs for recruiting, training, supervision have to be deducted. Physical capital measures quantifiable, physical products, services delivered by voluntary activity. Human capital focuses on individuals, i.e. the personal development and acquired skills. These impacts can be measured quantitative by the number of trainings attained and qualitative by the level of skills. Measuring the latter might be complicated. Social capital is about relationships, i.e., networks, norms, trust. Cultural capital is about shared sense of cultural and religious identity, including language and heritage. For both social capital and cultural capital it is difficult to find parameter for measuring (Rochester et al. 2010).

While Rochester presents a widespread point of view on measuring the impact on volunteering Bowman goes into detail in finding an exact equivalent for the economic value of volunteers. As there does not exist any market price for volunteer labour its economic value has to be imputed. He suggests three different methods to measure the economic value: the demand price-model. This methods counts cost which an organization pays for volunteers, i.e., cost of recruiting, training and supervision. The replacement cost-model looks at the interchange ability of paid staff to volunteers. The application of this model is limited. The most valuable model is the Volunteers' Contribution to Revenue counted by the number of physical units of output produced by volunteers and the price of each physical unit of output produced (Bowman, 2009). These models might provide useful results for volunteers and volunteers as unpaid staff. The value of volunteers as honorary manager might be more difficult to calculate.

As a result the calculated value could be presented in an expanded value-added statement which allows nonprofit-organizations to estimate their economic and social value-added and the value of their volunteer contributions (Mook et al., 2005). This statement could be a valuable appendix to the normal financial statement.

6. Conclusion

This article reflects ideas about the widespread topic of volunteers. It looks at volunteers from an organizational point of view and as a result a new concept of terms is presented. Implications like the changing

society, the changing face of volunteering are to be considered in volunteer management or in talking about the value of volunteers.

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