

Effective Management of Volunteers

The role of motivation and organizational culture

Katharina-Maria Rehfeld¹

Abstract

This article explores effective management of volunteers within non-profit organizations (NPOs), focusing on the role of motivation and organizational culture. Volunteers are vital to NPOs, driven by intrinsic motivation, and managing them requires understanding their motivations while maintaining a delicate balance between guidance and autonomy. Studies show that values and organizational culture play a significant role, while the organizational values must be aligned with the personal values of the volunteers. The article illustrates crucial aspects by providing information on voluntary work in Switzerland.

Keywords: sustainable leadership, non-profit organization, commitment, organizational culture

NPOs play a pivotal role in both the economy and the well-being of society. They heavily rely on volunteers who contribute their time and effort voluntarily, driven by a strong intrinsic motivation rather than financial gain. Managing and leading volunteers, however, presents a unique challenge due to the delicate balance between guidance and preserving their autonomy. To harness the full potential of volunteers and ensure their sustained support, it is crucial for those in leadership positions to understand their motivations to guide and manage them effectively and sustainably.

Against this background, the article highlights the peculiarities of managing volunteers by exploring the role of the values and culture of the organization to ensure its existence. Statistics and information about volunteers in Switzerland are provided as an example to illustrate its relevance further.

In Switzerland, the extent of volunteer work is considerable: in 2020, around 1.2 million people carried out unpaid work within organizations, clubs, or public institutions and 2.3 million took on informal unpaid activities such as neighbourhood help, childcare, services, or care and caring for relatives and acquaintances who do not live in the same household. Volunteers invest an average of 4.1 hours per week in this commitment (Federal Statistical Office Switzerland, 2021).

Researchers have highlighted sustainable leadership as a critical success factor for NPOs (Froelich/McKee/Rathge, 2011, p. 3). Sustainable leadership, particularly concerning volunteers, focuses on maintaining their performance and long-term commitment without offering monetary compensation (Kanning 2013, p. 25). Given the extensive literature on the impact of pay structures on employee performance and commitment, managing unpaid volunteers in NPOs necessitates alternative management approaches (Redmann 2018, p. 72).

¹ Katharina-Maria Rehfeld is Professor in Human Resource Management at IU International University of Applied Science and Adjunct Professor, International Institute in Geneva

Volunteer work is not free of expectations; it operates on the principle of reciprocity. Volunteers donate their time with the expectation that their motives or needs associated with philanthropy will be indirectly satisfied by the organization (von Schnurbein 2008).

Effective leadership in NPOs requires an understanding of volunteers' motives to align their behavior with the organization's goals. Sustainable leadership entails adopting a "motivationally compatible leadership behavior" (Krönes 2016, p. 10), tailored to individual volunteers' needs and motives.

Motives for Volunteering

The discussion on egoism and altruism has significantly influenced research on voluntary engagement for a long time (Cialdini et al., 1987; Schie et al., 2015). Reasons for voluntary engagement have been categorized into egoistic (self-centered) and altruistic (concerned with the well-being of others) reasons. In 1998, Clary and colleagues (Clary et al., 1998) introduced a functional approach that emphasizes the versatility of engagement, overcoming the previous debate on egoistic and altruistic motivations for involvement. They applied the question of the functional approach, which examines the functions and significance of attitudes for individuals, to the realm of voluntary engagement. They inquire into the psychological functions underlying volunteer work, suggesting that engagement can simultaneously serve different purposes for different individuals. Clary et al. (1998, p. 1,518) identify six generally relevant motives for voluntary engagement serving different functions or purposes (Houle et al. 2005, p. 338):

1. Value Motive: This motive is all about having a strong sense of wanting to do good for others and make a positive impact on the world. People with a value motive volunteer because they believe in helping those in need and making their communities or the world a better place. It's driven by a deep sense of humanitarianism and altruism, where the satisfaction comes from knowing they've made a difference in someone else's life.
2. Knowledge Motive: Those with a knowledge motive are motivated by the opportunity to learn and grow. They see volunteering as a chance to gain new insights, acquire new skills, and expand their horizons. These volunteers are often focused on personal development and self-improvement. They find fulfilment in acquiring knowledge and developing expertise in various areas through their volunteer experiences.
3. Career Motive: Some volunteers are driven by the desire to advance their careers or secure gainful employment in the future. They see volunteering as a means to build their resume, gain valuable work experience, and develop skills that can enhance their job prospects. This motive is especially common among young people and those looking to transition into a new career field.
4. Social Motive: People with a social motive are primarily interested in building connections and expanding their social networks. They view volunteering as an opportunity to meet like-minded individuals, make friends, and connect with others who share their interests and values. The social aspect of volunteering is what motivates them the most.
5. Protection Motive: The protection motive involves using volunteer work as a way to cope with personal issues or challenges. It can be a means of distraction or escape from problems in their own lives. Volunteering allows them to focus their energy and attention on helping others, which can provide a sense of relief from personal difficulties.

6. Self-Esteem Motive: Volunteers with a self-esteem motive are driven by the positive feelings and self-confidence that come from helping others. They find a sense of self-worth and accomplishment in their voluntary actions. Being recognized and appreciated by others for their contributions further boosts their self-esteem. It's about feeling good about themselves and their ability to make a difference.

After examining numerous studies through this framework, Chacón et al. (2017) discovered that the predominant driver for volunteering is the values dimension, while career and enhancement motivations are less common. The inclination towards career and understanding motivations tends to decrease with the average age of volunteers, and it appears that men are more inclined towards considering the social dimension compared to women.

In Switzerland, most volunteers get involved because they enjoy the activity. For many people, social aspects are also important: thanks to their commitment, volunteers come together with other people and can work together to move something. Other motives that are mentioned often are expanding own knowledge and experiences, giving something back to other people, developing personally and growing personal network. External pressures and obligations rarely play a role. In informal volunteer work, the most important motive is often to help: Three quarters (76%) is committed to helping others. There is no major difference in the motives of women and men (Federal Statistical Office Switzerland 2021).

The managing director of the Ilgenau village for disabled people in Ramsen, Switzerland, highlights the significance of these motives in volunteerism. Many volunteers are driven by a desire to give back, stemming from personal experiences or gratitude for their current circumstances. Younger volunteers, in particular, value networking opportunities, training, and skill development, often becoming experts in their fields through focused further training.

Effective leadership of volunteers relies on aligning their personal motivations with the fulfillment provided by volunteer activities (Stukas et al., 2009, p. 80). Despite the continued dependence of nonprofit and public organizations on volunteer support, determining the factors that drive individuals to volunteer and sustain their commitment over time remains a complex challenge. The Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) serves as a practical tool that has demonstrated its efficacy in engaging volunteers. Utilizing resources like the VFI questionnaire enables the evaluation of volunteers' motivations, allowing for the customization of their roles to enhance both performance and commitment. Research not only supports the effectiveness of this approach but also validates its utility in designing training manuals for volunteer organizations and improving recruitment and retention practices. Organizations are encouraged to foster and capitalize on these motivations through shared reflection, as proposed by Clary and Snyder (2002).

Organizational Values and Culture

Besides understanding volunteers' individual motivations, an organization's culture and its values play a significant role. Organizational culture has gained importance in recent years in how it influences external perceptions and cooperation within NPOs. It can determine whether volunteers are interested in working with the organization and whether they commit for the long term. A strong, trust-based organizational culture that aligns with and nurtures volunteers'

intrinsic motivation becomes a crucial factor in the success or failure of NPOs. Duke (2012) conducted a study that showed a positive relationship between organizational culture and non-governmental organizations (NGO) performance. A suitable organizational culture can have a positive impact on an organization's effectiveness and its ability to achieve its desired outcomes. Similarly, organizational culture can help prevent negative actions and scandals (Vijfeijken, 2019).

However, there has been limited research on shaping organizational culture in NPOs and how values guide and influence the behaviors of leaders, helpers, and members. Previous studies on organizational culture have largely focused on for-profit organizations. This is partly because NPOs often assume that their organizational culture is naturally shaped by their mission, vision, goals, and their distinction from the business sector. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly clear that the interests and values of NPOs, in pursuit of their missions, may not always align with a social and value-oriented organizational culture (Vijfeijken, 2019). This misalignment could diverge from the values held by volunteers.

Martin and Siehl (1983) describe organizational culture as "the cement that holds an organization together through shared patterns of meaning consisting of core values, forms, and strategies to reinforce content." Edgar Schein (1985) also highlights the role of employee values in organizational culture. Schein suggests that employees' values strongly influence organizational culture, meaning that an organization's culture reflects the fundamental values of its team, which, in turn, influence how people behave within the organization (Türk 1976, p. 68). This shared value base serves an identification function (Arnett et al. 2003). NPOs attract volunteers and members who identify with the organization's mission and share its values. To retain volunteers over the long term, it's crucial to assess early in the recruitment process whether a person's individual values align with the organizational culture's values (Weinert 2004, p. 171). Only when these values are in line with a person will they feel comfortable and remain committed to the organization.

Freiermuth (2022/2023, p. 8) points out that the self-perception of formally engaged volunteers has evolved in recent years: they have become more self-assured, viewing themselves as contributors who bring their personal talents and want to have a say, expecting communication on an equal footing. Nowadays, individuals who dedicate themselves to a club or institution not only aim to contribute to a good cause but also approach an organizing entity with specific needs. To retain volunteers, organizations must be aware of and consider these needs, as the options are vast, and volunteers can choose whom they work with.

In the competition for the resource of volunteers, favorable conditions are crucial. The foundation for this is professional volunteer management, aiming to optimize volunteer activities for all involved. It involves aligning the desires and needs of volunteers with the requirements institutions place on them. Volunteer management also ensures that collaboration with volunteers is part of the organizational culture and embedded in the overall strategy. It is crucial that volunteers are familiar with and can identify with the goals and values of the organization.

The integration of volunteers succeeds only when accepted and supported by paid staff. Paid employees should be involved early on, and any reservations and fears should be taken seriously. Otherwise, friction points may arise within an organization, complicating the collaboration between paid and volunteer personnel.

Focusing too much on motivating volunteers can create a conflict-avoidant atmosphere in the long run. For instance, if volunteers who are less motivated are overly protected due to a

misinterpretation of employee orientation, it can place additional burdens on paid employees and demotivate them (Simsa 2019, p. 272). This situation can lead to pronounced swings between extremes: too much autonomy followed by centralized control, which can negatively affect volunteers' intrinsic motivation (Simsa 2019, p. 374). Dealing with this leadership dilemma of "either-or," it is advisable to adopt a consistent "both-and" approach. These dilemmas and contradictions specific to NPOs require leaders to have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Leaders must balance divergent interests and expectations of different employee groups while also serving as symbolic role models within the organization. As a result, effective leadership is increasingly recognized as a critical success factor for NGOs in sustainability discussions. It is emphasized that volunteer work is not meant to replace paid work but rather complement and support it. Therefore, the roles, tasks, competencies, and obligations of volunteers and paid staff must be clearly defined and delineated.

The Swiss Red Cross (SRC) Aargau is one of the 24 cantonal branches of the national Red Cross society. As an autonomous association within the SRC group, they are financially and organizationally independent. About 1,000 volunteers are engaged in relief and social integration. According to Silvana Lindt, the specialist in volunteer management at the SRC Aargau, the paid staff experiences collaboration with volunteers as a crucial enrichment in their daily work. "Our employees appreciate the volunteers a lot, and the volunteers reciprocate that appreciation. It's a very positive collaboration for all parties involved. We motivate each other" says Lindt (Freiermuth 2022/2023, p. 8).

Conclusion and Outlook

In conclusion, this paper has delved into the critical aspects of retaining volunteers by comprehending their motivations, emphasizing the significance of organizational culture and values. Despite the third sector's substantial role in society and its contribution to essential tasks, it remains an area that lacks extensive research, particularly in terms of employee management. Recognizing its social and macroeconomic importance, there exists a pressing need to bridge this research gap through empirical studies, thereby ensuring the sustainability of leadership. This empirical approach is crucial for cultivating evidence-based strategies aimed at maintaining the long-term commitment of volunteers.

Furthermore, it is essential to underline that volunteer work is a voluntary endeavor, contrary to mandated involvement. It can never be demanded but should be requested and fostered. While forms of obligatory engagement have their place in various sectors of society, they do not fall under the purview of volunteer work.

Sustainable collaboration with volunteers should be ingrained in the organizational culture, with decisions regarding volunteer engagement made at the leadership level. Adequate resources must be allocated, and the legitimate fears and reservations of paid staff should be acknowledged and addressed. Without the understanding and acceptance of the paid staff, the successful organization of volunteer efforts becomes challenging.

In summary, volunteer work and paid employment are not in competition; rather, they serve different purposes. Services of immediate and vital importance to individuals and the environment should be carried out through paid work, while volunteer work significantly contributes to enhancing the quality of life, fostering human interaction, and championing environmental protection. Balancing these aspects is fundamental for effective leadership in volunteer management.

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