



The professionalisation process of volunteer management in Australia

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The Centre for Social Impact (CSI) is a partnership between the business schools of the University of New South Wales, the University of Melbourne, Swinburne University of Technology and The University of Western Australia. It brings together the committed hearts and business heads of the philanthropic, not-for-profit, private and government sectors in pursuit of social innovation. It provides socially responsible business management education and research in the common cause of building a stronger civil society for Australia.

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Introduction

In the last two decades two major changes occurred in the world of volunteering.

The first one was a rediscovery of the importance of volunteering, initially culminating in, but further boosted by, the UN International Year of the Volunteer in 2001. An important part of this renewed focus on volunteering was the acceptance of a broad definition of the sorts of activities that constituted volunteering. No longer was volunteering perceived as an activity exclusively undertaken by middle aged women but also by many young, successful persons, including many more males. The trend of corporate volunteering has led to an educated and professional human resource in voluntary organisations. Such volunteers expect voluntary organisations to be professional and well organised.

The second change was in the managing of volunteers, with an increasing body of knowledge on the subject (with a large number of books, internet sites, and professional organisations on the subject); and many opportunities to gain more skills and knowledge. The first change made the professionalisation process of volunteer management an essential one; the second change made it possible.

The non-profit sector in the Western World has undergone a long process of professionalisation since the 1970s. Following the Filer commission being assembled in the USA in 1973 to better understand the third sector and its needs (Mulhare, 1999), some changes took place: Yale University opened the first academic program in the management of non-profit organisations, followed by other academic institutes; research centres and associations were developed (e.g. ARNOVA and ISTR); foundations and journals were established to promote an evidence-based knowledge on the subject; and non-profit organisations were perceived as requiring strategic management, instead of mere administration. The establishment of the Independent Sector that followed the Filer Commission helped in representing and lobbying issues related to the third sector, and to its progress and professionalisation. As part of the above professionalisation process, non-profit organisations (NPOs) started to adapt practices from the business world, which in time became more context specific. Non-profit practices and professional terms were developed.

In this process, some changes also occurred in a specific occupation in the nonprofit world: management of volunteers. Management of volunteers is the practice in which an organisation strives to apply managerial processes (such as recruitment, selection and motivating) in order to retain people who give their time freely to help the organisation achieve its cause. Since this usually occurs in an organisational setting and in an ongoing volunteering, we are focusing here on formal manner of volunteerism.

Management of volunteers is an occupation, that is, it is a job (usually a paid one) that is undertaken in an organisational context, usually in nonprofit organisations. In order for it to become a discrete profession a few conditions have to exist.

Brint (1994) explained that a professionalisation process usually occurs in five stages:

1. A group of people start to work in a required occupation, usually in full time paid work;
2. The group develops a union or an umbrella organisation for purposes of professional socialisation, education and learning;
3. The group begins to look for ways to formally train its members;

4. The state/government may give some guidelines on who can work in the profession, sometimes through licensing; and
5. An ethical code is developed to protect service recipients as well as the professional status.

Brint asserted that professions are based on related tasks, which have high demand in the work market, and that in order to perform these tasks one has to be trained (usually in an higher education institute) so that access to the profession is not open to all. However, Brint explained that besides well-known professions such as medicine, accounting and law which have all the above criteria, there are some more minor professions which have only some. Morris (1995) argues that a profession brings together skills and knowledge, high standards and ethical behaviour. It has to be based on a concrete body of knowledge, have professional standards and ethical guidelines.

In the remainder of this article, we will examine whether or not management of volunteers is now a profession based on Morris's criteria. We will see if there exists a professional body of knowledge, standards and ethical guideline for managers of volunteers.

Professional body of knowledge

Since the 1980s there has been a gradual development in the body of knowledge on the management of volunteers. It is based on two main sources. The first is the practical knowledge that has been developed and shared among those who actually manage volunteers (practitioners). Some of them write books, others have internet sites. The second source of knowledge is an academic one. Since more universities now have programs in management of nonprofit organisations, be it in a business school, school of social work or another faculty, there are more and more scholars who study the different aspects of volunteering and management of volunteers. They share this accumulated knowledge in academic journals such as *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*; *Voluntas*; *International Journal of Volunteer Administration*; and others. Knowledge is also shared in academic conferences which are led by academic associations such as the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organisations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) or the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR). As explained above, one of the criteria for becoming a profession is to have academic programs in universities which teach prospective professionals how to execute their job. There are many universities in the US, Europe and elsewhere which have such programs, mainly in the general management of nonprofit organisations. Furthermore, professional certificates in management of volunteers can be gained from governmental agencies. For examples, in Australia such courses exist in TAFE (Technical and Further Education) which provides certificate I- III in active volunteering, diploma and advanced diploma in volunteer management. The Centre for Volunteering in NSW also provides accredited courses in management of volunteers.

The large body of knowledge on volunteerism deals with the different aspects of who can be defined as a volunteer and who tends to volunteer (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Handy et al., 2000; Meijs et al., 2003; Shure, 1991; Smith, 1981; Van Til, 1988); the motivations to volunteer (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Omoto & Snyder, 1993; Yeung, 2004); the rewards, benefits and costs which are involved with volunteering (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999; Cnaan & Amorfell, 1994) and of different organisational aspects of volunteering such as socialisation (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Managers of volunteers should make an acquaintance with the

existing body of knowledge on volunteerism and volunteer management, and use it to better manage and retain their volunteers. This information is available in books, journals and online.

Professional standards

Managers of volunteers have to face many managerial challenges, which are sometimes more difficult to cope with than managing paid staff. The fact that volunteers do not get monetary rewards for their work (salary) and that it is much more difficult to sanction volunteers than paid employees, necessitates creative and more sensitive methods of management. Knowing these challenges and successfully coping with them, while using the existing body of knowledge and the professional networks, can lead to better management, professional standards and in general – to the professionalisation of volunteer managers. The professional challenges in the field are many. We will here mention a few to make our point.

Selection of volunteers

Selection of volunteers is the process through which volunteer managers strive to select the most suitable volunteers for the organisation, the role and the group, which takes into consideration the individual as well as organisational needs and abilities. Many volunteer managers find it difficult to select volunteers, either because they do not have the necessary skills or because they find it difficult to reject people who wish to contribute their time as a gift to the organisation. Others may be afraid of not having enough volunteers. However, it is the organisational social duty to select volunteers.

First, one must remember that volunteers, just like paid employees, represent the organisation and it is important that such a representation would be a decent one. When volunteers have face-to-face encounters with clients, particularly vulnerable ones (such as children), it is the organisation's duty to assure that only suitable volunteers will serve these recipients. Finally, it is important that the potential volunteers will be a fit to the organisation, their peer group and their supervisor. Effective selection processes can assure long term retention of volunteers, less turnover, and thus a stronger and a more efficient organisation for the benefit of everyone. As Groucho Marx once said: "I don't care to belong to any club that will have me as a member" – people want to know that they were accepted to a hard-to-get-to organisation, which will make them feel proud to be affiliated to the organisation and make their socialisation process easier.

Socialisation and training of volunteers

The organisational socialisation is the process through which one learns the values, norms, and desired behaviour of the organisation he or she joins. It is a critical process since it assures retention of organisational culture, values and norms, allows the newcomer to cope with their new surrounds and increases the emotional commitment to the organisation and the role. In many volunteer organisations, newcomers do not undergo any formal training due to a lack of knowledge or out of difficulty in asking the new volunteers for additional time. The latter problem is based on the misperception that volunteers give their time for no rewards and therefore cannot be asked to give any more.

First, there are many benefits to volunteering (which are detailed in the many articles on the subject) and the relationship between volunteers and organisations that are mutual and not one sided. Therefore, volunteer organisations have every right to ask volunteers to give whatever it takes to

perform well. Second, it is the volunteers themselves who often want more training – it has been found that the level of training was related to satisfaction, respect to the organisation and supervisor, and retention of volunteers (Haski-Leventhal, Ronel, York, & Ben-David, 2008). It is true that volunteer managers still have to learn how to train newcomers and gain the necessary skills, knowledge and information to do it. As part of the professionalisation process, there are more opportunities now to do it.

Terminating volunteers' work

One of the more difficult professional challenges in the management of volunteers is to end someone's voluntary work. In one study, 82% of volunteer managers found it very difficult and 60% postponed dealing with such decision (Cook, 1992). However, due to the organisational duty toward the clients and other volunteers, it is sometimes necessary to do this unpleasant task. Many volunteer managers believe they would only in the case of extreme misconduct on behalf of the volunteer, such as illegal or immoral behaviour. This is based on the emotional challenge of rejecting a person's gift to the organisation and the wish to avoid hurting the volunteer; causing anger to the volunteer or his/her peers; harming the recipients who will now have one less volunteer to help them; or because they may have had a long-term relationship with this volunteer. However, volunteers should also have to perform according to the organisational standards and if they cannot perform well then it is the recipients, the other volunteers and the organisation which can be harmed. Therefore, it is important for the organisation to have a good job description for the volunteers, which includes tasks, mission and goals; to have a goal setting procedure that will set realistic expectations; and to have a written policy and criteria which will help the volunteer managers terminate volunteers work based on a more objective basis.

These are but a few examples on the managerial challenges which require professional standards. Fortunately, there are now professional standards, which can teach volunteer managers why and how to cope with the above challenges as well as other ones (for example, in Australia such standards were created by Volunteering Australia and can be found at: www.volunteeringaustralia.org).

Professional organisations and ethical code

The criteria for a profession also include professional associations and networking of the profession holders, as well as ethical rules and codes of conduct. Brint (1994) asserted that the ethical code is one of the final stages in turning an occupation into a profession, a stage which makes it legitimate. In Australia there are different networks for managers of volunteers to belong to and learn from the professional skills and knowledge.

There is now a global trend of having professional associations for volunteer managers in different places in the world. In the United States there was a leading organisation for volunteer managers named AVA (Association for Volunteer Administration) which has now been replaced by "AL!VE" - the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement – which is the new membership association for professional volunteer resource managers (<http://www.volunteeralive.org>) and AVRVM (Association of Volunteer Resources Management). In Australia AAVA (the Australian Association of Volunteer Administrators) asserts its vision: "Volunteer Management as a profession whose vital role in society is valued and respected" (<http://www.aava.asn.au/index.php?page=about>). In the UK the Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM) is the leading professional organisation, while in Singapore it is MOVE, in Japan – JCV and CAVR in Canada.

AVA had an ethical code for volunteer managers, which was called: “the professional rules of our profession” (that is, in AVA management of volunteers was already perceived as a profession). The ethical code included professional values, issues of confidentiality, objective standards and avoiding discrimination, and so on. It can now be found at:

http://www.maineservicecommission.gov/docs/C.5.%20AVACode%20of%20Ethics%20_short_%202007.pdf

Conclusion

In the last two decades a new profession is emerging: management of volunteers. The body of knowledge which acts as the professional basis is being developed, and it now includes theoretical and practical aspects. The professional challenges are being acknowledged and coped with, through the body of knowledge, training and networking. There are several professional associations worldwide; ethical codes are being written; and the opportunities to learn, train, and professionalise are greater than ever.

However, it is still an occupation that does not require any formal training or licensing, and almost anyone can become a volunteer manager. Although there are more and more people who see their profession as “volunteer managers” the mobility is still high. The developed body of knowledge, professional standards and ethical codes, are not well-known to all those who perform the task, and not every organisation encourages its volunteer managers to train and develop the necessary knowledge and skills. As there is no degree or postgraduate level training, but only TAFE level qualifications (or less), it is a para-profession.

Enhancing the profession in Australia: Practical implications

In order to promote the professionalisation of volunteer management in Australia, a few measures can be taken, which are here divided into three groups: professionalisation, research and support for facilitating organisations. These measures can be promoted by governments as well as by volunteer organisations, facilitating organisations and academic institutions (For further suggestions on enhancing volunteering by third parties see Haski-Leventhal, Meijs, & Hustinx, in press).

1. Enhancing the professionalisation of volunteer managers and volunteer organisations
 - A. Adopting the national standards for volunteering which were developed by Volunteering Australia, and enhancing accreditation of volunteer managers and organisations
 - B. Collaborating with facilitating organisations to train volunteer managers
 - C. Funding scholarships to enable people in volunteer management roles who have no training appropriate to those roles to attend appropriate training courses
2. Promoting research on volunteerism in Australia
 - A. Funding research into volunteering to ensure that policies are based on the best available evidence. There are several academic and non-academic institutes today that can undertake the role

- B. Resourcing a volunteer research centre within or across several universities – perhaps as a CRC or a Centre of Excellence
 - C. Using research based evidence to develop policy
3. Supporting facilitating organisations
- A. Working with volunteer centres such as Volunteering Australia and the Centre for Volunteering in NSW along with appropriate training authorities, to establish an Australian Institute for Volunteer Management and ensuring that it is adequately funded to develop clear standards appropriate for establishing volunteer management as a profession. This will also involve encouraging government agencies that are volunteer users to ensure that their programs are overseen by these professionally qualified staff
 - B. Working with facilitating organisations to identify and address barriers to volunteering, particularly by the socially disadvantaged
 - C. Collaborating with volunteer organisations when including volunteers in governmental departments
 - D. Developing a body of leading volunteer managers to enhance collaborations with volunteer-using organisations
 - E. Collaborating with volunteer organisations such as Volunteering Australia to recruit and manage volunteers in the public sector.

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She has twice gained the Emerging Scholar Award from ARNOVA, and was appointed member of the committee on the Israeli President's Volunteer Award in 2008, and a member of the research committee on volunteering in Australia.

Her main areas of interest are management of NPOs and volunteering, and she has studied and published widely on different aspects of volunteerism, including articles on student volunteering, youth volunteering, elderly volunteering, social policy on volunteering, and the impact of volunteering. Her articles were published in the Journal for Social Policy, Voluntarism, Human Relations, Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour and others.

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