

Volunteers are Key: A Case Study Analysis of Volunteer Sustainability Efforts Under the
Theoretical G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management

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Abstract

Volunteers have been described as the most valuable resource to a nonprofit organization. As a result, keeping them is essential to overall organizational success. Through the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management, several best practices are outlined in an attempt to sustain volunteer populations. However, the question remains if these best practices are being implemented and to what extent. An in-depth case study into two volunteer management structures in Grand Rapids, MI, USA were conducted in the hopes of exploring this question. The findings of this study found that each nonprofit organization utilized some of these methods to some extent with one doing so more than the other but neither one doing so fully.

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Introduction

In the United States, voluntary action provides nearly 75 billion dollars to the United States' gross domestic product (Mowen & Sujan. 2005). Indeed, researchers have even gone so far as to call volunteers the greatest resource to the nonprofit organization (Hall et al, 2003). The study of volunteer management began in the mid-20th century and expanded rapidly with the explosion of literature and innovation on the closely related field of Human Resources. Overall, volunteer management is a growing and instrumental sector in the nonprofit sector, as well as the greater economy.

There are several theoretical models for volunteer management that exist to create the most effective volunteer program structures. Among these models, the most complex and widely accepted of these is the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management. This acronym, G.E.M.S., stands for generate, educate, mobilize and sustain. As will be explained in detail later, each phase contains several techniques and best practices to run a successful volunteer management program. Although all phases are extremely important to the overall success of the volunteer program, specific interest remains in the final phase, the volunteer sustainability phase. Sustaining an existing volunteer base is extremely helpful, as time, costs and other resources are saved in not having to recruit, train, and schedule new hires. As a result, the research of this project chose to focus on the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management, specifically the volunteer sustainability phase of this model.

However, there are differences between theoretical models and real-world applications. So, the question remains as to what volunteer managers actually think of the best practices outlined in this model. Including their professional opinion of the techniques and their experiences of implementing and utilizing these best practices. Going deeper into the specific objectives of this question and focus area, the researcher hopes to gain insight in four separate areas.

The first goal of this project is to assess the extent, if any, that these volunteer managers have some relationship with the volunteer sustainability efforts outlined in the model. The second goal is to see how many, if any, of these efforts are utilized and why the decision not to use certain ones were made. The third major goal of this project is to see what their opinion and experience using or not using these techniques is. Finally, the fourth goal is to analyze what the impact may be on choosing not to implement these techniques may be.

To properly investigate the question and problem ahead, the researcher chose to complete a qualitative case study of two major nonprofits in the Grand Rapids, MI, USA area. This will involve sitting down with volunteer management leaders to allow them the space to introduce the missions of their organizations, the makeup of these programs, and dive into their organizations volunteer sustainability efforts. By allowing these nonprofit professionals to explain their “how” and “why” behind their volunteer sustainability efforts will help paint a comprehensive picture of the relationship between the two.

Literature Review

Overview of Volunteer Management

Volunteering can be extremely influential to the overall success of the organization, going as far as to refer to it as the greatest resource to the organization (Hall et al, 2003). Smith has found that the relationship a volunteer believes to have to the organization is similar to that a paid employee may feel (2004). Meaning that they may perform relatively similarly without the added payroll expense. This voluntary action has been seen in the United States to contribute roughly 75 billion dollars to the United States' gross domestic product (Mowen & Sujan, 2005). Indeed, voluntarism and the third sector has allowed access to solutions for social issues, especially welfare related complications, that could not be solved within the confines of the public and private sectors (Lindenmeier, 2008). As a result, volunteerism is an area of great importance to not only those in the charitable sector, but throughout many social and economic layers.

To properly understand the impacts and importance of volunteering, one must understand what volunteering consists of. Volunteering can be defined as, *“the labour organized in a formal or informal framework, provided consciously and responsibly for the benefit of the community, the results of which generates progress and prosperity for the entire community* (Popescu et al, 2015).” This can be conducted formally, meaning voluntary action associated with an official NGO, or informally, meaning outside the official realm (Carson, 1999). For the purposes of this study, any following use of the term volunteering will relate to formal methods of volunteering. Handy suggests that there are three distinct organizations that utilize volunteers: service delivery, which involves direct distribution of goods and services to clients, advocacy organizations, which attempts to change mindsets and policies surrounding specific cause or platform, and the final type of organization is mutual support agencies, which ground their missions around a similar cause (1988).

With the exception of court-ordered, organizationally required, and other forms of required community service, volunteering can be defined as “self-planned non-obligatory helping behavior (Rodell et al, 2016). As a result, the question arises as to why individuals choose to volunteer. There are multiple schools of thought surrounding this topic. For example, Fischer and Schaffer suggest that one or several motivations are at play to push people to volunteer: altruism,

ideology, egotism, material reasons, status or reward, social relationships, leisure time and personal growth (1993). Others may argue that individuals volunteer to express values of altruistic and humanitarian concerns (Clary et al, 1998). Others still would categorize an individual's motivation to volunteer into five categories: the rise, social values, career, values of protection and comprehension (Gage, 2009).

Outside of the intrinsic or other sources of motivation to volunteer, the act also possesses benefits as well. Volunteering has been linked to learning or advancing skills such as software usage, client relations, effective communication, and teamwork (Kamerade, 2015). Indeed, a history of volunteer work has been seen to lead to career success (Tullier, 2005). Research has also shown that volunteering may be the only avenue for skill and resume building for individuals who may not be able to attend school or training for any myriad of reasons (Taylor, 2004). Although small gender discriminations towards benefits on female volunteers are noted in literature (Devlin, 2003; Shantz, Banerjee & Lamb, 2019), benefits to volunteering are extremely notable throughout the literature.

As previously mentioned, individuals participating in voluntary actions for nonprofit organizations are extremely imperative to said organizations success. In 2015, volunteers equated to 184 billion dollars to the U.S. economy; this contribution is equivalent to the work of 3.7 million full time employees (Corporation for National and Community Service, n.d.). Other research has stated that, when managed correctly, there is little difference in the work completed by employed individuals as those completing voluntary actions for the company (Brudney, 1990). As a result, individuals participating in voluntary activity is not only extremely beneficial for the organizations they are working for, but also society as a larger whole.

Individuals making the decision to not participate in voluntary action have negative impacts. Hall notes a recent decline in the number of participating volunteers and its direct impact on the work the organization conducts (2013). Indeed, in the United States roughly 400,000 public charities rely on volunteers to carry out their mission (McKeever, 2015). Naturally, without the utilization of volunteers to complete tasks related to the NGOs mission, they will have to hire paid workers to do so. This will greatly impact the organization's already limited budget and other resources. When you take into account the numerous benefits previously mentioned that volunteers bring to

the organization and the greater society as a whole, the impact of not having these individuals available is sizable.

The study of volunteer management emerged in the late 1960s-1970s (Brudney et al, 2016) and has continued to grow and develop. The field at the time was largely pulling ideas and theories from traditional Human Resource management. However, Drucker drew significant attention to the field when he suggested volunteers, and therefore volunteer management, to be detrimental to gaining a competitive advantage (1990). Closely following this, the seminal text *Leadership and Management of Volunteer Programs* was released and is still one of the best-selling books related to this topic to this day (Liao-Troth, 2008). On the other hand, the modern state of the field of volunteer management is the continued application and innovations of technology (Chui & Chan, 2019). Overall, the study of volunteer management continues to pull expertise from multiple disciplines and continues to path its own way.

Debate still exists on the most effective method of volunteer uses and procedures. The most effective volunteer management structure varies greatly from organization to organisation as a result of differences in size, mission, capabilities, other resources, etc. (Brudney & Sink, 2017). Regardless of variables, Brudney & Meijs suggest that all volunteer management should be focused on first having a large enough volunteer pool to survive and that one this precondition is fulfilled the department or organization must focus on supporting and guiding said volunteers (2009, 2013).

The P.E.P Model

One of the most influential models of volunteer management is the P.E.P. model. This model breaks down effective volunteer management into three distinct phases (Safrit & Schmiesing, 2004). The first of these phases is the Personal Preparation Phase. This phase gives volunteer managers or other organizational leaders the opportunity and time to create a new volunteer program or revise and expand an existing program. After this planning stage is completed, the next phase is described as the Volunteer Engagement Phase. This phase involves all techniques and actions surrounding volunteer recruitment and then any actions to retain these volunteers.

Finally, the volunteer manager or other organizational leaders must continuously reevaluate themselves with maintenance and self-evaluation within the Program Perpetuation phase, which is a continuous process (Safrit & Schmiesing, 2012). Overall, volunteer management is directly related to organizational success and therefore must be treated and executed with highest regards. An essential condition of volunteer recruitment and retention is effective and strategic volunteer management.

Although this model is considered an essential to the field of volunteer management, critics of its application do exist. Namely, compared to some of the theoretical models that will be mentioned later, the model is extremely simple in nature. These steps do not provide as much specific information on the actual application of these phases as others to follow do. However, this is not a complete negative. The P.E.P. Model can be used by organizations to get a big picture view of where they exist in their volunteer programs, as well as better narrow down complications as they arise. As a result, although the P.E.P. model is not the most usable model, it does allow a starting point or an option for big picture analysis.

The I.S.O.T.U.R.E. Model

One of the first widely accepted model of volunteer management was the I.S.O.T.U.R.E. Model of the late 1960s/early 1970s. This model consisted of seven different phases of the volunteer management model. First, being the identification of volunteer needs within organizational programs. Following, Boyce suggests that effective management in this field involves the selection of volunteers based on characteristics such as skills, knowledge, interests, etc. These volunteers are then placed into an orientation to familiarize the volunteer with the company's overall and volunteer-based goals, then trained in any other area that may be relevant to completing the tasks asked of them by the organization. Said volunteers will be utilized for the required tasks and following the model suggests these volunteers should be recognized for their accomplishments, as well as evaluated for their performance. As a result, the I.S.O.T.U.R.E. Model consists of identification, selection, orientation, training, utilization, recognition and evaluation.

Although all phases in the I.S.O.T.U.R.E. model are imperative to the overall application of the model, some may argue that the most imperative is the actual utilization of these volunteers.

Terry, Godke, Heltemes, and Wiggins, argue that if volunteer administration in combination with other paid staff do not properly apply individuals in this phase, all previous work will be for nothing (2011). Overall, in the application of any model, but especially this model, the proper use of volunteers is imperative to the success of this model.

The 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Program

Another major model of volunteer management that followed shortly after is the 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Program, named after the agricultural youth-development nonprofit (Kwarteng, Smith, and Miller, 1988). This model, in contrast to the previous, consists of only six components. These components follow a similar approach to other volunteer management programs. The first segment of the program involves recruiting all necessary volunteers needed for a successful volunteer program. These volunteers must then be trained on their respective tasks but also an overview of the organization as a whole. This model then puts extensive emphasis on volunteer sustainability efforts; these efforts include volunteer motivating, volunteer recognition, and volunteer retention. The model then ends with volunteer supervision techniques (Kwarteng, Smith and Miller, 1988).

One major component of this model that was especially impactful to the field was depicting the model in a circular fashion. This is extremely imperative and ground-breaking to the field, as volunteer management is not simply setting up human resource policies, but a continued analysis of organization and volunteer needs. Another nuance from this model is the enhanced volunteer-focused approach previously mentioned, as highlighted in the motivation and recognition levels of this model.

As previously mentioned, the model itself was built and created by the nonprofit 4-H, to retain volunteer leadership for their work in youth development. However, the number of individuals participating in the program are on the decline (United States Department of Agriculture, 2010), with the largest segment of their participants leaving the organization being first year members (Hamilton, Northern & Neff, 2014). This may be the result of several factors, some external and out of the organizations control, such as lack of parental involvement (Ritchie & Resler, 1993). But factors such as youth who are unhappy with their clubs and projects are also seen as a reason (Harder et al, 2005). The odds of some individuals being unhappy with a program is inevitable,

however, the continuous decline of youth participants may show the volunteer leadership put in place is not as effective as it could be. As a result, the effectiveness and real-world application of this model is questioned.

The Volunteer Professional Model for Human Services Agencies and Counselor Model

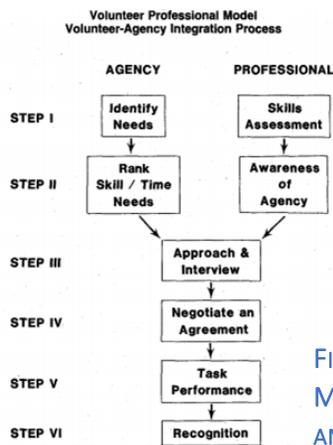


FIGURE 1. VOLUNTEER PROFESSIONAL MODEL FOR HUMAN SERVICES AGENCIES AND COUNSELOR MODEL

Another model that works a bit differently than others aforementioned is the Volunteer Professional Model for Human Services Agencies and Counselors by Linehan and Jackson in the early 1980's. This model, as the name suggests, assists in management of volunteer activities performed by those with an extremely advanced skill set, namely community agencies and practicing counselors (Linehan and Jackson, 1984). Although the pairing of these specific types of professional and public service may seem like an odd pairing, volunteering in these areas are recommended as professional development and discipline, much like lawyers completing pro bono work. The model is more so intended for organizations that employ said individuals and are either beginning their organization or beginning their volunteer management program (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, Wells, 1998).

This model exists, as seen in Figure 1. as a “Y” shape. The first step for the agency and professional alike is similar to other models is the assessment stage; here, the agency must assess what needs it has for the professionals and the professionals should possess any personal skills or certifications required to perform the voluntary work, as laid out by the organization. Following this, the two must make an agreement on the expectations this position requires. The authors

suggest, “in our experience, the professional who does this preparatory work is better utilized from the beginning than one who decides to devote time and skills that are not actually available” (Lenihan and Jackson, 1984).

In the following steps, it is the task of the organization to pinpoint exactly what work or tasks would benefit most from the professional volunteers, while in the meantime those interested in volunteering should be making themselves familiar with the organization and its work (Lenihan and Jackson, 1984). In the third step, the two groups are unified through a matching process to ensure that the professionals are willing to complete the tasks and the organization is comfortable with their ability to do so. Once they reach an agreement, the actual tasks are performed and after the model suggests the organization should recognize those involved for their hard work (Lenihan and Jackson, 1984).

This model, although applicable to every organization that provides professional volunteer services, it is more so intended for grass root organizations that are attempting to gain their footing. It was created and designed for a very specific, but necessary, segment of the volunteer management population. This is also the first time in the history of major volunteer management models that we have seen some form of specialization or concentration of a model to a specific subsection of the volunteer population.

The G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management

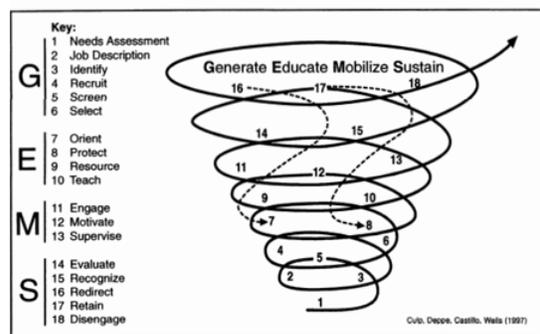


Figure 2. G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management

The fourth and final model of volunteer management is the G.E.M.S. model of volunteer management. This model is especially important as it is considered a culmination of all previous models (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, Wells, 1998). The acronym G.E.M.S. stands for generate,

educate, mobilize, and sustain, with each of these being phases breaking down into three to six subsections. Firstly, within the generated portion of this model, for a volunteer management program to generate individuals to participate in voluntary activities, they must first identify the volunteer activities and programs within the organization that require volunteers through a needs assessment. Following this, when the volunteer need is properly analyzed, the company must identify and recruit said volunteers. Once recruited, these individuals will be screened for all required skills and other necessary information and selected based on who would be the best fit for the position.

In the second grouping of phases is the education stage. In this stage, the organization must first orient the selected few with the work of the organization as a whole, as well as the specific tasks to be carried out by the volunteers. Next, the volunteer managers must educate volunteers on how to protect each of the four groups they interact with: the clients themselves, other volunteers, employees of the organization and the organization itself. Moving forward the volunteers should be given all resources and other teachings that would allow them to perform their duties to the best of their abilities. The authors of this model suggest that this education piece should be presented in a plethora of ways to better appeal to a wide array to learning styles (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, Wells, 1998).

Following this, the third stage is the mobilization stage, in which the volunteers are used for their intended purpose. To begin, the volunteers are mobilized with project and tool assignment when necessary. Next, they are motivated through the tactic the volunteer management deems most beneficial to that specific individual. Finally, it is the job of the volunteer manager or any other paid staff that interacts with the volunteers to supervise and provide constructive criticism when necessary.

The Volunteer Sustainability Phase of the G.E.M.S. Model

The fourth, final and arguably most important stage of the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management is the sustain phase. This is especially important, as retaining old volunteers means less time, energy, and resources wasted on in-depth training, as well as better guarantees a constant volunteer pool for the organization. These techniques are as follows: evaluation, recognition, redirection, retention, and disengagement if necessary.

Here they must first evaluate if the goals set by the organization and the individual are met. In terms of what specifically is being evaluated, the authors suggest that volunteers be evaluated on both individual and organizational goals. Examples of this would include the organizational volunteer goal of harvesting from a community garden to feed vulnerable families whereas an individual volunteer of ensuring that the plants are watered and weeded weekly. These goals can also be formal, via physical documentation of efforts and performance, or informal, via interpersonal communication.

Next, recognizing the volunteers' efforts allows them to feel more connected to the bigger goal. Volunteer recognition is a continuous and ongoing technique utilized in a plethora of theoretical models, including but not limited to the P.E.P. Model, the I.S.O.T.U.R.E. Model and the 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Program. Volunteer recognition is so heavily recognized within the academic literature as it has been proven to lead to increased volunteer retention. In support, Walk, Zhang, and Littlepage found that when volunteers were given paper awards or certificates for their efforts, they were more likely to participate in the program the following year (2019).

Retaining volunteers means fostering a meaningful connection between volunteer and organization. Laverie and McDonald suggest that nonprofit organizations who are more effective in creating and sustaining a more dedicated volunteer workforce are more likely the nonprofit individually and the sector as a whole to be successful and more strongly impact the economy (2007). As a result, all nonprofits should be aware of and utilizing volunteer retention as a volunteer sustainability method.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, retaining old volunteers is far more resource effective than recruiting new volunteers, as the time and fiscal efforts of recruiting, training, and scheduling new volunteers. As a result, volunteer retention is an imperative and effective technique for volunteer management programs. Volunteer turnover, or the very action that volunteer retention efforts aim to minimize, has been referred to as an increasing challenge to nonprofits' ability to successfully provide their intended services (Garner & Garner, 2011). Overall, volunteer retention efforts are a necessary and instrumental tool within the realm of volunteer sustainability efforts.

As highlighted in the spiral-shape of the model, volunteers can be redirected back to education or to another task or project if deemed necessary. This is up to the discretion of the volunteer manager or other organizational leaderships directly involved. This typically means returning the volunteer back to the education phase, specifically orientation. This sustainability technique is especially helpful as it allows the organization involved to conserve resources on recruiting and training on general organizational overviews if that is not the area of concern. As a result, the organization would only be responsible for training on related skills, knowledge and job responsibilities (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, Wells, 1998).

Finally, if that method does not work, the only option left for leadership is to disengage a working relationship with any volunteer that is still not a good fit. As illustrated in the model, this is a last resort and should be used in situations where volunteer behavior is unacceptable. This can also be a mutual decision between the volunteer and the volunteer manager if there is a major life change in the volunteer's life that would majorly impact volunteering efforts. Examples of this include individual relocation, occupation change, major schedule changes, other life events, etc.

Models Overview

Overall, by viewing the sequential timeline of volunteer programs, we can analyze the relatively short history of volunteer management. Beginning in the 1960s as a response to a labor shortage, volunteer management models have made very little progress since then. Most of the models previously mentioned are from the 80s-90s. Even the most current model discussed, the P.E.P Model, was nearly 20 years old at the time this paper was written and, again, this model is criticized for its simplicity. This massive time gap seems even more in the perspective of volunteer management as a facet of the study of Human Resources. The study of Human Resources is a continuously innovating field that has seen exponential growth in the past 10 years alone (Boxall and Purcell, 2011). The lack of growth in this field of study is a reflection of the lack of importance placed on volunteer management.

Heavily related, most of the models previously mentioned are relatively simple in design and are not being evaluated to the same extent as their Human Resources counterparts. This is not to discredit the work and findings of these volunteer management researchers but rather when you

again compare these models to the constantly evolving models of Human Resources, their simplicity shines even more so. Human Resources research today includes areas such as technological advances in relation to models (Stone et. al, 2015), interconnection and synergy of combining theoretical models (Chadwick, 2010), and analyzing and strategizing how to fill gaps between theoretical best practices and actual model application (Lepak et al, 2006). All of these areas of growth are also needed in the realm of volunteer management and their related theoretical models and yet, the gap in the literature still remains.

Conclusion

Although all models possess their own unique strengths and weaknesses, they do share several connecting themes. Firstly, all models previously mentioned involve in some capacity beginning with a volunteer recruitment strategy. Next the volunteers themselves are actually utilized for the tasks or projects required. Finally, there is typically some form of retention method. This may be done via performance review or another method. Most notably however, later models place a large importance on volunteer recognition, as seen through the volunteer-focused approach.

Each model above is important and impactful to the field to some extent. However, the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management can easily be argued to be the most comprehensive and advanced model in the field. This model is also the one most applicable to a wide array of situations and work that any nonprofit may conduct. For example, the Volunteer Professional Model for Human Services Agencies and Counselor Model is only applicable for volunteers that are professionals, as the name suggests, or the 4-H Leadership model is applicable outside of the organization but fits best for the work and structure of the organization they were designed for.

The G.E.M.S. model also better addressing the current needs of volunteer management with stages such as screening, protecting, redirecting and disengaging (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, Wells, 1998). Overall, the G.E.M.S. Model can be considered the most widely applicable and comprehensive volunteer management theoretical model in the current field. Additionally, within the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management, the arguably most impactful stage is the volunteer sustainability stage, as it allows for effective use of all related resources. As a result of this model's comprehensiveness and wide acceptance in the volunteer management community,

it is the ideal option for this research as a reference for best practices for volunteer sustainability efforts.

With that being said, although the G.E.M.S. Model is the best fit for an exceptional and most infamous model of volunteer management, it is not without its flaws. This model is from the last 20th century. This does not necessarily mean it is dated or irrelevant, but there does exist a gap in the literature as to the relevance to date, as well as the interaction with innovative technology, differing nonprofits and sectors, etc. The field overall requires more academic attention and innovation and that includes the G.E.M.S. Model

Methodology

Introduction

Within this chapter, the methodology methods and reasoning behind them will be discussed. This will include the research design, the research objective, the research sample, the research instrument, data collection and analyzation, and finally any ethical considerations that may be related to the investigation at hand.

Epistemology

Epistemology can be described as, “*the study of the criteria by which we can know what does and does not constitute warranted, or scientific, knowledge* (Johnson and Duberley, 2000) ” This philosophical approach allows for the recognition of the influence the researchers perspective may possess on the creation and analysis of findings of the research question (Levitt et al, 2021). In general, there are three major classes of thought within epistemological research: positivism, interpretivism, and realism. The first, positivism, consists of conducting research with little to no bias or interpretation by the researcher or otherwise; this type of work is seen most apparently in quantitative research (Gill and Johnson, 1997).

The second distinct view is that of interpretivism, this viewpoint attempts to address the complexities of certain phenomena, rather than generalize a concept (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). This mindset allows some level of subjectivity, as it recognizes some scenarios have complex and multifaceted answers that are more prevalent in social sciences than physical science. Interpretivism, on the other hand, posits that, “*interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments* (Meyers, 2008)”. This viewpoint would not be the best option for this research, as interpretivism focuses on the unique and deviant actions and specific context of one individual or group of individuals. The aim of this research is to investigate nonprofits in hopes of gathering an understanding of overall opinions of the field.

As the aim of this research is to analyze individuals’ perspective of a phenomenon without being as bias and value influencing as possible, the researcher has chosen a positivist approach for the

following research. This choice is most fitting for the aims of this research, as the goal is to explore the actual opinions and applications of volunteer managers. Any outside bias or leading will not allow said information to be uncovered. Choosing a positivist approach will ultimately allow the researcher to analyze the phenomenon of interest more closely and that allows it to be the optimal choice.

Research Question

Based on the research previously mentioned, this research seeks to investigate to what extent the application of the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management, specifically the volunteer sustainability phase, is implemented, if at all, within nonprofits in Grand Rapids, MI, USA. Again, as the G.E.M.S. Model is the most comprehensive and widely accepted in the field, it will be used as a reference for the best practices in terms of volunteer sustainability efforts. This model and surrounding research suggest that volunteer sustainability efforts should be implemented fully in every context. As a result, the first goal of this research is to explore the relationship between the theoretical model and real-world application.

The second area of interest and exploration within this study is the extent that volunteer sustainability efforts are being implemented. Therefore, a main portion of the investigation will include seeing what, if any, volunteer sustainability efforts are utilized by these volunteer managers. The goal here is to see if some practices are favored and why, as well as if any are actively disliked and why that may be as well.

Thirdly, this research aims to discover volunteer managers' specific opinions and experiences with each of the following sustainability efforts outlined in the G.E.M.S. model of volunteer management: evaluate, recognize, redirect, retain and disengage. The surrounding research suggests that this relationship would be positive, as these tactics are linked to higher volunteer retention.

A final area of inquiry would include to what extent does not following any or some volunteer sustainability efforts impact the organization, in the experience of the volunteer manager? The research also suggests that not implementing any or all of these volunteer sustainability tactics would lead to lower volunteer retention.

Overall, the research aims to discover what volunteer managers experience and overall opinion is of volunteer sustainability efforts in their personal experience.

Research Design

Choosing a Research Design

Choosing the appropriate research design is imperative to effectively answering a research question, as making the incorrect selection can result in invalid or meaningless results (Edmonds and Kennedy, 2017). Research designs are typically split into two major sections: quantitative and qualitative designs. Patton suggests that the aim of qualitative research is to gather a depth of understanding on a particular subject, whereas quantitative research attempts to attain a breadth of understanding (2002). Related, Creswell and Creswell suggest that qualitative research design focuses on words and open-ended questions and responses, whereas quantitative research design centers itself on numbers and close-ended questions and responses (2017).

Erickson defines qualitative research as, “*the essential purposes of qualitative research are to document in detail the conduct of everyday events and to identify the meanings that those events have for those who participate in them and for those who witness them*” (2012). The validity of qualitative research continues to grow and expand rapidly as standards develop in areas such as research design, reviewing and reporting (Parker, 2004). As the aim of the research is to explore individuals' perceived impact of volunteer recognition, qualitative research is the most applicable choice.

General Methodology

One the decision for a positivist, qualitative approach was deemed most suitable for this project, the attention must then turn towards the general type of methodology that will be used. For this, there are several options available.

The first major general methodology of qualitative methods is the Ethnography approach. This approach is based on direct observation and involves the description of people or groups of people's customs and cultures. (Gobo & Marciniak, 2011). Being a historic approach, there is great variance in the definition and process of data collection and analysis (Herbert, 200).

Ethnography focuses on exploration and discovery, rather than testing an specific hypothesis (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). Being a historical methodology and with limited participant input, there is a history of racist and largely colonial undertones (Gobo & Marciniak), however the realm of Ethnography continues to grow and evolve.

Another option for general methodology is action-oriented research. This research design involves uncovering research in the hopes of contributing social change (Hart & Risley, 1995). This research design is unique, as it typically involves a collaboration between the research and the community group that participates (Fixsen & Dulap, 2004). This approach seeks to find particle solutions that will have a meaningful impact on the communities they are working with (Fixsen & Dunlap, 2004). Overall, this methodology is becoming extremely useful, especially in the social-political landscape.

A final choice is a case study. Although a case study can be used for quantitative approaches, it also can be applied to qualitative approaches (Yin, 1981). The case study approach aids in providing an understanding of the “what” and “how” of a phenomenon (Yin, 2017). It also has been seen to provide contextual richness for a situation (Davidson and Martinsons, 2016, Spigel, 2017). The case study approach can be used to investigate the social context of a specific system (Gobo & Marciniak, 2011).

The obvious choice for the aims and objectives of this research project is the case study approach. As previously mentioned, this research method approach allows for understanding the “what” of a system while investigating the social context of it. The time restraints of this project do not allow for the Ethnography approach; additionally, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to investigate an individual's experience and opinion of a phenomenon without directly conversing with them about it. The action-oriented approach also would not be applicable, as the goal of the research is not to make actional change. The case study approach is the only viable option for this project.

Case Study Design

Once the general methodology is chosen, the next area of concern becomes actually designing the case study. Yin suggests that the first step in defining the case, which they describe as “a

case is a bounded entity, a person, organization, behavioral condition, event, or other social phenomenon (2012)”. As the case is the unit of analysis in a case study, choosing the optimal one is imperative to the success of the project. For this project will be the volunteer managers or individuals in related positions’ volunteer programs.

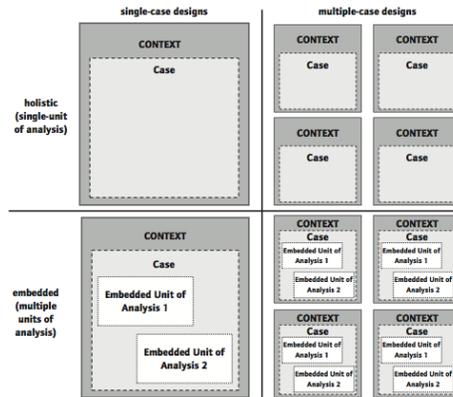


Figure 3. Yin's Case Study Design Structures

The next step in creating an effective case study design is the type of case study chosen. The first design is a single-case or multiple case design. A single case design consists of only one context, whereas a multiple would consist of more than one (Yin, 2012). A single case design was considered, however analyzing only one organization may not be able to provide an overall picture of the volunteer management systems in this target area. Yin also suggests that the single case approach is mostly meant for cases of uniqueness, representatives, or a revelatory case (2012). These organizations interviewed fit none of these descriptors and therefore this is not the most effective option.

Yin suggests that multiple case design allows for easy replication and to understand the impact of specific factors that may impact one unit more or differently than another (2009). As a result, having multiple contexts allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the volunteer management in Grand Rapids and therefore would most benefit the research aim of generalizing opinion on volunteer sustainability efforts.

The next decision to be made when deciding on a case study design is the debate between holistic and embedded subcases. Holistic subcases include a single unit of analysis, whereas embedded refer to case designs with more than one unit of analysis. As a result of the aims of the research, the best choice to assist in the exploration of volunteer sustainability within multiple organizations, the best option is an embedded approach.

Overall, by following Yin's case study design, the most optimal choice for this project is a multiple case, embedded approach.

Data Collection Method

Within the realm of qualitative data, four domains of qualitative study approaches exist. The first, ethnography or fieldwork consists of emerging oneself fully into a culture or social group in an attempt to understand these individuals' relationships and activities. Another domain of qualitative studies is audiovisual records. This new advancement in qualitative medicine involves the replaying of audiovisual records for transcribing and interpreting. Although this method allows for enhanced reproducibility and availability to others to replicate (Frankel and Devers, 2000), the data necessary for this would not be possible to be gathered for this study, as it inquires in the personal experience and emotions of individuals.

Closely related in the study of documents, which follows a similar approach as the former and as a result would be an ineffective choice for the same reasons. Finally, is the use of surveys or interviews. At its simplest, an interview is an exchange of information from one party, typically the subject, to another, usually the researcher (Frankel and Devers, 2000). This is an optimal option for the current study as it allows for investigation into individuals' attitude and beliefs and results in easily quantifiable and generalizable results (Frankel and Devers, 2000). As a result, interviews were chosen as the appropriate route for this study.

Research Sample

For this research question, we very carefully selected our research sample in the aim of achieving the most reliable results. As the aim is to study volunteer recognition within nonprofit organizations, leadership within these aforementioned groups will be selected for interview. Discrimination will not be used for the size of the companies selected, simply that they possess the 501c3 certification required to be an official nonprofit in the United States and implement some form of regular volunteer activity.

Again, to avoid any title prejudice, the volunteer management leadership we chose to interview does not need any specific title or credential, simply confirmation that they run or make major

decisions for the volunteer department. This will be verified ahead of time and this decision will ultimately allow the researcher to study exactly who is implementing

Research Instrument

Based on previous successes within this field, the research decided to implement the use of semi-structured interviews to collect the required data. This will allow the interviewee to have all necessary direction and information to answer the question, but it will simultaneously shield them from any bias or leading that may be done by the interview, even unintentionally.

The interview questions will be sent out to the interviewee ahead of time to allow them to familiarize themselves with the types of questions that will be asked, allocate them time to collect any necessary information on their end, and give them another opportunity to decline if they do not feel completely comfortable with any of the topics covered.

Along with the questions, the researcher will also send over any relevant information that may be necessary for those being interviewed to obtain a basic understanding of the G.E.M.S. and any other required information. The interviewer will also be requesting that, if possible, the interviewee provide any resources that may be used internally to train or communicate with volunteers. This will be highlighted as not required whatsoever but may allow the interviewer additional insight into their volunteer management process.

Data Collection and Analysis

Due to the prevalence of the worldwide pandemic, Coronavirus 19, any interview will be taken electronically to better protect the safety of the researcher and the interviewee. These interviews will be completed over an electronic video service, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The interview will be recorded once permission to do so is obtained. The interview will also be recorded on a secondary device as a precaution barring any technical difficulties. Additionally, the researcher will take notes throughout the interview to guarantee no information is missed or forgotten about when analysis began. The data collected from these semi-structured interviews will be the primary data in this study.

The data collected from participants will then be analyzed by the researcher. To do so, a thematic approach will be implemented. Although subjected to slight interpretation by the researcher, the thematic approach of data analysis can, “*provide rich and insightful understandings of complex phenomena, be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches and expand on or test existing theory*” (Braun and Clark 2006). Although this method does have some disadvantages, such as the lack of depth and potential for phenomenon fragmenting (Attride-Stirling, 2001), it is the most optimal option for the aims and resources of this project. As a result, a thematic approach to data analysis will be used as the data analysis within this research project.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration is imperative to protect those involved in this study. The researcher at the present moment sees no extraordinary ethical considerations. However, Byrman et al suggests that appropriate ethical standards include above all avoiding harm to participants (2011). As a result, and with guidance from National College of Ireland's *Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research Involving Human Participants*, only data that is required for the study will be collected, the study itself will be voluntary and anonymous, and finally the purposes of the study will be highlighted for all participants. Additionally, no participant will be under the age of 18 years of age and belong to any vulnerable population. The research will also avoid questions of sensitive or intrusive nature to protect all participants' wellbeing. Finally, all research data collected will be protected using the proper precautions.

Limitations

Although the research question and related design are the ideal choice for the hypothesis, certain limitations do exist. Firstly, as the data collected was directly from individuals, the potential risk does arise as to the honesty and validity of the participants. As the questions asked specifically to those in a position of management are in regard to their work, there is a risk they may not feel comfortable fully sharing company tactics.

Another potential limitation of this study is inside research. Inside research is scientific work that is conducted within a social group of any type that the research is also a part of (Greene, 2014).

As the research works within the nonprofit field, specifically closely related to volunteer management, there are potential disadvantages and limitations that may come from the researchers own personal bias.

A third and final potential limitation is the nonprofit's size and capacity. Differing size, mission, field of work they reside in, volunteer capacity, etc. However, the research suggests that all volunteer sustainability efforts can and should be used by every organization utilizing volunteers. As a result, this should not be a major issue, but something that may come up in the results.

It is the opinion of the researcher that none of the aforementioned limitations will be detrimental to the carrying out of the research study. With that being said, it is imperative that these limitations be made aware for acceptance of findings and any potential replication efforts.

Summary

In summation, the previous chapter explained in detail the methodology this research study will utilize. Including the epistemology the research will use, the research question and hypotheses, the design of the research. And finally, any limitations and ethical concerns that may also be present in the work.

Organization A: Healthy Kids

Organizational Overview

The first organization interviewed for the research question was Organization A; this organization is a healthy lifestyle change program that focuses on building healthy habits in the home, particularly in the population that has child between the ages of 5-17 and within the 80th percentile of BMI or more. As a result, Organization A will be referred to as Organization Healthy Kids for the remainder of this paper. The mission of Organization Healthy Kids is, “*to combat childhood obesity by empowering families and children to take ownership of their health by providing hands-on training, community resources, and supportive relationships in a judgement-free space.* (About Us | Health Net of West Michigan, 2021)”. Having roots as a pilot program in the greater Grand Rapids, MI area in 2010, the program continues to expand in classes offered, including a Spanish-speaking program, one for teens, and a budding gardening program. The organization is now offered in a variety of locations, referred to as sites, around the United States.

Volunteer Management Overview

Volunteers for this company are referred to as mentors, as their primary purpose is to help guide these families to provide “more support around building healthy habits”. She explains that her organization believes the more support that exists in this area, the better, and these volunteers are there to help rally around each family. Volunteers are largely a part of a neighboring university's health and medicine programs, but also a small amount coming from other nonprofits, as well as other community organizations and individuals and the volunteer manager's personal network. She explains in detail these individuals' commitment to not only the children and families they bond with, but also the advocacy and dedication they bring to fighting systematic and oftentimes racial components of childhood obesity.

This volunteer population is specifically targeted and ran by the colleges committee, as they must complete volunteer hours as part of the degree requirement, but also allows them to come in with an understanding of the barriers to healthy lifestyles vulnerable populations may face. With that being said, any community member is more than encouraged to volunteer, they must

simply show a passion for the cause at hand. A typical night class will involve 12-15 volunteers, with more being utilized for events such as their annual 5k. She explains that she expects her volunteers to be a bright source of joy for the families and almost always get this without having to ask them.

For this program, all mentors must go through a mentor training. Training for this program is what the volunteer manager describes as “program specific”, meaning it largely involves the goals of the program, the data necessary for collection, and the overall culture they aim to cultivate. This is also a place for the volunteer manager to set out expectations and time commitments required of being a mentor in this program. Little to no information is shared on how to actually interact or encourage the families, as it was deemed unnecessary. Again, the volunteer manager takes advantage of soft and hard skills and knowledges already accumulated from the volunteer’s higher education. Another important aspect of this training is being time and therefore program specific, for example, the 7-week nutrition class volunteer training will look different to the 5k volunteer training. The volunteer manager mentions multiple times how much she condenses this training as to not waste the time of her volunteers.

As far as the actual utilization of volunteers, these mentors would be in charge of encouraging and helping the families at weekly classes. Families could also sign up for an encouragement phone call if desired. Each mentor would also be tasked with completing a check in call outside of the class time to provide additional support and readdress class expectation.

On any given night, there is usually 12-15 mentors participating in a class or event. Volunteers have an average turnover rate of roughly one school year, as estimated by the volunteer manager. Outliers for this pattern exist, with one committee member comes back every single year that he is able to and another volunteer making a 1.5-hour drive to continue to work with the organization. The volunteer manager is able to cultivate a group of dedicated individuals that she humbly claims comes for the program, but in reality, you can tell her leadership skills shine though.

The volunteers agree to sign up for a session of classes, with one to two sessions having occurring a season. COVID-19 had an impact on returning volunteers, which makes estimations skewed.

Volunteer Sustainability Efforts

As far as volunteer sustainability efforts, the volunteer manager explains it is extremely situation-based. As previously mentioned, volunteer recruitment and sustainability are typically not an issue for this organization, as their volunteer base is usually there as a mandatory education requirement. The manager's biggest tool is showcasing the program, which she believes more than speaks for itself. The close relationships built with families and the progress children make is a big part of it too, the volunteer manager elaborates. What makes a larger impact on her volunteers, she claims, is seeing the results of a questionnaire the children and families fill out before and after the sessions to track progress.

Volunteer evaluation is not really utilized. Redirection is used when needed. Mentors can sometimes group together and neglect attention to the families, but the volunteer manager will intervene and recenter on the shared purpose of the class time. Disciplinary action has not been needed. The volunteer coordinator credits a lot of this to their detailed work setting up expectations in the recruitment and training stage. The volunteer manager argues that, in her personal experience, poor performance in volunteers is a regretting making the commitment and therefore the volunteer manager also makes it clear that any volunteer can excuse themselves at any time in the program. The disciplinary policy is a warning, then any necessary follow up after.

Every week a schedule is sent out to the volunteers and every night before class a "mentor-huddle" is conducted. The volunteer manager also considers herself as the volunteers' supervisor and therefore is more than willing to give out references for them; this bonding and social capital also leads to volunteer sustainability in the opinion of the interviewee. The volunteer coordinator will also be an ally to the volunteers, in the way that she will take it upon herself to assist in the redirection and centering of a child who is consistently off task or not participating as required. The volunteer manager at this specific nonprofit goes above and beyond to be available to her volunteers in any way that may be helpful to them including as a reference and as an intermediary for misbehaving children.

As far as specifically volunteer recognition, social media recognition is utilized as a tool. More importantly to the volunteer manager is interpersonal connection during the mentor huddle and

mentor debrief. She mentions naming individuals who go above and beyond as “MVP of the night”. She also connects with the volunteer by recognizing how difficult it may be to work with a family or child who is not cooperating fully. She recounts,

“I’m thinking about one time in particular, we were in the middle of a major rainstorm and the kids were so anxious and going crazy. By the end of it I just look at my volunteers and tell them, ‘y’all are dope, y’all are awesome, I hope you guys can hang your hat today and say I did a good job because that’s exactly what we did, we did a good job.’”

Upward mobility for volunteers in this organization is difficult in this organization simply because the team is so small. To put into perspective the organization has a program director and a volunteer coordinator. The volunteer coordinator mentions that as the organization grows, they would love to pull from the pool, however, that is just not an option at this time. *“There are some volunteers I wish I had a position open for you, I wish we functioned a little bit different in our model in our county so that we could onboard you”.*

Overall, what is most notable about this volunteer is her commitment to her volunteer staff. It is difficult to quantify the sense of pride she has and the bond she shares with her volunteers. Although not fully following the model as would be best practices, she goes above and beyond to take care of her volunteers in every way necessary.

Organization B: Housing

Organizational Overview

The second organization analyzed for this study is Organization B. The mission of organization B is to, *“To end homelessness, one family at a time, by engaging faith-based and community organizations to provide emergency shelter and basic needs to families with children who are homeless and to provide additional programs to assist them in finding housing and sustaining their independence.”* (Mission & Impact - Family Promise of Grand Rapids, MI, 2021). This organization, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, helps families facing homeless situation. As the organization works primarily in housing, they will be referred to as Organization Housing for the remainder of the paper.

Volunteer Management Overview

Although this organization has many facets and programs, the volunteer manager interviewed for this paper was in charge of the remodel of the mobile homes. As Organization Housing is a rather large organization, the organization overall handles roughly 1,000 volunteers at any time, whereas the model home redo team consists of 8 to 10 people on average. This makeup is largely youth during the summer and tapers off in the fall, presumably when school restarts, the volunteer manager accounts. The volunteer manager also estimated the average individual usually volunteer twice a year for a five hour session, if they return at all. There are certain outliers, of course, with a small number of individuals coming bimonthly and organizations, like church groups, coming once every three to four months.

There are very little volunteer attraction efforts. The spokesperson explains that, outside of the abnormal circumstances surrounding COVID-19, *“people just come to me”*, Training for this program is virtually nonexistent. The volunteer management leadership explains that this is because the projects they work on require rudimentary and typically previous experience, such as painting walls, cleaning kitchens and bathrooms, etc.

Volunteer Sustainability Efforts

In terms of actual efforts to sustain volunteers, the program director admits she does not do much. *“I mean I don’t put out a bowl of candy”* was her exact response. She instead focuses on maximizing the day, meaning fitting as much meaningful work into the schedule as possible. Through effective use of volunteers, she poses, people that participate can feel good about the work they are doing and do not feel as if their time was wasted. She explains, *“Our program thrives on active volunteerism so the more you can set up a good experience and set up expectations, the better it will be on the receiving end...we aim to value their time by keeping things organized and putting in equal work.”* Volunteers are also not evaluated in any way during their efforts with the organization. Overall, the volunteer managers answers were short and without much thought and consideration, especially compared to the expertise of the previous case.

Volunteer recognition is not specifically used. Organization-wide a reward is given out after a large number of volunteer hours are completed, ie 1,000 hours donated, 10,000 hours donated, etc, but not physical award or social media shoutout is done by this specific department itself. The volunteer manager mentioned that she does not do anything directly nor has any plans to anytime soon.

Volunteers are not evaluated in any way. The volunteer manager explains that this is for the same reason that training is very minimal; the work that the volunteers are completing is not extensive or advanced in any way. When asked about the opportunities for growth for volunteers, the manager explained that the infrequent times people have asked her, she was able to transfer them to other volunteer efforts within the organization. For example, after the remodeling of the homes, another team of volunteers helps with the moving of furniture and other decorating activities. She explains that they’ve never hired a volunteer for a more permanent role with the organization, however. Explaining that previous volunteer experience with the organization would be a benefit on an application, but she has not ever and probably would not ever recommend a volunteer for a position.

Again, the volunteer manager for this organization makes her answers very short and does not speak about her organization with the same attitude or fervor as the previously. Now, this is not a

steadfast example of this employee's opinion of the organization or the volunteer management structure, she could simply just be nervous or not as outgoing as the previous manager interviewed. But it may help shape the overall picture of this volunteer management structure within this organization.

The next area discussed was what redirecting efforts look like during volunteer activities. The interviewee suggests that as leadership, they do virtually nothing to redirect underperforming behavior. Going into more detail, her explanation for this is the volunteers for this project are on site for a very short amount of time, usually 2-6 hours. She poses it would "*take more time to stop what they're doing, reorient them, and continue to project in the amount of time they have*". She also mentions that them being in a large group makes them difficult to keep on task and implied that that was simply a side effect of group work. As a result, she allows them to continue in an inefficient manner rather than take the time to reorient them. This also speaks to her leadership abilities related to the volunteer manager at Organization Healthy Kids who makes tough calls for the best interest of her volunteers.

Although the volunteer management team leader posits, they do not engage in much in volunteer recognition activities, they do complete work to ensure a continuation of service in the same volunteer role. She always tries her hardest to work with the schedule of those volunteering, offering sessions in the morning, in the evening, and on the weekends when applicable. For the handful of returning volunteers, she makes an effort to familiarize herself with the skills and jobs they enjoy doing and are able to recruit them for projects within these areas. And finally, as it is a larger organization with multiple sites, she always makes sure they are connected to the site closest to their location or at least are familiar with which that would be. Although this is some effort in the right direction, it is not much when comparing it to the best practices outlined in the G.E.M.S. Model.

When it comes to volunteer removal, she discusses a situation where the organization hosted a free-to-sign-up volunteer meet up about half a year ago. At this meet up, a volunteer arrived the event inebriated. The volunteer manager did not feel the need to interfere as he was not hostile and gave him a simple job to complete for the remainder of the evening. Following this, a policy

was put in place to not allow that type of behavior and this policy was reflected on the volunteer waiver moving forward.

All of the best practices outlined in volunteer management heavily push against this approach. Although the situation was not violent, it absolutely could have, putting the other volunteer's safety at risk. Even if it did not turn violent, it was still assumingly extremely uncomfortable for the other volunteers and sends a message that this type of behavior is allowed at this establishment.

When asked if the administrator had any final thoughts on volunteer retention or any other topic covered, she took the opportunity to explain how difficult COVID-19 and the related pandemic massively impacted the area of volunteer management. Explaining that taking basically a year and a half off without volunteers and if anything with need increasing, was extremely difficult. She explains that although volunteer numbers have been down even prior to the pandemic, the ending of the pandemic will hopefully bring out a new volunteer population,

Organizational Comparison

In summation, there are somewhat noticeable discrepancies and similarities between the two organizations analyzed. These findings are as followed:

Volunteer Management Overview

Recruitment and Makeup

Although both organizations both operate with little active volunteer recruitment efforts, there are noticeable differences in sources in which these volunteer managers locate their volunteers. Firstly, Organization Healthy Kids obtains their volunteers via working relationships with local colleges and universities for students to complete program-required volunteer hours. The other organization obtains them via existing volunteer populations, through other community organizations, and through an enrollment form of the companies website.

As for the actual volunteer population, Organization Healthy Kids volunteer force comprises largely from a specific population with a required skill set and background knowledge. Whereas Organization Housing takes any and all general public that may be interested. Very little training is given to volunteers working with Organization Housing, although the work they complete

does not require extensive training. The other organization does provide program specific training to help the program succeed.

Volunteer Size and Longevity

Another key difference between the two is the number of volunteers seen. Organization Healthy Kids typically house 12-15 volunteers at any typical nightly event for a year-long commitment. On the other hand, this specific department in Organization Housing houses 8-10 volunteers for a five-hour session usually twice a year. This stark difference in average length of commitment may be the result of the first organization, Organization Housing Kids, obtaining an agreement of commitment via the committee they receive volunteers from.

Organization Housing sees a far lower length of commitment out of its volunteers. The final difference located as it pertains to volunteer size and longevity is average turnover rate. Outside of outliers that exist for both nonprofits, Organization Healthy Kids works with their volunteers for on average a year, whereas Organization Housing sees their volunteers once or twice a year if they see them more than once.

Volunteer Sustainability Efforts

General Tools Used

Neither organization intentionally utilizes a specific volunteer sustainability tool when asked without direction or prompting. Organization Housing puts a bulk of their effort into ensuring that they utilize all volunteer time to the fullest extent possible. The volunteer manager at Organization Healthy Kids follows a similar realm of thinking, explaining that by showcasing the program, the program speaks for itself. After asking specifically about each individual volunteer retention effort, they were able to recognize they utilized some of the following efforts.

Evaluation and Disciplinary Action

Neither organization uses evaluation. Within Organization Housing, the volunteer manager narrated a time when disciplinary action was more reactive than proactive. Organization Healthy Kids also did not have extensive experience with disciplinary action. However, the volunteer manager redirects on site, works with families to deal with problematic behavior, and always allows volunteers to excuse themselves from service.

Volunteer Recognition

Organization Housing does not choose to use volunteer recognition as a personally used tool. As previously mentioned, the organization itself gives out an award and related social media post after extensive hours of volunteer service are served. Organization Healthy Kids does consistently use interpersonal and informal forms of volunteer recognition, especially during their volunteer huddle and debriefing times. Overall, Organization Health Kids far more extensively uses the volunteer sustainability technique of volunteer recognition.

Upward Mobility

Neither volunteer leader has a plan in place for upward mobility. However, their attitudes toward it varied slightly. Those at Organization Healthy Kids would if the opportunity was available, however they are too small of a company to have any open positions for them to obtain a permanent role within the organization. They do make an effort to be a professional reference for all of their volunteers. Although this is not upward mobility within the organization, it does allow them professional growth. At this specific department of Organization Housing, there is also no specific program for upward mobility, only can be directed towards other volunteer departments within the organization.

Discussion

Introduction

Within this section, the above are the findings generated from this study will be discussed in detail. The analysis and discussion of the findings will be reviewed. Additionally, a discussion of the implication of these results will also follow.

Volunteer Managers & Volunteer Sustainability Efforts

The first research objective of this project was to analyze the relationship, if any, that may exist between volunteer management practices and utilizing volunteer sustainability efforts. Upon first mention of volunteer sustainability efforts, each organization did not directly mention any of the efforts that exist within the G.E.M.S. model of volunteer management. However, as previously mentioned, they did explain that they use these techniques when specifically asked.

For example, Organization Healthy Kids did not mention anything about volunteer recognition when asked generally about volunteer sustainability efforts. However, when asked specifically if they use volunteer recognition, they were able to provide multiple examples of them using this technique. This may be a lack of understanding of the umbrella term volunteer sustainability efforts. This is supported by Wong, Chui and Kwok who contributes ineffective volunteer management to the rapid growth of the economy and the short turnover rates these organizations typically have (2011). As a result, the greater issue may be that this study chose to not take formal title or education into consideration.

Both organizations did mention that in terms of volunteer sustainability efforts they both made it top priority to ensure that volunteer time was not wasted. For them, this meant being organized and fully utilizing the time the volunteers did agree to. This is supported in Grossman and Furanos' 2002 work in which they identify the three crucial elements for a successful volunteer program. They are as follows. First, an organization should be screening potential volunteers to ensure appropriate entry and placement into the organization. Next all volunteer programs should provide some level of orientation and training to provide volunteers with the skills and outlook needed. Finally, the organization should provide ongoing support of volunteers by paid staff to

ensure volunteer time is not wasted. Again, although not mentioned within the G.E.M.S. model of volunteer management, it is a recognized and important tool within the realm of volunteer management.

Volunteer Managers & Full Utilization of Volunteer Sustainability Efforts

The second major area of concern for this research was seeing if volunteer managers utilize every volunteer sustainability effort outlined in the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management theoretical model. As a refresher, these sustainability efforts are as follows: volunteer evaluation, volunteer recognition, volunteer redirection, volunteer retaining efforts, and finally volunteer disengaging efforts in some way. This study found that for the two organizations researched, neither utilized all of these efforts. Techniques that were utilized to some extents were volunteer recognition, volunteer redirection, volunteer disengagement. Techniques that were not fully utilized in some ways are volunteer evaluation and volunteer retraining efforts.

This might be the case for a plethora of reasons. Firstly, the volunteer management system for Organization Healthy Kids has contracts with their volunteers for a school year, as per a collegiate requirement. They are routinely watched and corrected over the course of the program and the work that they are completing. Additionally, it may be difficult to quantify performance in motivating a family in this journey. A similar situation exists even more obviously with Organization Housing. With groups of 4-10 individuals working within a house on basic renovation efforts (i.e., painting walls, removing debris, cleaning housing areas, etc), it would be extremely difficult to determine which volunteer did which act, especially with so much overlap of work.

This, in combination with the simplicity of the work would make evaluations difficult. Finally, Bird and Lewis shows that volunteer evaluation works best with both stakeholders, aka the volunteer manager and the volunteers themselves, are deeply involved in the process and both groups understand and act upon the information collected (2021). Neither organization really has these relationships with the groups. Overall, there is still room for discussion if not utilizing volunteer sustainability efforts is the reflection of subpar volunteer administration or if it is simply a result of the type and complexity of volunteer work being completed.

Volunteers Managers Experience and Opinion of Volunteer Sustainability Efforts

Another objective of this research was to discuss the opinions and experiences of volunteer managers. The assumption of the researcher that this opinion and experience would be positive, and the volunteer managers would possess an overall high opinion of these techniques. This was mildly the case, in the situation of Organization Housing Kids. The volunteer manager for this organization spoke very highly of the relationships that she has created with the volunteers and the change these volunteers were able to create. These deep interpersonal relationships formed can be the result of a myriad of reasons, but as previously mentioned, she contributes a lot of her bonding moments to volunteer huddles and debriefs where she verbally awards and praises her volunteer population.

Closely related was the conversation surrounding Organization Housing and their volunteer disengagement policy, or lack thereof. When they were presented with a volunteer who was acting not in line with public law by coming in heavily under the influence of marijuana and disrupting the other volunteers around them, they chose not to disengage. Now, this is not to diminish the fear of someone like this becoming violent and they did not directly have a policy in place for this situation to lean on that were both real concerns for the volunteer manager that day. However, the model suggests they still have the right and obligation of not only the reputation of the organization but also the safety and experience of other volunteers.

Impact of Not Implementing Volunteer Sustainability Efforts

As previously mentioned, previous research has suggested that the implementation of volunteer sustainability efforts should increase volunteer sustainability. As a result, companies who do implement or implement more of these techniques would naturally have higher levels of volunteer sustainability. This was seen as partially true in this project. As seen in the findings, Organization Healthy Kids does implement more of these techniques than Organization Housing. Healthy Kids did report a longer volunteer commitment. One may argue that this is the result of a longer volunteer commitment agreement these volunteers commit to, but the volunteer manager continuously explains that the volunteers involved in Organization Healthy Kids always are

aware they may leave service at any time. Organization Healthy Kids also reports a shorter volunteer turnover and overall a closer perceived relationship with the volunteers. Overall, the impact of not implementing volunteer sustainability is more heavily felt by Organization Housing, which is in line with them implementing less techniques recommended under the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management.

Analysis of Findings

Overall, a major takeaway from the findings of this research is the volunteer managers not fully utilizing all parts of the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Sustainability. However, upon discussion, it did not read as these volunteer leaders were actively against volunteer sustainability efforts, but more so that they were not familiar with these techniques. This may be the result of several reasons.

As previously mentioned, the general theme and tone of the volunteer managers interviewed were not that of disapproval for the theoretical models and related recommended techniques, but more so a lack of understanding of the academic best practices being discussed. This observation is well supported in the literature. Volunteer Management in general does not receive the funding or prioritization it requires (Hall et al, 2003), especially considering the benefits it brings into the overall organization (Kolar, Skilton, and Judge, 2016). Lia Troth goes as far as to call United States based charities as having “rudimentary and underdeveloped” volunteer structures (2008). This is especially precarious as poor volunteer management practices results in the loss of more volunteers than other reasons, such as changing personal or familial needs (Wong et al, 2011). This aligns with the volunteer managers lack of knowledge on the subject, as volunteer programs in the United States are not properly funded or valued equal to the worth they bring to the organization.

As previously mentioned, another major cause of the less-than-ideal volunteer programs in the United States is a result of the United States general position of nonprofits in the global sector. Contrasting this greatly, in Western Europe organizations are highly segmented and field activity is mutually agreed upon (Heinzel, 2004). If this same group mentality existed within the nonprofit sector in the United States, the two-nonprofit interviewed would have a more collective and universal standard for volunteer sustainability practices. However, the approaches outlined

by the volunteer managers are naturally more aligned with the United States individualist approach within the realm of volunteer management.

Heinzel also argues that the United States' nonprofit market is vastly oversaturated compared to its European associates. This major demand of nonprofit workers may lead to a couple of undesired outcomes. Firstly, with such a large staffing need and with little importance placed on volunteer management programs, there runs a large risk of getting unqualified individuals in key roles within the volunteer management department. Now, this is in no way suggesting that those I interviewed were unqualified or lacking at their job in any way. But rather that they might not be given the proper training before and after hire to perform their job to the fullest extent possible.

Secondly, this oversaturated market in the United States, in combination with the sectors over reliance on governmental funding, may lead to mission straying to receive government funding. Mission straying is a phenomenon of nonprofits doing work or having policies that are not fully in line with their intended purpose, or mission, to be better in line with the desired qualifications of government or other forms of funding (Dougherty, Natow, & Vega, 2012). This over-reliance on governmental or other forms of funding may lead to performing actions or not fully implementing procedures that otherwise would have been. Additionally, these income sources usually have tight and extensive timelines for deliverables that also may impact the quality of outcomes an organization or volunteer program provides. Overall, the funding structures that exist within the United States are partially to blame for the less-than-exceptional nonprofit execution, especially as compared to their global counterparts.

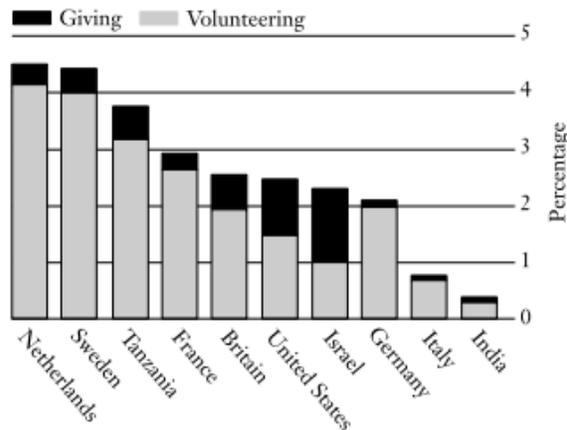


Figure 4. Private philanthropy as a percentage of GDP, 1995-2000. Salamon et al, 1999.

The final major complication present is the international comparisons in cultural opinions on giving fiscal gifts compared to donating their time to a nonprofit organization. Salamon, et al. suggest that the United States is one of few countries that give financial donations more than volunteer time (1999). This gap is far larger when you factor in gifts to religious organizations as well. Figure 4. shows how vast these discrepancies are, especially compared to the Netherlands and Sweden. As a result, little priority is again given to volunteer work, as programs can be funded predominantly through government funds, grants and general donation. This also shows that there may be a shortage of quality volunteers in the United States, as a majority of people would rather donate fiscally than with their time.

Conclusion

Overview of Findings and Discussion

In summation, the findings of the research project involved both organizations using some of the techniques outlined in the Volunteer Sustainability phase of the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management to different levels of extent, but neither being fully in line with the model. This fits well into the literature as the United States

Recommendations

As a result of the findings and general academic discussion surrounding this topic, several recommendations exist for consideration by not only volunteer managers, but the nonprofit sector and potentially beyond as well.

The first of these recommendations are arguably the most obvious, but it would be for the organizations interviewed and beyond to more closely align their volunteer programs with the theoretical model G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management. Specifically, the recommendations and structures within the final stage of the model, which include volunteer sustainability efforts. Firstly, the model suggests that volunteer managers evaluate all volunteers, informally or formally. It also instructs volunteer managers to recognize its volunteers. As previously mentioned, volunteer recognition is a powerful tool for sustaining a volunteer population and is present in several theoretical models.

In a similar line of thinking, volunteer retention is an important part of the model. These efforts greatly reduce ineffective resource use in new volunteer recruitment and training efforts. Neither organization directly utilized a technique of volunteer retention and would greatly benefit from it. The model also suggests that volunteer managers should redirect volunteers who need supplementary education or who would better serve in a different volunteer position. Finally, within this step, any volunteers who are still not performing up to organizational standards should be disengaged. Although the volunteer managers from this study did perform some of these techniques some of these times, the model recommends that all best practices be implemented on a consistent basis.

The second recommendation made would include a push for more volunteer leadership training. This training and education may come in several avenues. Firstly, it may be a reevaluation of education or experience requirements necessary to obtain a leadership position in the volunteer department of an organization. This can also include calling on colleges, universities and other continued educational bodies to implement courses related to effective and relevant volunteer management practices. Related, a discussion must be had regarding the importance of the potential enmeshment of nonprofit courses into the greater business departments of these higher learning organizations. What would greatly help volunteer programs improve would include prioritizing volunteer management education.

Greatly related, what would most benefit the sector of is an expansion of academic literature surrounding the topic of volunteer management. The body of knowledge that does exist is largely based on innovations in the sector of Human Resources. Although the two are closely related, there are distinct difference in motivation and recruiting of paid and volunteer staff that should not be generalized. A greater, more complex, more groundbreaking body of work surrounding best practices and phenomenon that exist within the area of volunteer management would improve the field as a whole.

The fourth recommendation made would include the prioritization of volunteer programs within the nonprofit organization itself. As previously mentioned, volunteer programs are typically underfunded and undervalued within the greater organization, regardless of the immense value volunteer work can provide the company. One major change that would work as a steppingstone would be increasing the perceived value of volunteer programs in the overall organization. This proposition may seem unattainable, however, that is not the case. The expansion and familiarization of the literature that illustrates the worth of the department is the first step. This, in combination with the previous recommendations, will come naturally over time with the proper support.

The fifth and final recommendation based on the findings of this project is further collaboration between volunteer managers and nonprofits in general. Relatively large differences exist between two nonprofits in the same city. If these two organizations were in collaboration or part of a committee for volunteer managers, there is space to share ideas, skills, knowledge, etc. In these

spaces there is the strength in numbers to advocate for the previous recommendations and any future obstacles they may face.

Limitations

Although the research was extensively thought out and based on the existing academic body of literature, there are always limitations to academic studies. Firstly, an even clearer picture may have been able to be painted if the two organizations in question were closer in both capacity of the volunteer management department and the mission of the organizations. Yin suggested that the more units of analysis allow for a clearer examination of the phenomenon (2009). For example, of the two organizations analyzed for this project, Organization Healthy Kids was a more robust and complete program. However, by only analyzing two organizations, it is difficult to say which is the norm for nonprofit organizations in this area. Although the existing research mentions these techniques as intersectional across all organizations, this would help remove all doubt that the findings found here may be the result of the type of volunteer utilized.

Another goal would be the level of information given to the participants ahead of time. The research provided each interviewee with a general overview of the model but did not go into detail about the techniques or specifics. This was in an attempt to make sure that no unconscious bias was created by the researcher. A paradox does exist between wanting the participants to be informed and creating a bias, so potentially a follow up study would be helpful to see if providing more background information would alter accuracy of results. Related, the researcher could have given more in-depth definitions and examples of terms used. For example, volunteer recognition gives the impression of a formal and calculated exchange, whereas in reality, it includes any effort to recognize the actions of a volunteer. Giving more general background information may have provided a clearer picture of what the research was exploring and allowed participants to give more in-depth answers.

The third and largest limitation of this study is the roadblock of asking individuals to rate their own job performance. No person wants to admit that they are not completing their job well or up to industry standards. Related, volunteer management programs and policies are typically created or at least approved by upper management in the organization. Fearing backlash from the company or admittance of failing in any form is not something most individuals are comfortable

fully doing. Again, the risk does remain of individuals not being fully honest about their professional decisions and experiences. As a result, and even just in general, interviewing more individuals involved in this process may have helped with exploration. This could have meant interviewing the actual volunteers to see if these practices are actually and constantly implemented. This could have also meant interviewing other nonprofit employees that also work closely with these volunteers.

Conclusion

In summation, the lack of application of every technique and best practice as outlined the Volunteer Sustainability section of the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management is not a reflection of the abilities or qualifications of the volunteer managers interviewed, but rather a better reflection of the opinion and culture in which these volunteers exist within. With the application of the G.E.M.S. Model of Volunteer Management recommendations, along with volunteer manager education, expansion of research in the sector, proper funding and respect to volunteer departments within the organization, and with deeper collaboration between volunteer managers would greatly aide in the mending of the issue. These changes are not rudimentary in any way and involve dismantling institutional culture. However, they are necessary for volunteer management programs to be the most successful and efficient that they can be.

What is greater concern, however, is the lack of priority and resources allocated to nonprofits in general, and their volunteer manamagenet programs in particular. This is a multi-faceted issue. Firstly, the research must be up to par with the business sector. A start would even be getting innovations and explorations in the volunteer management sector a more appropriate priority in the nonprofit literature. Additionally, those working the volunteer management sector should be given continued education and training. However, none of these actions happen until volunteer management is given the importance that it deserves.

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