
BOOK REVIEWS

Limits of the Workplace Analogy: Are Volunteers Unpaid Staff?

Susan M. Chambré

Fostering Volunteer Programs in the Public Sector: Planning, Initiating, and Managing Voluntary Activities, by Jeffrey L. Brudney. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990. 282 pp., \$28.95 cloth.

Enhancing the Volunteer Experience: New Insights on Strengthening Volunteer Participation, Learning, and Commitment, by Paul J. Hsley. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990. 192 pp., \$24.95 cloth.

ABOUT a year ago, a volunteer coordinator showed me a book he thought I had never seen. It was a copy of Marlene Wilson's *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (1976). I was surprised that he thought I might not be familiar with it because the book is a classic in the field where I have been doing research and teaching for over a decade. It was analogous to showing a physician a copy of an elementary biology text. In our previous conversation, I had told him I was a college professor doing research on volunteering, an introduction that should have indicated I had some expertise. Reflecting back, however, I no longer think he was implying I was uninformed; he was introducing me to a field that he had himself discovered after he started his job. Over the years, I have met several volunteer administrators like him who believed for a time that they were in a unique job. They are surprised to learn there is a field called volunteer administration and people like me who have devoted a great deal of time to studying volunteerism.

Another incident highlights a different facet of the limited understanding of volunteerism and volunteer administration. A student in a graduate-level course on volunteer management realized about a quarter of the way into the semester that managing volunteers was an

important part of her job. Her organization distributes funds for small business development outside the United States. The recipients are identified and the grants are monitored by field coordinators, many of whom, including Peace Corps volunteers, were involved with the organization as an extension of their work in economic development. Perhaps the job's title or the fact that coordinators were paid by *someone* obscured in her mind that these people were volunteering for her organization.

The publication of these two books marks an important step in the consolidation of our understanding of the nature of volunteering and key ingredients of successful volunteer programs. Both represent notable advances in the quality of available publications on the subject because they integrate practice-based observations with the now considerable amount of empirical research. For newcomers and experienced practitioners and researchers, they summarize sizable amounts of existing knowledge. Neither provides a definitive overview of the field. They complement each other and reflect the field's truly interdisciplinary nature and the broad range of perspectives needed to fully understand volunteerism and to manage volunteers.

Volunteers as Learners

Writing from the perspective of adult education, Ilsley points out that "people can be challenged, inspired, and educated by exercising their right to volunteer" (p. 140). His book is at once a primer on volunteer management and a report of a four-year qualitative study. The research was guided by grounded theory, a strategy that begins with a broad focus where the researcher has few preconceived notions so that the experience or situation is understood from the vantage point of participants. Basic principles and theoretical perspectives are "grounded" in the data and then compared with previous research.

Ilsley and his students interviewed volunteers and volunteer administrators and observed several programs. Two typologies are developed. One identifies different motivations; the other indicates several types of commitment. He describes five motives: social service volunteers mainly interested in helping clients, cause-oriented volunteers, consummatory or self-expressive volunteers concerned with enjoyment or personal expression, occupational/economic self-interest volunteers, and philanthropic/funding volunteers. Since motivations change, understanding commitment, not only initial motivations, is critical for designing ways to increase retention. Four types of commitment are described: volunteer centered, where the main sense of loyalty is to other volunteers; organization centered, where the major connection is to the goals and policies of the organization; and client or social vision centered. To these lists one could also add "reciprocal volunteers," who work for organizations that benefit themselves, their friends, or their families.

Volunteerism

Brudney addresses his book to public agency managers who typically work in isolation and in collaboration with volunteers. He points out that public agency managers are often in volunteerism because of the large number of services underwritten by public agencies. Public agency managers are often involved in the War on Poverty, citizen participation, and are a proponent of policy development and the provision of services. More recently, they have been influenced by the perception that volunteerism can reduce the impact of reduced funding. Brudney's research (on the Small Business Administration) with a review of volunteerism and its impact on assist students and public agencies for the importance of volunteerism, and become aware of the importance of volunteerism.

Both books contain earlier books, especially Helen Wilson's *The Effectiveness of Volunteerism* and Susan Ellis's *From Volunteer to Professional* cover some of the same conclusions on recruitment and retention. The books none the less contain discussions are more thorough than those that often explain times the data provide offer important perspectives on volunteer programs.

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Volunteerism and Public Administration

Brudney addresses his book to current and prospective public managers who typically work in settings where there is a great deal of collaboration with voluntary and community-based organizations. He points out that public administrators need to understand volunteerism because of the large amount of government by proxy. Indeed, most services underwritten by public funds are delivered by voluntary organizations. Public agencies also rely more on volunteers. Since the War on Poverty, citizen participation has become an important component of policy development, planning, and monitoring the delivery of services. More recently, reductions in public spending have led to the perception that volunteers are a source of labor that could buffer the impact of reduced funding. Like Ilsley, Brudney integrates his research (on the Small Business Administration's SCORE program) with a review of volunteer management issues. His intention is to assist students and public managers to develop an appreciation for the importance of volunteerism, understand basic management issues, and become aware of the limitations of volunteerism.

Both books contain ideas and recommendations discussed in earlier books, especially Harriet Naylor's *Volunteers Today* (1973), Marlene Wilson's *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (1976), and Susan Ellis's *From the Top Down* (1986). Brudney and Ilsley cover some of the same terrain and tend to reach many of the same conclusions on recruitment, orientation, training, retention, and the ambiguous and often precarious relationships between staff and volunteers. The books nonetheless represent significant advances. Their discussions are more thoughtful because they report research findings that often explain why current practices are effective. Sometimes the data provide no clear-cut guidelines. Instead, the books offer important perspectives so that practitioners can analyze their own programs.

The books are distinctive in another way: they do not exhibit unabiding and limitless enthusiasm for the benefits of volunteerism. While it is undoubtedly true that volunteerism has many virtues for individuals, organizations, and society, there are also circumstances and conditions where paid labor is more efficient and cost effective.

A common theme in the two books addresses a question that neither actually poses but leaves implicit: Are volunteers unpaid staff? Brudney also offers some intriguing information concerning a second issue, the limitations of voluntary labor.

Volunteers as Unpaid Staff

Thinking of volunteers as unpaid staff is fruitful for several reasons. It encourages managers to realize that time contributed by volunteers has an economic value. Were the volunteer not performing the job, the organization might pay someone or do without the service or the

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activity. Researchers have calculated the economic value of volunteering since Wolozin (1976) first did in the mid 1960s. In 1989, the overall value of voluntary workers was estimated to be \$170 billion, equivalent to 9.2 million full-time employees (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1990). In the future, estimating the value of volunteer time may become standard practice in nonprofit organizations, an idea under consideration by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Viewing volunteers as "staff" underscores their importance as a source of labor and might result in greater appreciation of their services and allocation of more resources to "employ" them. Regrettably, the notion of volunteers as unpaid staff has also led to the idea that they could replace paid staff when public spending is reduced. I was recently reminded of this attitude in a meeting between several departments in my college and managers in a public agency. The managers were quite anxious to recruit our students as interns. As the discussion evolved, the organization's agenda became clear: they were not seeking interns who could be prospective employees, but cheap labor.

Both Brudney and Ilsley point, for different reasons, to the limits of viewing volunteers as unpaid staff—what Ilsley calls the *workplace metaphor*. Brudney notes that it is not realistic to think volunteers can replace paid staff when spending is reduced because "citizens seem no more enamored with the idea of substituting for government personnel than are volunteer scholars and practitioners, or the employees whose jobs might be at stake" (p. 34). Volunteers have quite a different place in public institutions. The assessment of their impact and importance merits not only standard measures of their cost effectiveness but qualitative measures as well. Brudney (pp. 36–37) asserts:

Volunteers are not the remedy for cutting government payrolls. Instead, their true value lies in supplementing and broadening the services provided to clients by regular staff. The participation by volunteers in public agencies to assist in the delivery of services will not lead to budgetary reductions and may, in fact, produce some slight growth in expenditures. But public officials should not be deterred: The approach possesses significant economic advantages.

Chief among them is the potential to increase the cost-effectiveness of services. . . . That is, while the benefits possible to clients through volunteer involvement in government programs elude precise statistical calculation, the method can help public agencies to hold costs down in achieving a given level of service, or to increase services for a fixed level of expenditures.

The qualities that volunteers bring, what Brudney calls the *volunteer intangible*, can be attributed to some important differences between volunteers and paid staff. The absence of monetary rewards is central. It means that their services are perceived quite differently by clients, who are often acutely aware that their altruism is unfettered by a concern with monetary rewards. This was the reason why charity

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organization societies a century ago viewed volunteers as superior to paid workers (Lubove, 1969). Because clients sometimes distinguish between volunteers and paid employees, quantitative measures such as the number of volunteers and their economic value do not adequately gauge their impact because "in no way could one assess the price or monetary equivalent of the empathy, caring, and regard that committed volunteers routinely show clients" (Brudney, p. 67). Since their ties to an organization are different from paid staff, they sometimes "enjoy relatively great latitude to place the needs of the client before those of the organization" (p. 67). This quality, Brudney suggests, sometimes creates a greater sense of trust between volunteers and clients because of the absence of financial rewards, and "in general, volunteers possess closer ties to the community served and greater knowledge about it than do paid employees" (p. 68). Unlike most of Brudney's assertions, this one is appealing but not substantiated by empirical data. I would venture a guess that it will remain unsubstantiated inasmuch as formal volunteers, like paid staff, tend to be better educated and more affluent than the clients they serve. The assertion might, however, be more accurate for informal volunteers.

Limitations of the Workplace Analogy

Ilseley provides some reasons for why some managerial techniques developed for paid staff are inappropriate and need to be adopted selectively: "Professionalization of volunteer organizations has an undoubted appeal. . . . Increased organization has made at least some volunteer organizations able to carry out their missions more efficiently and effectively. These gains may come, however, at too high a price. Professionalism tends to produce an increased rigidity, an organizational 'hardening of the arteries,' that alienates volunteers. Rather than being simply welcomed as people who have a desire to serve, entering volunteers are screened, trained, supervised, and fitted into predetermined slots. They are treated like interchangeable objects rather than like people with individual interests and abilities" (p. 87).

A common idea in most books and articles on volunteer administration is that it is easier to recruit and retain volunteers to occupy positions that offer opportunities for self-actualization. Ilseley offers several welcome but unorthodox observations. He points out that challenging and interesting volunteer positions are not universally attractive. Some people prefer routine and mundane work responsibilities when they are for organizations whose goals match their own. He also suggests that some volunteers do not want to be treated like "staff"; although they are interested in "working," they are not willing to attend meetings or training sessions.

The book includes other evidence of the limits of the workplace analogy. Because volunteers are not really unpaid workers, they are sometimes unwilling to conform to bureaucratic procedures like filing reports, a point also made by Brudney.

Ilisley offers some management strategies based on his research. Highly structured programs incorporating conventional management procedures like job descriptions and pre- and in-service training are not necessarily the optimal approach for all organizations. Instead, he recommends that programs include as few rules as necessary. Administrators should view themselves as facilitators of learning—as liaisons, not “drill sergeants,” who can increase commitment by providing opportunities for volunteers to express their feelings and their opinions and participate in decision making. Programs should tolerate diversity and encourage informal support among volunteers. Although Ilisley does not mention the similarities, his recommendations suggest that volunteer administrators might begin to adopt managerial practices developed in Japanese factories.

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The Place of Volunteers in Organizations

Both books provide some fresh views on the limitations of viewing volunteers as unpaid staff. Another concern in Brudney's book are the circumstances where volunteers are not appropriate. In their enthusiasm for promoting the effective use of volunteers, many in the field have a myopic view, thinking perhaps that with proper screening, training, and retention procedures, volunteers can perform most if not all tasks. Brudney is more cautious. He describes some circumstances where volunteer use may not be appropriate. One is especially striking in light of the fact that a great deal of fire fighting in the United States is done by volunteers (Perkins, 1987): “A national study of volunteer fire departments concluded that even though volunteer forces in small towns required less public revenue, they sustained greater losses due to fire, which contributed to considerably higher total costs borne by citizens” (Brudney, p. 54). Volunteers are also inappropriate in some circumstances because they are not guided by the universalistic principles of human service professions and bureaucratic organizations. Researchers have documented instances where volunteers only serve clients of their choosing; engage in racial discrimination; openly disagree with client's values that differ from their own; and publicly discuss them, thereby violating client confidentiality.

Developing New Management Strategies

These books offer novices and experienced students of volunteer administration some new ideas and careful research reviews. One hopes that they will accomplish at least two things. First, they will disseminate useful research findings to practitioners, most of whom lack formal education in nonprofit management. They might not provide practitioners with a list of how to's but will assist them to realize that fostering and enhancing volunteerism is a complex enterprise. Second, they indicate some directions for future research. As we continue to refine our understanding of when, how, and why people volunteer

and the circumstances that typologies of motivations in that direction. Brudney reminds us that voluntary labor is appropriate in some circumstances and effective.

The first quarter century of volunteerism has taught us that volunteers have an important economic role. The principles for paid staff have increased the chances of success. The workplace analysis points to some important issues. Volunteers are unpaid staff. Perhaps in the next ways that volunteers are provided clearer insight into paid employees.

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and the circumstances that enable them to continue to work, Ilsley's typologies of motivations and types of volunteers provide a useful direction. Brudney reminds us that there are instances where voluntary labor is appropriate but other cases where paid staff are more effective.

The first quarter century of writing about volunteerism has taught us that volunteers are unpaid workers whose activities often have an important economic value. Application of management principles for paid staff has improved the ways volunteers are recruited and increased the chances that their desire to work is properly channeled. The workplace analogy has its limits, however, and these books point to some important new directions for consideration. Although volunteers are unpaid staff, they bring many other qualities to their work. Perhaps in the next quarter century, future work will explore ways that volunteers are not unpaid staff, a line of inquiry that can provide clearer insight into the commitment of volunteers, as well as paid employees.

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