Managing and Being Managed:
The Experience of Paid Staff and Volunteers in Health and Social Care Voluntary Groups

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Health and social care voluntary organizations provide vital services to vulnerable client groups in Ireland (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002). This reflects a feature of the Irish voluntary sector, where service needs have often been identified and responded to by local communities. Since the 1960s, new voluntary organizations have generally been founded by volunteers who share common values or practical needs. Beginning with an all-volunteer effort, many continue to rely on volunteers to provide services or to complement the work of paid staff (Donoghue, Anheier & Salamon, 1999).

Yet Ireland's socioeconomic fabric is changing rapidly. High rates of economic growth in the past decade (the so-called Celtic Tiger economy) have resulted in very large increases in rates of personal consumption and government expenditure (Central Statistics Office, 2004). Changes in external conditions, such as these, can be expected to have an impact on the voluntary sector.

Nonprofit groups face many challenges as they develop through the organizational life cycle. These can be thought of as dilemmas, often associated with increased provision of services and relationships with funders, which potentially disrupt the status quo regarding volunteers' contributions to the organization. This paper explores how managers and volunteers respond to changing circumstances, critically reflecting on the relationship between volunteers and the organizations with which they work.

Psychological models of volunteering assume that volunteers wish to achieve goals through their work, including values expression, improved skills, increased understanding and self-esteem (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Volunteer managers face the challenge of providing conditions that enable these goals to be met. Management is challenging in the sometimes "complex and messy" environment of nonprofit organizations (Hudson, 1995, p. 15). Volunteer management, described as "… the most frequently overlooked building block in the infrastructure of volunteer-involving organizations" (Voluntary Sector National Training Organization, 2004, p. iv; Ruddle & Donoghue, 1995), often lacks required resources. In addition, volunteers and paid staff may differ in their views on issues such as regulation, accountability and professionalism (Pearce, 1993).

METHOD

A qualitative research design was used to examine the experiences of volunteers and paid staff in a sample of Irish voluntary groups providing health or social care services. Analysing the views of both groups at the same time is a useful means of understanding both perspectives (Merrell & Williams, 1999). Individual, semi-structured interviews were held with 26 volunteers and 9 paid staff at 8 health and social care nonprofit organizations in Ireland, as part of a broader study of volunteering.

Organizations were chosen on a convenience basis. They represented a cross-section of mental health and crisis intervention and social services organizations, addressing issues such as intellectual disability, homelessness, children living on the street, mental health issues, sexual violence and terminal illness. Organizations varied in their number of volunteers (30 to over 300), paid staff (3 to over

600), time period since foundation (between 5 and nearly 50 years), and configuration at the local, regional or national level.

Separate interview schedules were drawn up for use with volunteers and paid staff. The median length of interviews was approximately 40 minutes. Audiotapes were transcribed and thematically analysed. Paid staff selected for interview were volunteer coordinators/ supervisors (n=5) or senior managers, e.g., Director, CEO (n=4). Two of the organizations were taking part in a research case study, and 8 volunteers were convenience-sampled for interview from each one. The remainder of the volunteers interviewed were randomly selected from respondents to a quantitative survey (n=444).

FINDINGS

Volunteers in the participating organizations fulfilled several roles. They contributed directly to services in 7 of the 8 groups, although in most cases the main human resource consisted of paid staff. Volunteers also made indirect contributions through activities such as fundraising and membership on a volunteer Board of Management. Two primary themes were identified in the interview transcripts, related to organizational values and volunteer management.

Voluntarism and the Professional Organization

Voluntarism was a continuing influence on organizational culture, and described in terms of energy, idealism, drive, and flexibility. Voluntarism was also associated with informality, which contrasted with the professional management language used by some managers (e.g., "We each have a work book and we're working through what's the mission of the committee ... What is the goal? ... Who is the primary customer?")

Managers generally felt that adopting a professional management approach was a rational response to organizational pressures and external events. Increasing size and complexity required professionalism. Service users also expected a more professionalized approach than in the past. State funding was more freely available than previously, but

managers had to adapt to the demands posed by this funding model ("It's an entrepreneurial, from-the-ground-up, voluntary organization. ... It has met the great big juggernaut of State funding.")

These pressures provoked changes in organizational values, such as a greater concern with "maintenance than mission." In the resulting climate, managers could see volunteer input as problematic (e.g., "We can't actually tell people what to do if they are volunteers ... The service can be more unpredictable with volunteers.") The aim of providing more extensive services was often seen as more important than the need to maintain the involvement of volunteers. There were some counterexamples to this trend. Some groups were committed to continued volunteer involvement, despite the restrictions to growth that may be entailed.

The prevailing view in larger organizations was that any reliance on volunteering input would be discontinued as state funding increased. This implies a view in which volunteers make up for shortfalls in resources, rather than a commitment to the volunteer ethos. The advantages of paid workers were emphasised by managers in larger groups (e.g., "When you have staff you have systems in place, there is going to be a good consistency of service ... It will make the organization much more bureaucratic and structured." However, volunteers in direct service work wished to continue in their role, seeing the option of fundraising as unsatisfactory.

Management Practices and Volunteers' Experiences

Volunteers needed to experience rewards in return for their time, expertise or other resources (e.g., "You don't stay with a voluntary organization that long if there is not a reward, ... something in it for you.") A relationship of equity and mutual benefit requires appropriate and supportive management supervision. Appropriate supports and structures could alleviate the pressure of the work itself. The traditional approach to supporting volunteers was generally informal; one volunteer said that "they wouldn't have had any support and they would have just got

kind of burnt-out." One manager saw structured training as undermining the informality of the volunteer experience, but most took a more formal perspective:

> We put together a programme that we're going to adhere to, say, for three months... concentrate our efforts on *a, b, c* and *d* and then we're going to come back in three months and evaluate the effectiveness of that.

Acknowledgement and respect within the organization were viewed as important by volunteers, with value attached to comparatively minor symbols of status ("I certainly have felt that as a volunteer you're perhaps less than valued. ... to the extent that someone once said to me the car park is not for volunteers.")

Volunteers serving on Boards of Management contributed at a different level to direct care and fundraising volunteers. Volunteer Board members were recruited for their organizational experience, skills and social capital (e.g., "They look for someone with already some existing skills. ... I was head hunted.") Representation on the management board and other committees allowed volunteers to exercise organizational leadership, and conferred status. This was an important strategic role given reduced volunteer input elsewhere. Working with volunteer Boards had the potential to cause frustration among paid managers. Several Boards took an interest in direct management functions such as recruitment and staff issues in addition to organizational strategy.

DISCUSSION

Volunteering can yield benefits for volunteers, service users and organizations. Volunteers wished to achieve particular goals through their work, as predicted by functional theory (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Effective volunteer management supports volunteers in this aim, through appropriate management systems and motivation strategies such as acknowledging volunteers' contributions.

Examining the study findings in more detail revealed ambivalent attitudes toward volunteering. Paid staff evaluated the volunteer ethos positively, but often associated volunteering input with problems in consistency and quality (a dual attitude among staff). Paid staff often viewed volunteering as in decline, whereas volunteers tended to see it as an essential resource (a dual attitude between different groups in the organization). Some groups had decided to rely mostly on volunteers, but others had moved toward a paid staff workforce (different views between organizations). In general, the need for strengthened internal systems for managing volunteers was apparent in this study, reflecting international findings (e.g., Urban Institute, 2004).

All of the nonprofit groups faced dilemmas in the current or planned deployment of volunteers. Responses varied according to an organization's size and age. Older groups, aiming to provide services on a large scale, planned to use state funding to reduce or eliminate volunteers from direct care. Several smaller groups took a different approach, supporting direct care volunteers through an intensive and systematic management style.

There was little evidence of dialogue between volunteers and managers about these issues, raising the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. A mutually beneficial move forward would be to identify, articulate and work through organizational dilemmas and value conflicts. Several methods are available to assist in this, such as the critical management perspective (Voronov & Coleman, 2003) and the process of organizational analysis (Francescato & Tomai, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The study used a convenience sample of organizations, with further work required to investigate the robustness of the findings across the voluntary sector. Nonetheless, a general need to foster communication was reflected in the lack of strategic discussion and debate on the appropriate role and function of volunteering. As a general principle, volunteers and paid staff thought of volunteering in positive terms. But large organiza-

tions tended to focus on the development of a paid staff workforce, with comparatively little attention given to strengthened volunteer management. The reduction or removal of volunteer input to direct services could result in several losses, some direct (e.g., volunteers as a human resource) and others indirect (e.g., volunteers as a link with local communities). While funding levels may make these losses tolerable at present, it is a risky policy given the uncertainty of the future funding environment.

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