Managing Volunteers: the importance of emotional labour

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Existing literature

- prescriptive practitioner literature (Connors, 1999; Sunny & Kleiner, 2003; McCurley et al, 2012)
- Transplantation of for-profit logic into non-profit contexts (Studer and von Schnurbein, 2012; Billis, 1989)
- Working assumption is that the management of volunteers = management of paid staff
- Those that manage volunteers are left to mop up the consequences of the operationalisation of this assumption in practice.

Notes from slide 2

- Limited research in the UK (but large body of work in the USA).
  - Focus on paid employees in voluntary sector rather than volunteers.
  - Volunteer focused academic research: focus on identities and motivations not management of volunteers.
  - Practitioner focused volunteer management research: prescriptive and evaluations of projects.

"One of the pieces of the puzzle still missing is the effect of day-to-day interpersonal relationships between volunteers and paid staff, volunteers and managers and between volunteers themselves… the micro-relationships… tone of voice, choice of words, body language, frequency of communication, underlying moods and stress, humour etc… to date we lack the observational case studies that record and analyse behaviours at this level"

(Murray, 2008:245-246)

- There is a need for a qualitatively driven, micro-analysis of he relationships, interactions and encounters between volunteers and their paid managers.

Empirical Study

- National Trust funded empirical research project
- To what extent is the management of volunteers similar or different to the management of paid staff within the National Trust?
- 2 property case studies
- Medium sized stately home locations

  = 28 hours of interview data
  + 18 hours of focus group data
  +24 hours of non-participant obs

  Methods
  - participant-produced drawing focus groups (volunteers and paid staff)
  - participant-led photography (managers)
  - Activity Involvement Records (managers)
  - semi-structured interviews (managers)
  - non-participant observations (managers)
  Analysis
  - NVIVO
  - emergent thematic analysis

Findings

- Key differences between management of paid staff and volunteers

  - Performance management systems
  - Communication processes
  - Task (allocation; accountability; responsibility; expectation)
  - Roles of trust and fear in relation to autonomy and creativity
  - The role of emotional labour/management

Notes from slide 6

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- These findings challenge the prevailing trajectory within the third sector, namely the operationalisation of the management of volunteers as paid staff. The attendant costs and benefits f managing volunteers are significantly different to those associated with the management of paid staff. Indeed, our findings suggest that rather than the volunteer management practice being rooted in HR and other management rhetoric here is cause to suggest that this relationship be inverted. Rather we need to ask what can HR learn from effective volunteer management!

Performance Management

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✓ More informal for volunteers

✓ Shared view that formal performance management policy and procedure would be inappropriate for volunteers

✓ Formal policies, documentation and frameworks exist to support managers in their management of volunteers performances but these are rarely drawn upon or implemented in practice.

Q Is there a tension between informal processes of volunteer performance management at property level and more formalised policies and frameworks provided by the Trust?

🔍 Managers often feel inhibited in challenging poor volunteer performance and facilitating improvements, which can lead to an increased workload for them and less optimal outcomes for the property.

Communication

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✓ Volunteers want to be listened to and engaged with in dialogue – not just told

✓ Methods of communication need to be locally negotiated and contingent on demographic and geographic context

Q Communication is fundamentally about sharing information. If methods of communication prevent such sharing they are ineffective. Why pursue universal infrastructures of communication if they are ineffective in local contexts?

🔍 Some teams and departments used white boards whilst others used Facebook ...

Task Differentiation

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✓ Volunteers generally happy with the 'work' they are given

✓ Most managers shared the view that that tasks undertaken by volunteers should support the property, as opposed to the property being reliant on them

✓ Most volunteers shared the view that some tasks were better left to paid staff

Q Upon what basis or criteria do managers evaluate tasks as [un]suitable for volunteers to undertake?

🔍 Significant variation between departmental areas and properties around tasks identified as suitable for volunteers to undertake ...

Trust v Fear

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✓ Paid staff and managers are reluctant to give volunteers certain tasks

✓ Fear of volunteers evaluating the work as mundane or repetitive

✓ Volunteers are not trusted to undertake certain tasks as they are not bound by a conventional employment relationship as paid staff.

✓ Paid staff and managers fear volunteers could replace their roles

Q To what extent are properties missing out on significant operational benefits of volunteer labour as a consequence of these permeating emotions of trust and fear.

🔍 Volunteers want to be trusted to support managers in the conservation and presentation of the properties but managers tend to be fearful of accepting volunteers as anything more than 'help'. Where greater trust is demonstrated the results are positive.

Emotional Labour

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✓ Voluntary work spaces are defined by different emotion and feeling rules to paid work contexts due to the absence of the formal employment relationship

✓ Volunteers demonstrated a strong 'affective commitment' (or love) to the spaces and places at which they volunteered.

✓ Managers were tasked with managing their own emotions in a more conventional manner (because they are paid) whilst also coping with the emotions of the volunteers.

Q To what extent is emotional labour a key leadership skill in the management of volunteers?

🔍 • Managers cast volunteers strong emotional reactions and responses as 'bad' behaviour that they had little control over but must endure. Yet, volunteers' affective commitment is a significant asset to the organisation if it can be effectively harnessed.

Discussion

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- Reconstruction of the 'employment relationship'
  - space freer of conventional social and feeling rules
  - Unregulated emotional landscape: high emotionality
  - Negative consequences of inability to deal/engage with this emotionality
  - Affects the way volunteers evaluate their managers: emphasis on attention to 'space and place'

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Implications and Impact for the National Trust

1. review of existing training provision
2. total overhaul of current NT training on the management of voluteers
3. specialist in-team interventions for building emotional resilience in volunteer teams

… but what if this is unique to the National Trust?

Moving forward

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- Wider project including more organisations from a variety of voluntary sector organisations
- City of London Open Spaces (in progress)
- Citizens Advice (establishing research design)
- National Trust (more case studies)

- Would your organisation like to be involved? If so, please get in touch!