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Volunteer Management in India: A study among Non-profit Organizations

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Abstract

Volunteer management is the systematic utilization of the volunteer manpower for the achievement of organizational intents. The differences in operation of developmental programmes and differing capacities of Non-profit ventures often make the volunteer management plans unique in its own ways (Hager & Brudney, 2004). Volunteer managers have the commitment to recruit and select best persons with desired set of expertise and aptitudes to complete challenging assignments. Volunteering, certainly need to be persuaded as a fun activity in which people enjoy while accomplishing the tasks. Due to the large number of volunteer workforce with diversified set of knowledge and skills, retaining volunteers is one of the most challenging tasks for the voluntary organizations unless there are enough provisions for effective volunteer management. The paper attempts to comprehend the volunteer Management practices in Indian NGOs.

Key words: Volunteering patterns, Management of Non-profits, Motivation

Introduction

Over the last few decades, volunteerism has evolved as the most essential element for sustained service, not only for the public and non-profit sectors, but also for the profit oriented financial undertakings (Cnaan & Amrofell, 1994). The voluntary sector as its name indicates, is increasingly dependent on individuals who volunteer (Lie & Baines, 2007). Voluntary organizations cannot operate merely with the salaried workforce. They usually require volunteers to aid them throughout their manoeuvre , right from the mobilization of capital to the point of execution of larger public programmes (Schlegelmilch & Tynan, 1989). Improved volunteer well-being is associated with better outcomes (Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011). Thus, adoption of schematized volunteer management strategies is pivotal in ensuring active rotation of volunteers in the non-profit sphere. Volunteer management, like any other field of managerial practice, is encumbered with lots of challenges (LiaoTroth, 2008). Volunteer management is not limited to

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recruitment, selection, training and delegation of responsibilities (Machin & Paine, 2008). The job descriptions for the tasks to be performed by volunteers; should be communicated in advance (Brudney, 2012). Motivating the individuals to linger with their volunteering roles and responsibilities for long is indeed a tuff task. Due to the multiplicity of tasks in which the non-profits endure in, the approaches and paradigms of work differ from one NGO to another. However, while concocting the process of volunteer management, the organizations should strive to put the best strategies into practice. Formulating predetermined criteria for the selection of volunteers can help gear up the staffing process and can ensure the availability of persons with intended faculties on ground. Volunteer managers also have to be clear with the type of volunteer they wants according to the needs and expectations of the organization or the programme. Requirement of spot volunteer or volunteer for casual needs or volunteers for accomplishing specific needs etc. have to be identified more precisely (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). Research studies have indicated that the motivation of volunteers is a crucial determinant of their quality of service and better predictor for retention (Clary et al., 1998).

It is mandated that, the data including educational accomplishments and hobbies should be collected during the recruitment process. This could better help to understand the aspirations of the volunteers and would aid in positioning them in tasks in which they fit in. Screening applicants for matching skills and responsibilities are vital in ensuring productivity (Henry, 1966). Screening and training are very important in finding out the volunteer orientation for sensitive areas like hospice and palliative care settings (Paradis & Usui, 1987). Volunteering in organizations are actively influenced by values, self-esteem and empathy (DBA, 1997), a thorough understanding of these factors is essential for deploying the right person at the right position. Keeping the volunteers engaged in productive activities is indeed an important challenge to the volunteer manager. Often, the skills and talents of volunteers are found to be underutilized, particularly in the Indian context. Relational expectations of people who volunteer are significant features of their psychological dispositions, which could be used in formulating frameworks for effective managerial practices which the volunteers find themselves attuned with (Stirling, Kilpatrick, & Orpin, 2011). Personal relationships are another major factor which prompts people to volunteer (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Better Social environments along with better managerial backing makes volunteers stay for long (Hidalgo & Moreno, 2009). Success of volunteer management programmes are largely dependent upon sustaining the motivational level of the volunteers (Krishnakumar & Nalini, 2018).

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Information technology have made revolutionary changes in every field of managerial practice, including volunteer management (Brudney & Meijs, 2014; LiaoTroth, 2008). Managers need to think of far off benefits from volunteering than fulfilling the immediate aspirations (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). Although volunteers are currently managed by usual Human Resource management practices by many NGOs, several scholars have argued that volunteers should be managed using different strategies than that of paid staff as the former do not receive any sort of remuneration for their accomplishments (Studer, 2015).

Methods

The central aim of the study was to identify the volunteer management strategies adopted by Volunteer managers of Non-profit organizations in India. Adding to this, researcher wanted to make an enquiry about the volunteering preferences by Indian NGO managers.

Descriptive study design was employed in this study. The data was collected from the volunteer managers from different parts of the country by online survey. The participants were conveniently selected by the researcher. The email ids and other relevant data were gathered from online NGO directories. The researcher actively communicated with the subjects over phone and email to facilitate easy data collection. A total of 116 volunteer managers from different states and Union territories of India participated in this study. Data was collected during March 2019 to June 2019. Confidentiality of the subjects was assured throughout the study period. The data was analysed using percentages and proportions.

Findings

Table No.1

Age of Volunteer Managers	Percentage
18-24 years	1.72%
25-34 years	18.97%
35-44 years	20.69%
45-54 years	41.38%
55-64 years	13.79%
Above 65 years	3.45%
Gender.	Percentage

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Female	18.96%
Male	81.04%

Level of Activity of NGO	Percentage
International	6.90%
Local	20.69%
National	20.69%
State	51.72%

State/UT wise constitution of study subjects	Percentage
Andhra Pradesh	6.90%
Assam	1.72%
Bihar	5.17%
Gujarat	1.72%
Haryana	3.45%
Jharkhand	5.17%
Karnataka	6.90%
Kerala	5.17%
Madhya Pradesh	3.45%
Maharashtra	3.45%
Manipur	8.62%
Mizoram	1.72%
Odisha	3.45%
Puducherry	1.72%
Rajasthan	5.17%
Tamil Nadu	5.17%
Telangana	3.45%
Uttar Pradesh	15.52%
West Bengal	12.07%

Have undergone professional training in NGO management	Percentage

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No	37.93%
Yes	62.07%

Source: Primary Data

Most of the study participants are of the age group 45-54 years age group (41.38%), followed by 35-44 years (20.69%) and 25-34 years (18.97%). The percentage of participants from 18-25 years age group and those above 65 years of age is found to be very low. Males constitute 81.04% of total participants, where females constitute only a little less than 19%. Most of the NGOs which co-operated with this study were operating within their states of registration (51.72%), while 20.69% of the participating organizations were operating throughout the country. About 21% of NGOs were working in their own localities whereas a little more than 6% were operational throughout the globe. The highest level of participation in this study was from Uttar Pradesh (15.52%) and West Bengal (12.07%). Also it is observed that only 62.07% of total respondents in this study possess the professional training in NGO management.

Volunteer Recruitment

Table No.2

Incidence of volunteer Intake	Percentage
Always	51.72%
Most often	18.97%
Never	3.45%
Occasionally	17.24%
Rarely	3.45%
Very Rarely	5.17%
Volunteers Age Preference	Percentage
18-24 years	24.14%
25-34 years	41.38%
35-44 years	6.90%
45-54 years	1.72%
Above 55 years	1.72%

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All Age Groups	24.14%
Criteria for Allocation of tasks to the volunteers	Percentage
Based on the mixed criteria	1.72%
Based on their educational qualification	12.07%
Based on their experience	18.97%
Based on their interests	24.14%
Based on their skills	43.10%
Incidence of conducting screening test during volunteer recruitment	Percentage
Always	32.76%
Most often	8.62%
Never	20.69%
Occasionally	12.07%
Rarely	15.52%
Very Rarely	10.34%

Source: Primary Data

As per the data available, 51.22% of the NGOs under this study always intake volunteers, whereas 18.97% do that most often. 17.24% occasionally involve volunteers in their activities. It is noted that 3.45% of NGOs rarely involves the work of volunteers although 5.17% very rarely need them. Most of the NGOs prefer volunteers of the age group 25-34 while 24.14% prefer people of 18-24 years of age. A little less than 25% of the NGOs prefer people of all age groups for volunteering activities. People above 35 years of age are found to be less preferred by NGOs under consideration.

The selection of volunteers by different NGOs involves consideration of different criteria. 43.10% of the volunteer managers assign tasks by considering the skills of the volunteer whereas 24.10% give weightage to individual interests. 18.97% of the volunteer managers identify experience for assigning the tasks although 12.07% allots it as per the educational attainment of the candidates. Only 1.72% of volunteer managers assign tasks based on mixed criteria. 32.76% of the managers always conduct a screening test before volunteer recruitment while 20.69% never do that.

Use of online resources

Table No.3

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Frequency of online advertisements for volunteer recruitment	Percentage
Always	10.34%
Most often	8.62%
Never	34.48%
Occasionally	18.97%
Rarely	10.34%
Very Rarely	17.24%

Frequency of online volunteer campaigns during events	Percentage
Always	15.52%
Most often	6.90%
Never	32.76%
Occasionally	15.52%
Rarely	6.90%
Very Rarely	22.41%

Source: Primary Data

It is clear from the data that the use of online resources in recruiting volunteers is found to be very low among Indian volunteer managers. 34.48% of the managers never give online advertisements for recruitment of volunteers. 32.76% of managers never involve in conducting online volunteer campaigns during events. The frequency of use of online resources is found to be too low in both cases.

Volunteering Patterns

Table No.4

Face difficulties in getting Volunteers	Percentage
Always	43.10%
Most often	20.69%
Never	6.90%
Occasionally	8.62%
Rarely	8.62%

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Very Rarely	12.07%

Volunteer Preference	Percentage
Foreign volunteers	10.34%
Local volunteers	50.00%
Volunteers from other states	12.07%
Volunteers within the state	27.59%

Share of no. of current foreign volunteers	Percentage
None	81.03%
1-5	13.79%
11-15	1.72%
6-10	1.72%
Above 20	1.72%

Source: Primary Data

While considering the difficulties faced by the volunteer mangers in getting volunteers, 43% of the respondents reported that they always faced such problems. Adding to this, 20.69% of volunteer managers report that most often they face difficulty in getting volunteers for their programmes.

The volunteer preferences also vary greatly among Indian NGO managers. 50% of the total respondents prefer local volunteers while 27.59% opt people within the state. About 12.07% prefer volunteers from other states whereas 10.34% of respondents are in need of foreign volunteers. It is evident from the data that the proportion of NGOs opting for International volunteers is found to be low while comparing with other set of volunteers.81.03% NGOs under this study did not have any foreign volunteers during the time of enquiry.

Orientation and motivation

Table No.5

Provide orientation for volunteers before assigning tasks	Percentage
Always	46.55%
Most Often	10.34%
Never	12.07%

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Occasionally	24.14%
Rarely	1.72%
Very Rarely	5.17%

Host events for recognising the good practices of volunteers	Percentage
Always	37.93%
Most Often	12.07%
Never	6.90%
Occasionally	29.31%
Rarely	6.90%
Very Rarely	6.90%

Source: Primary Data

From the data it is clear that the volunteer managers provide frequent orientation to the volunteers before assigning them tasks. 46.55% always provide orientation and 24.14% occasionally does that. 10.34% of respondents agree that they provide orientation opportunities most often whereas a little higher than 5%, rarely get into it.

The data on frequency of conduct of events for recognizing the best practices by volunteers reveal that events are hosted for the same always by 37.93% of respondents and occasionally by 29.31% of the respondents. 6.90% of respondents very rarely conduct such events while another 6.90% never do that.

Volunteer management responsibilities

Table No.6

No. of persons sharing volunteer management responsibility	Percentage
None	6.90%
1 person	18.97%
11-20 persons	5.17%
2 persons	24.14%
3-5 persons	20.69%
6-10 persons	13.79%
More than 20 persons	10.34%

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Years of Service as Volunteer Manager	Percentage
1-5 years	18.97%
11- 15 years	6.90%
16-20 years	22.41%
6-10 years	25.86%
Less than 1 year	3.45%
More than 20 years	22.41%

Source: Primary Data

The data on no. of persons sharing volunteer management responsibility reveals that in 24.14% of NGOs, two persons manage volunteers, whereas in 18.97% of NGOs, volunteers are managed by a single manager. In most of the NGOs, volunteers are manged by more than 2 persons.

The years of service as volunteer manager were also covered in this study. 22.41% of the managers are involved in this work for more than 20 years whereas it is 16-20 years for another 22.41% of respondents. 25.86% of the respondents are managing the volunteers for 6-10 years while its 1-5 years for 18.97% of total subjects under this study. 6.90% are managers for 11-15 years while managerial responsibilities are less than a year for 3.45% of respondents.

Discussion

The efficacy of volunteer management practices has been assessed through several researches, worldwide (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006). Getting a ready circulation of volunteers is found to difficult as reported by the majority of Volunteer managers in this study. Indian volunteer management sector have done only petty research on retention of volunteers. Motivation of volunteers differs from NGOs to NGOs, and even has social, regional and cultural aspects. Many NGOs have failed in understanding the motives of persons who volunteer. Motivation also have direct influence on satisfaction level of volunteers (Vecina, Chacón, Sueiro, & Barrón, 2012). Increased level of volunteer engagement in a variety of programmes help them to sustain volunteership (Vecina Jiménez, Chacón Fuertes, & Sueiro Abad, 2009).

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In this study, it has been observed that volunteer managers are skilful in assigning the right volunteer roles by considering the person's competencies in hand. The educational, skills and lot of other factors are crucial in determining the compatibility of a volunteer in his or her work (Brudney & Meijs, 2014; Heidrich, 1990). A systematized framework for volunteer Involvement needs to be formulised to meet the exceptional requirements of the non-profit organization (Rehnborg & Moore, 2012) through careful examination of the roles that the volunteers could perform (Yallen & Wentworth, 2012). Many of the NGOs lack proper volunteer management policies and strategies despite the bulk of work that the volunteers perform (Graff, 2012). It has been observed in this study that the use of online resources for volunteer recruitment is still minimal. Recruitment of volunteers involves a well-planned course of action (Gotlieb, 2012). The use of internet resources should be augmented for better progress of voluntary sector (Hobbs, 2012; Hodgson, 2012; Macduff, 2012). It is observed that not all the NGOs frequently appreciate best practises of volunteers in the team. Volunteer recognition and incentives are also active determinants of volunteer sustenance (Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013). Another crucial factor discussed in this study is about the necessity of orientation while they are provided with developmental assignments. Irrespective of the duration of volunteership, orientation is the key factor which determines the success of a programme (Edwards, 2012). Provision of better training opportunities offers the foundation for volunteers to strengthen their bond with the organization (Hood, 2012). In this study, it has been identified that only few of the organizations involve volunteers from abroad. Replication of ideas happen better through global collaboration (Lesmeister, Rose, & Barnhart, 2012). Volunteers serve for long or short periods or work in native settings or foreign settings with changes in their world views. The diverse styles of volunteering mandate diversification of volunteer management strategies (Macduff, Netting, & O'Connor, 2009; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013). It is generally agreed that these strategies account for a positive change in the operations of the non-profit organization (Vinton, 2012). Career and academic motives have been identified as central for the younger adults to involve in volunteering (Shields, 2009). The age of the volunteers have a substantial influence on the roles they perform (Black & Kovacs, 1999). The Indian volunteer managers need to incorporate better strategies for better outcomes.

Conclusion

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The energy of the volunteers is indeed vital force which sustains every non-profit undertaking. (Brudney & Meijs, 2009). The volunteers should be provided with space to raise their queries and should be free to present their recommendations to the volunteer managers. Imparting tireless training and engaging volunteers with challenging tasks are potential ways to ensure volunteer sustain in the organization for long (Jamison, 2003; Newton, Becker, & Bell, 2014). The volunteer management strategies should be systematically formulated for the success of the coordinated efforts in NGOs. In the Indian context, the non-profits are far behind in schematised planning of volunteer manpower. Conscious efforts have to be made both by the policy makers as well as by the Managers of NGOs to achieve maximum output from the efforts of volunteers. Moreover, the researcher urges the social investigators to conduct more in-depth studies at this regard.

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