Module IV: Paid Staff & Volunteers

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Engaging the Nonprofit Workforce

By engagement, the authors mean the extent to which workers feel that the goals and mission of their job align with their own. Engagement is related to but not identical to employment satisfaction. Unique for the non-profit sector, however, employees don't think of their work as "just another job," but that's no reason to assume they are engaged just because they believe in their organisation's mission.

The advice in the piece is tailored for managers, who are perfectly positioned to foster worker engagement. Deliberately centering worker engagement within an organisation's strategic vision is the first step to take. Most employees want the chance to develop their skills and advance their career, so promoting from within can keep workers engaged with the organisation. The expectation for advancement often goes unmet, not least because many NFPs are small and other career opportunities beckon. The authors recommend ongoing training and showing interest in career development of workers. Secondly, hiring workers based on a "cultural fit" can resolve engagement issues before they worsen.

Ass a consequence of the emotional stake that non-profit workers place in their job, emotional burnout can occur if effort put in by employees is met with recognition or reward. Burnout is bad enough on its own terms, but on the practical side it leads to worse performance and *increased* turnover. Many workers in the sector are already at risk of burnout. The authors don't have any material recommendations for this problem aside from acknowledging the difficulty of the work and improving employee engagement in every other way possible.

Job expectations matter a great deal for worker engagement; specific performance standards and clear explanations for why a task is important helps keep employees from emotionally disengaging from their task. On this front, managers should also receive training on identifying and reducing burnout. Transparency and employee participation helps as well, not just to make workers feel like they are part of the team but to welcome out-of-the-box thinking.

There are demographic variables that affect employee engagement, such as educational level and generational differences, although weakly. The good-ish news is that gender and ethnic diversity have little relationship with reported engagement among workers.

Worth, 2014

Worth discusses the work of paid staff and unpaid volunteers in a mixed workforce common to many an NFP. He distinguishes between *policy* and *service* volunteers: the former are involved in leadership and organisational management whereas the latter are involved in implementing operational programs under the supervision of paid managers.

Worth presents a survey of different management theories, reviewing the theory of scientific-management and other critical theories of management. The current state of research emphasises the importance of human motivations in productivity, although there is no consensus on which needs, expectations, or emotions are most important. Each of these theories have strong explanatory strong points for NFP work as well as critical shortcomings. Table 9.1 on page 213 of the text offers a concise summary of widely-examined theories of management, should the reader wish to investigate further.

Worth spends an entire section applying Denhardt et al.'s theory of human motivation to paid workers. Manager's should be self-aware about their own needs and motivations, because that inevitably rubs off on their interactions with employees and volunteers as well as the workers' motivations as well. Secondly, motivations are not universal, and acknowledging that fact is important, and managers should be realistic about the extent to which the motivations of others can be influenced. Consequently, employees or volunteers who are bad fits might not be worth the effort expended to motivate them successfully. Establishing clear and challenging milestones for achievement can help orient a team around a tangible goal and redirect energy towards a specific end. Rewards for accomplishments may successfully motivate some, but not all, volunteers, and honesty about expected rewards is important to avoid emotional disengagement. Rewards are not limited to wage compensation, but when it comes to that, workers performing the same work should be compensated equally and equitably. Lastly, Denhardt et al. emphasise that the workers in different life-stages are motivated differently and should be supported and managed accordingly.

On the volunteer side, Worth applies the theories of various authors rather than a single published author. Without volunteers, organisations would have to pay a substantial premium to supplement their work – not just unskilled work, but also specialised expertise. There is no academic consensus on which particular categorisation of volunteers is best, so real-world organisations should be aware of all of them but consider which typology best fits their organisations volunteer-force. Broadly speaking,one can distinguish volunteers by either the work they do, how often they do it, or why they do it. This last question – why – touches on human motivation, which Worth earlier says also relates to the engagement and output of all workers, including volunteers. Research shows that their motivation is similar to that of the paid staff.

When recruiting volunteers, organisations should first consider *why* volunteers are needed, such as labour supplements or for community engagement; having

volunteers with nothing to do is a bad idea. The tasks delegated to volunteers don't have to be low-skill low-importance jobs, but high-importance tasks are best reserved to paid staff. Organisations should also be willing to refuse volunteers if they do not have skills needed to do a job and even target individuals with expert skills for recruitment as a volunteer. Depending on an organisation's structure, a decentralised volunteer program may be preferable to centralised coordination under supervision of a designated volunteer manager. Vacant volunteer positions can also be listed like job listings, rather than waiting for volunteers to show up looking for ways to contribute. As part of risk-management, official volunteer policies can delineate clear boundaries for work and give the organisation legal protection when things go wrong. Affording a sufficient budget to volunteer development can improve the impact of volunteer workers. Lastly, same as with paid staff, setting explicit performance goals and recognising a job well done goes a long way to retaining volunteers.

The NFP sector is growing and volunteer labour is growing with it. Demographic shifts in the future will mean that career volunteer managers will have to handle older volunteers differently than younger ones, same as with paid workers. Making sure that paid staff and volunteers are a diverse group vis-à-vis gender, ethnicity, age, and education makes an organisation stronger.

Porter & Emmens, 2009

The researchers investigated the special psychological and medical needs of humanitarian work in international NGOs. They found that existing practices were inconsistent, seldom adhered to, and often incomplete. Peer-support programs have been developed for humanitarian workers, but it is evident that this solution is only a partial one. Almost half of INGOs do not have existing protocols for post-travel checkups and psychological debriefs, and staff care is likely to be slashed as the economic contraction continues. The researchers found that less than a third of INGOs self-assess their workers or staff-care measures and there is almost no publicly available internal research either.

Preparing staff for field work receives the most attention, but once on-assignment, many organisations rely on ad hoc solutions, revealing the opportunity for systematic exchange of best practices between INGOs. Post-assignment receives the least attention, where workers can slip through the cracks quite easily.

The authors recommend a "framework for action" address these shortcomings, based on seven questions to discuss with planners. INGOs should consider what they can share with one another as well as what they ought to do better "in-house" before relying on outsourced expertise.

Rehnborg, 2009

Rehnborg begins by dispelling myths about volunteers. First, volunteers give their work for free, but managing and retaining volunteers is not free – it requires investment. They might not want the same thing as what your organisation wants, or get different things out of participation than what the organisation thinks. Meeting volunteers needs is important because the relationship that high-expertise and spot volunteers have with the organisation is very important. Volunteer labour and staff work should overlap, not be siloed into different domains, because this makes the organisational structure more robust handicaps an org's community-reach.

She offers a "volunteer involvement framework" to categorise different volunteer roles – along one axis is the connection the role has to a program (affiliation vs skill), along the other is the time commitment of the role (episodic or recurring). Depending on which category a volunteer falls in, their view of "what they get out of" volunteering changes. The full chart is on page 10 of the report.

With this trademark framework, Rehnborg describes how to create a sustainable volunteer engagement program. Beginning with research on the volunteer force, and organisation can identify what kinds of volunteers they have and why they work for them pro bono. This information informs the grand strategy of an organisation as it develops its volunteer base by investing in personnel for volunteer management. As part of strategic planning, the governing board of an NFP needs to be part of the process from the beginning. Additionally, the community served should be integrated into plans for volunteer development.

Once the strategic vision is decided upon, implementing it requires drawing up logistical benchmarks and resources. There's no need to reinvent the wheel: copying the success of others can save a lot of headache, but adjustments should still be made. Quantitative self-assessment for success, exit interviews, or accounting for financial return on investment can check the temperature of strategic recruiting efforts to see if they succeeded or failed and to what degree.

Legislative Testimony and Public Comment

The author(s) write that testimony and public comments are written to persuade and inform decision makers in government. This can be expert testimony or just the thoughts of ordinary people affected by a policy on the table. As an exercise in advocacy, neutrality isn't encouraged – but neither is dishonesty.

Prepare in advance with other people writing testimony or comments so that there's no redundant information. As a memorandum document, having clear labels for author, audience, date, and subject do your audience a favour for keeping track of your thoughts. In the text, make sure to name-check your organisation or the cause you represent and do not bury the lede. Ending with generous thank yous to the audience shows that you intend to remain amicable on future disputes as well.

For legislative testimony, getting in touch with the committee staffers helps a writer determine what sort of information they are expecting. Oral testimony is very different than submitting a written document; legislators can and will interrupt you as if they are cross-examining you. In that case, it is best practice to simply admit when you don't know anything for certain and promise to follow up with written reports. The last thing you ever want is to end up as the subject of an article on the front page of a newspaper.

Writing for Non-Traditional Formats

Email correspondence is always on record, so professionalism should never be ignored just because you think you are writing in private. Emails are often received out of context or accidentally cc'd to hundreds of people, so always err on the side of strict formality. Keep messages short and straightforward; many people have hundreds of emails to sift through per day and would rather not read a Victorian-era letter recounting the last six months of your life. If you simply must include a record of something that can't be explained in 5 sentences, attach it as a .pdf. Despite the mandate for brevity, it is a step above an SMS, so write in complete sentences and complete words.

Social media platforms like Twitter can amplify an organisation's messaging and brand reach; but as one wise poster once said, "everyday there is a new main character on twitter; the goal is never to be that person." As a platform for public conversation, public intellectuals can fire off "hot-takes" and interact with people outside their field on a seemingly more personable basis, but a poorly thought out tweet can backfire when the dogpiling begins.

The wisest twitter users limit the accounts they follow only to those the *must*, avoid using the "like" feature except with the utmost discretion, and always refer to other websites or resources rather than create long threads on the timeline. This last piece of advice is critical, because Twitter users (even verified accounts) do not have complete control over the content of a tweet. External redirection makes sure that you are the one controlling your messaging, not twitter. Social media platforms are only the audience, not the medium itself.

Spence, Delegation

Spence says that handing off responsibility for decision making is often worth the anxiety it creates. As tasks are delegated to departmental experts, it can be exciting and encouraging to see the way things improve, even if mistakes still happen and things still slip through the cracks. Purposefully, joyfully, and willingly delegating important jobs is essential for any leader.

INSSA Humanitarian Crises

International humanitarian relief has become an increasingly dangerous field to work in as INGOs try to serve the needs of people affected by famine, disease,

war, and natural disasters. Political and criminal attacks on aid workers multiplied fivefold from 2001 to 2011, such as kidnapping, extortion, and murder. Fatalities grew 200% during the same period and 80% of the violence was visited upon local, not international, staff. Aid workers continue to pursue their work even in the absence of adequate support and protection, and INSSA seeks to fill that critical want.