

13. Public Sector Management and Not-for-Profit
Interactive Session

Contracted volunteers and expectations – an exploratory study of volunteer job satisfaction in a not for profit organization.

Mr Graeme Payne

Flinders Business School
Flinders University, South Australia
payn0111@flinders.edu.au

Associate Professor Greg Fisher

Flinders Business School
Flinders University, South Australia
greg.fisher@flinders.edu.au

13. Public Sector Management and Not-for-Profit Interactive Session

Contracted volunteers and expectations – an exploratory study of volunteer job satisfaction in a not for profit organization.

ABSTRACT

Contrary to the literature, this paper challenges the view that a contractual relationship has a negative impact on volunteer job satisfaction. This paper explores job satisfaction of volunteers engaged on a formal written contract that specified a period of engagement and set monthly hours. A qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews of contracted volunteers in a refugee mentoring program of a single not for profit organization. Volunteers viewed the written contract as positively contributing to their job satisfaction. Their level of satisfaction was demonstrated by a commitment not only to complete the contract period, but also to continue with an informal post-contractual relationship. The findings and the derived organizational benefits provide the basis for new developments in volunteer deployment.

Key words: written contract, job satisfaction, not-for-profit organization, volunteers, template analysis

INTRODUCTION

This exploratory study investigates the under-researched practice of volunteer written contracts and challenges assumptions in literature that a contractual relationship will erode a volunteer's job satisfaction. Other than by limited assertions (Crossman and Ready, 2004, Hadzi-Miceva, 2007 Nichols, 2013), the literature does not investigate the practice of formal written contracts for volunteers. There is also a gap in the literature relating to the impact of written contracts on volunteer job satisfaction.

This article examines the job satisfaction of volunteers who are formally contracted by a not for profit organization for a fixed period of six months at six hours per month. Contrary to the assertions and observations in the literature, the written contract did not have a negative impact on the job satisfaction of these volunteers, who viewed the contract as positively contributing to their job

satisfaction. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with interview transcripts analysed using the template analysis method.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The written contract

Rousseau (1989 p. 1) observed that employment contracts, either written or verbal, are integral to the employment relationship and establish 'inducements and contributions that are basic to membership in an organization.' Rousseau also acknowledged that employment contracts are also 'made in exchange for some compensation and enforced or recognized in law'. Nichols (2013) observed that 'volunteers are a particularly interesting group to study... because they are not bound' to an organization 'by the usual ties of employment' [and that] 'even if a written contract were to exist, a high proportion of the volunteer's expectations of the relationship with the engaging organization [would] be derived from informal exchanges.' This would be in contrast 'to the greater formalities of the employee/employer relationship' (p. 987). Thus, the very existence of written contracts may have little effect on volunteers because they have greater expectations of the nature of the relationship with the organization. Cnaan and Cascio (1999) identified a number of differences between employees and volunteers including the lack of remuneration. Another difference was that 'volunteers have only a moral and emotional commitment to their organizations, whilst paid workers have an instrumental commitment' (p. 3) which refers 'to a form of involvement for specific, extrinsic rewards' (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986, p. 493)

Hadzi-Miceva (2007) asserted that the engagement of volunteers is of their own 'free choice', which means that it is the 'personal liberty of any individual to decide whether to volunteer.' It is also volunteers' decision about 'the extent to which [they are] willing to engage in voluntary activity without having been compelled or coerced by authorities or by law' (p. 48). In finding that volunteers demonstrated slightly higher levels of job satisfaction than that of employees, Crossman and Ready (2004) suggested that a possible explanation for this could be that a written contract raises the expectations of employees while volunteers do not have raised expectations, not having a written contract. Further research is clearly needed to explore this claim.

Volunteering organizations do not recommend contracting of volunteers as it may have the outcome of establishing legal relations (Volunteering ACT, 2014, Volunteer Now, 2015). The view is supported by Volunteering England (2015) in that ‘Any hint of obligation (for instance volunteers agreeing to volunteer for the next six months) runs the risk of the document being seen as contractual’. In addition, Volunteering England advised that ‘Care must be taken to set out what the organisation will provide and how it will treat the volunteer and what it expects from the volunteer in such a way as to avoid the creation of mutual obligations, which could be regarded in law as creating a contract’. Fair Work Ombudsman (2014) maintained a similar view. This is consistent with the views of Restall (2005) who noted that, in legal proceedings dealing with the determination of a volunteer’s status, consideration of the volunteer’s ‘duty to obey orders, and whether or not there is discretion on hours of work’ were factors (p. 7).

The foregoing literature, data provided by volunteering bodies and legal articles unanimously warn against contractual relationships between organizations and volunteers. There seems to be no detailed research on the impact of written contracts on the job satisfaction of volunteers. This is the gap in the literature to which this paper makes a contribution.

Job satisfaction

Locke (1976) described job satisfaction as ‘a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences’ (p. 1304). A complex body of literature about volunteer job satisfaction exists (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2009; Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998; Ferriera, Proenca, T., & Proenca, J. F., 2012; McDonald & Makin, 2000; O’Donohue & Nelson, 2009; Vecina, Chacon, Suerio, & Barron, 2012; Vecina, Chacón, Marzana, & Marta 2013). According to Farmer and Fedor (1999) and Liao-Troth (2001, 2005), volunteer expectations are likely to be shaped or motivated considerably by their individual values. They may, for example, join an organization because of shared mutual values with the organization. Ferreira, Proenca and Proenca (2012) categorized volunteer satisfaction as being extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic satisfaction is influenced by motivations related to development and learning and altruism, while extrinsic satisfaction is influenced by belonging and protection and career recognition. Ferreira, Proenca and Proenca

concluded that the volunteers in their hospital study have a much higher rate of intrinsic satisfaction than extrinsic satisfaction. It is expected that participant volunteers in our study will have a high degree of 'intrinsic', especially altruistic, satisfaction.

Addressed in this study is the question: *Does the existence of a written contract that specifies a fixed term period and hours of engagement influence the nature of job satisfaction of volunteers?*

METHODOLOGY

Research context

The participating organization facilitates an outreach refugee-mentoring program. This program is designed to assist refugees in their integration into the community. Prior to their commencement volunteers signed a written agreement, the content of which includes protocols covering volunteering role and expectations, obligations, safety and client relationships. The agreement also contains a specific provision that contracted them for a fixed term period of 6 months at 6 hours per month. At the end of this period the formal relationship with the organization ceases. At the instigation of both the volunteer mentor and the refugee mentee, the relationship may continue beyond the contractual period and outside the formal relationship with the organization. Other than specification of wages and conditions of employment, the contractual nature of this volunteer agreement has similarities to that of an employment contract and the traditional employment relationship. However, the specification of a fixed term and hours in this agreement goes beyond the views and recommendations of volunteering organizations

Data collection

An invitation for interview was sent 106 volunteers who were engaged by the organization during 2013/14. Of these 21 agreed to participate in the interviews. Table 1 outlines the age and gender profiles of these interviewees.

Inset Table 1 about here

The primary data collection involved both unstructured and semi-structured interviews. In the first instance, unstructured interviews were conducted with the paid manager/coordinator of the mentoring program in order to obtain contextual data about the mentoring program. Based on information from these interviews and the literature, questions were developed for the purpose of face-to-face semi-constructed interviews with three of the 21 volunteers. Interviews were then conducted with the remaining 18 volunteers. Each interview lasted generally between 20 to 30 minutes, was voice recorded and then transcribed. The transcript of each interview was sent to each volunteer for verification with some proposing minimal changes which were mainly clarifications and did not affect the original meaning.

Data analysis

Template analysis was adopted as the analytical method for the analysis of interview scripts. According to (King 1998), template analysis lies between content analysis and grounded theory. For example, in content analysis, all codes are predetermined, and in grounded theory, there is no a priori definition of codes. Template analysis allows more flexibility in producing an interpretation of the text. According to Cassell (2008) the 'key advantage of template analysis process is that through its application, researchers have a relatively clear path to follow in creating a structure for the analysis of their data'.

Consistent with the template analysis process (Crabtree & Miller 1999, King, 1998, 2012; Waring & Wainwright, 2008) we identified research themes from the interview scripts through close readings of texts. The themes were then organized into a coding template, hierarchically, with those related to each other clustered together to produce higher-order codes. Higher-level themes represented broad themes and lower-level themes identified more focused themes. Table 2 was the template used to analyse the interview transcript data.

Inset Table 2 about here

DISCUSSION

The contract

Contracted volunteers (CV) unanimously expressed views regarding the effect of the written contract

on their job satisfaction that were different from the assertions made in the literature. They were enthusiastic about the contractual arrangement as it created a flexible environment. They also appreciated the finite nature of the length of the written contract.

If it wasn't working well there is a 'let-out' as it may not work out for a thousand reasons ... It made it professional: it gave me an opt-out but it also put some responsibility back on me [and] I think it's important. It gives you some safeguards about what the relationship is going to be. The contract protects you from overstepping the boundaries ... if it doesn't work out or you feel you've done your bit and you feel you are no longer any good to them or you haven't formed a friendship. (CV18)

I knew that it was six months and you could then renew or break but six months wasn't going to be a problem either way, and, as I said, 6 hours per month wasn't a huge commitment so I didn't go into it with any sort of foreboding. I felt that [the contract] was OK. I thought that was fair. Actually six hours a month isn't a lot. Really, I do probably just a couple of hours. I go there each week on a Wednesday and do a couple of hours. Yesterday I was there for three hours, so I would easily exceed the amount required. (CV3)

This [the contract] provided a structure where I didn't have to commit to a regular Tuesday or something. The flexibility was really what appealed to me. When I could just go 'OK we can meet this Sunday'. 'I can't meet next Sunday so, OK, we'll meet on Tuesday. (CV15)

Most of the volunteers did not see the written contract as constraining at all. Nor did the written contract affect their job satisfaction. For example:

It did not feel like a contract or obligation... I achieved a good friendship [with the mentee] as a result' (CV4).

I was hoping to be in it for longer than six months so it didn't affect me ... it didn't bother me. (CV16; echoed by CV18)

Intrinsic satisfaction

Consistent with the literature, the volunteer participants indicated their job satisfaction as based overwhelming on the fulfilment of their altruistic ideals.

The intrinsic satisfaction of these volunteers also came from the joy they had at the visible impact of their contribution to their mentee's well-being (CV8, CV10, CV 12, CV15, CV18) and also

I am very happy that I have formed a good friendship with my mentee and I think I have now a good relationship with the rest of her family... I think I am able to contribute something to their lives as well, so it is a bit of a two-way street CV

It was clear the written contract itself did not affect their altruistic satisfaction and its development into a personal and emotional satisfaction as the relationship with their mentee turned to friendship.

It was quite a rewarding experience ... I achieved a good friendship as a result... and we still hang out together now. (CV4)

It didn't feel like volunteer work for very long ... very quickly you are just hanging out with a mate.... It is unique. (CV4)

Finally, evidence of the participant volunteers' job satisfaction was demonstrated by the fact that they all intended (or had) completed their contracts. They also indicated an eagerness to continue their relationship with the mentee beyond the formal contract period. For example, one volunteer said that he/she wanted to continue the relationship with the mentee 'for the rest of their lives' (CV9).

The overwhelming evidence showed that the written contract did not in any way negatively affect these volunteers' job satisfaction. On the contrary, many of the volunteers found the written contract a positive feature of their volunteering experience. The attractive features of the contract were its finite nature in terms of length of engagement, its flexibility in terms of when, where and how the hours are spent, and finally, the safeguarding parameters that it put around the relationship between the mentor and mentee.

CONCLUSION

There have been suggestions in the academic and professional literature that written contracts outlining roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships of volunteers in a manner similar to that in employment written contracts would have a negative effect on the volunteer satisfaction. Our findings showed that a written contract in no way negatively impacted on the participant volunteers' job satisfaction. Volunteers felt a high level of job satisfaction for a range of intrinsic reasons. Fulfilment of their altruistic ideals, and the personal emotional satisfaction gained through the development of friendships with their mentees were the major rewards of their volunteering experience. In addition, volunteers were happy to observe the positive impact of their contribution on their mentee's development. In terms of what the volunteers 'got out of it', they felt well satisfied.

Extrinsic satisfaction was not dealt with in this paper for a number reasons. The totality of the evidence indicated that intrinsic satisfaction was far more important to the volunteers. Furthermore, none of the volunteers linked extrinsic satisfaction to the contract, so a discussion of their extrinsic satisfaction, minimal as it was, would not have contributed to the case for or against the impact of the contract.

Most importantly for our argument, the volunteers found the formal written contract an enhancement of their volunteering experience. They found that the contract was freeing in terms of how the monthly hours were spent. The specification of a six-month period was appreciated as adding an official finiteness to their engagement, which suited their busy lives. Finally, the contract established a structured environment that defined and placed safeguarding boundaries around the relationship between the volunteers and their mentees as well as allowing the volunteers to make the decision whether to continue with a 'post contract' informal relationship with the mentee. In fact they all indicated that they wanted to continue the relationship informally, as personal friendships, beyond the contract period.

This study is limited by the relatively small number of volunteer participants engaged in a work unit within a single not for profit organization. Comparison with a control group without a written contract may have provided more in-depth results, but was impossible in the time frame available for this research project. The contracting of volunteers and their job satisfaction could be further studied,

including trialling, utilising a larger sample and across multiple organizations.

The outcomes of this exploratory research are important on several theoretical and practical grounds. There is little or no academic research into the role played by written contracts in the job satisfaction of volunteers. Our exploratory study in part fill this gap. From a practical standpoint, our findings open the possibility of examining extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction of volunteers beyond the existing literature that focuses on the psychological contract. From a practical standpoint it is clear that not for profit organizations could, in certain circumstances, safely take advantage of the concept of contracted volunteers. Based on the evidence, there is potential for beneficial outcomes for organizations. For example, in the case of time limited not for profit projects, which external funding increasingly supports, contracting volunteers for the duration of the program could ensure the program's stability as well as positively defining the contributions of volunteers. This study provides the basis for further consideration of the practice of formal written contract for volunteers.

References

- Boezeman, E. J., & Ellemers, N. (2009). Intrinsic need satisfaction and the job attitudes of volunteers versus employees working in a charitable volunteer organization. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82(4), 897–914. doi:10.1348/096317908X383742
- Cassell, C. (2008). Template analysis. The SAGE *dictionary of qualitative management research*. Retrieved from <http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-dictionary-of-qualitative-management-research/n105.xml> (accessed 10 September 2015).
- Cnaan, R. A., & Cascio, T. (1999). Performance and commitment: Issues in management of volunteers in human service organizations. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/1
- Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L. (1999) Using codes and code manuals: a template organizing style of interpretation. In Crabtree, B. F. & Miller, W. L. (Eds.) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd Edition), Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications
- Crossman, A., & Ready, E. (2004). *The psychological contracts of employees and voluntary workers: a comparative study*, 18th ANZAAM Conference. Retrieved from <file:///Users/user/Desktop/Literature%20Volunteers/%20Crossman%20V.html>
- Ellingson, J., Gruys, M., & Sackett, P. (1998). Factors related to the satisfaction and performance of temporary workers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(6), 913–921. doi:apa.org/journals/apl/83/6/913.pdf
- Fairwork Ombudsman. (2014). *Unpaid work fact sheet*. <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/policies-and-guides/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/unpaid-work>
- Farmer, S. M., & Fedor, D. B. (1999). Volunteer participation and withdrawal: A psychological contract perspective on the role of expectations and organizational support. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 9(4), 349–367. doi:10.1002/nml.9402
- Ferreira, M. R., Proenca, T., & Proenca, J. F. (2012). *Motivations which influence volunteer's satisfaction*. Paper presented at the 10th International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, Siena, Italy. <https://www.istr.org/resource/resmgr/wp2012/mferreira.pdf>
- Hadzi-Miceva, K. (2007). A comparative analysis of the European legal systems and practices regarding volunteering, *The International Journal of Not-for-profit Law*, 9(3), 37–58. http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol9iss3/ijnl_vol9iss3.pdf
- King, N. (1998) Template Analysis. In Symon, G. & Cassell, C. (Eds). *Qualitative methods and analysis in organizational research. a practical guide*. London: Sage.
- King, N. (2012). Doing template analysis. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges*, London, Sage.
- Liao-Troth, M. A. (2001). Attitude differences between paid workers and volunteers. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 11(4), 423–442. doi: 10.1002/nml.11403
- Locke, E. A. (1976). The nature and causes of job satisfaction. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp.1297–1349). Chicago, Rand McNally.
- McDonald, D. J., & Makin, P. J. (2000). The psychological contract, organisational commitment and job satisfaction of temporary staff. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 21(2), 84–91. <https://www.istr.org/resource/resmgr/wp2012/mferreira.pdf>
- Nichols, G. (2013). The psychological contract of volunteers: a new research agenda. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 24(4), 986–1005. doi: 10.1007/s11266-012-9294-9
- O'Donohue, W., & Nelson, L. (2009). The psychological contracts of Australian hospital volunteer workers. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 14(9), 1–11. doi: 10.1177/0899764013485158
- Restall, M. (2005). *Volunteers and the Law*. London, Volunteering England.

- O'Reilly III, C. & Chatman, J. Organizational commitment and psychological attachment: the effects of compliance, identification, and internalization on prosocial behaviour. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 492–499.
- Rousseau, D. M. (1989). Psychological and implied contracts in organizations. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 2(2), 121–139. doi: 10.1007/BF01384942
- Vecina, M. L., Chacón, F., Marzana, D., and Marta, E. (2013). Volunteer engagement and organizational commitment in non profit organizations: what makes volunteers remain within organizations and feel happy? *Journal of Community Psychology* 41, 291–302. doi:10.1002/jcop.21530
- Vecina, M. L., Chacon, F., Suerio, M., & Barron, A. (2012). Volunteer engagement: Does engagement predict the degree of satisfaction among new volunteers and the commitment of those who have been active longer? *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 61(1), 130–148. doi: 10.1111/j.1464-0597.2011.00460.x
- Volunteering ACT. (2014). *Designing Volunteer roles a practical guide*. www.volunteeringact.org.au/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=179014
- Volunteer Now. (2015). *Volunteers and the law information sheet*. <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/volunteering-and-the-law-information-sheet-nl.pdf>
- Volunteering England. (2015). *Volunteer agreements*. <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/component/gpb/volunteeragreements&qh=YToxMTp7aTowO3M6OToidm9sdW50ZWVyljtpOjE7czoxMjoidm9sdW50ZWVyaW5nIjtpOjI7czoxMDoidm9sdW50ZWVycyl7aTozO3M6MTE6InZvbHVudGVlcmVkljtpOjQ7czo4OiJ2b2x1bnRlciI7aTo1O3M6OToidm9>
- Waring, T., & Wainwright, D. (2008). Issues and challenges in the use of template analysis: Two comparative case studies from the field. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 6(1), 84–94.

Table 1**Age and gender profiles of participant volunteers**

Age	Gender
20-29	4 males
30-39	3 females
40-49	5 females 1 male
50-59	4 females
60-69	2 females 2 males
70-90	
Total	21
Total /gender	7 males 14 females

Table 2**Template of themes from supervisor/manager and volunteer interview transcripts**

Issue	Themes	Sub-themes
Job Satisfaction	Intrinsic satisfaction: altruism	Emotional satisfaction
Written contracts	Freedom or constraint	Job satisfaction Intent to remain.
Post written contract	Commitment	Post written contract relationship with client