

VOLUNTEERS IN SCOUTING FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING VOLUNTEERS*

At the World Scout Conference in Greece in July 2002, it is anticipated that the delegates will adopt a strategy for Scouting. The proposal for the strategy is set out on the website at <http://www.scout.org/strathome>. The strategy sets out a vision for Scouting and identifies a number of strategic priorities, one of which is '*Volunteers in Scouting: developing new approaches to broaden the base of adult support*'. The aim of this strategic priority is to:-

Redefine the concept of volunteering as applied to Scouting and review the policies and practices to help National Scout Organizations recruit and retain a new group of adults in Scouting.

The aims of this WONDERforum are to:-

- Discuss the concept of volunteering with a view to exploring how the concept can be extended for the benefit of Scouting.
- Share experiences of the implementation of the World Adult Resources Policy, to determine if this policy is suitable for an extended concept of volunteering.

An understanding of voluntary institutions requires an understanding of the general field of voluntary action and of the most common definitions of terms such as volunteer and voluntarism. Popular literature depicts volunteering as neighbourly, selfless commitment to the greater good (Bellah et. al, 1985). Hence in discussing the above concepts, I will explain or define several relevant terms associated with the word 'volunteerism'.

DEFINITION

1. ***A volunteer is someone who gives time, talents and professional expertise on a voluntary basis and without any remuneration (NCSS, 1977b).***
2. ***Volunteerism is associated with volunteers, volunteer programmes and volunteer management (Association for Volunteer Administration, 1996). It refers to the volunteering itself (Tang, 1997).***
3. ***Voluntarism is about anything voluntary in society, including religion; voluntarism basically refers to voluntary agencies (with voluntary boards) that may or may not involve volunteers (Association for Volunteer Administration, 1996). Voluntarism is philosophy and a movement (Tang, 1997).***
4. A possible definition generated during discussions on the strategic priority 'Volunteers in Scouting' is – ***volunteering is about the volunteer offering a needed service by personal commitment without equivalent financial compensation.***

Thomas and Finch (1990) opined that in general, volunteering could be described in one of two ways. The table below summaries the descriptive features of volunteering as identified by Thomas and Finch, 1990.

FEATURES OF VOLUNTEERING

Here are a range of features of volunteering:

Giving time

Unpaid

- Although expenses may be paid

Helping people

- Although helping one person is usually considered to be friendliness, neighbourliness or 'being a nice person'
- Helping family or relatives is usually thought of as caring

Involves commitment

- Of yourself
- Of your time
- On a regular basis, on-going
- Being available
- Being responsible and being relied upon

Doing something you want to do

- Not compulsory; having choice
- Because you want to help or to 'increase someone's happiness'
- Because you want to pay back ('a debt to society')
- To achieve personal gain

Being part of a group or organization

Using your skills and abilities

- Perhaps sharing them with others

Encompasses a wide range of fields

- Though perhaps not political or campaigning fields

And a wide range of activities

- Though not necessarily fund raising or committee membership

Descriptive features of volunteering (Thomas & Finch, 1990)

The above definition has but one thing in common and that is '*helping people*'. The research that I completed recently reaffirms and validates past studies; that active participants in voluntary organisations are mostly inspired and motivated by purposive benefit (Clark and Wilson, 1961; Friedman et. al., 1988; Wandersman et. al., 1987; Effendy, 1999). In any society, there are bound to be people who are willing to

come forward to serve a given cause. In Scouting, this cause is to develop young people physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually and spiritually so that they can become useful and better persons to serve mankind.

Volunteers choose to serve but there will never be enough of them. We need an effective volunteer management system to attract, manage, motivate and retain them; otherwise they will just become disillusioned or ineffective and leave at a loss to the organisation and community.

WHY DO VOLUNTEERS QUIT / LEAVE OUR ORGANISATION?

My experiences and research indicate the reasons for their frustration and disappointment are as follows:

Lack of purpose

- Volunteers are not sure of the core purpose of the Movement and whether their contributions are needed and their involvement, valued.

Lack of support / guidance / resources

- Volunteers are left on their own, once appointed, to manage the responsibilities without the essential training and support and the resources required to do the job well.

Too many jobs

- Volunteers are assigned too many tasks. They experienced 'Burn Out' syndrome. This happens to volunteers who demonstrate the sincerity and willingness to undertake more work / responsibilities.

Incompetence

- Assignment. They feel inadequate, inefficient and ineffective to handle or cope with the given tasks.

Lack of focus

- Find the job/task boring, unchallenging and unfulfilling. There is no sense of achievement as they are unable to evaluate their accomplishments.

Lack of information / communication

- Volunteers are not kept updated on changes, new developments and therefore lose touch with reality.

Organisational politics

- 'keepers' who are keen to keep volunteers dependent upon them for selfish reasons.

Poor personality job fit

- Volunteers are assigned tasks that are in conflict with their personality or traits or values.

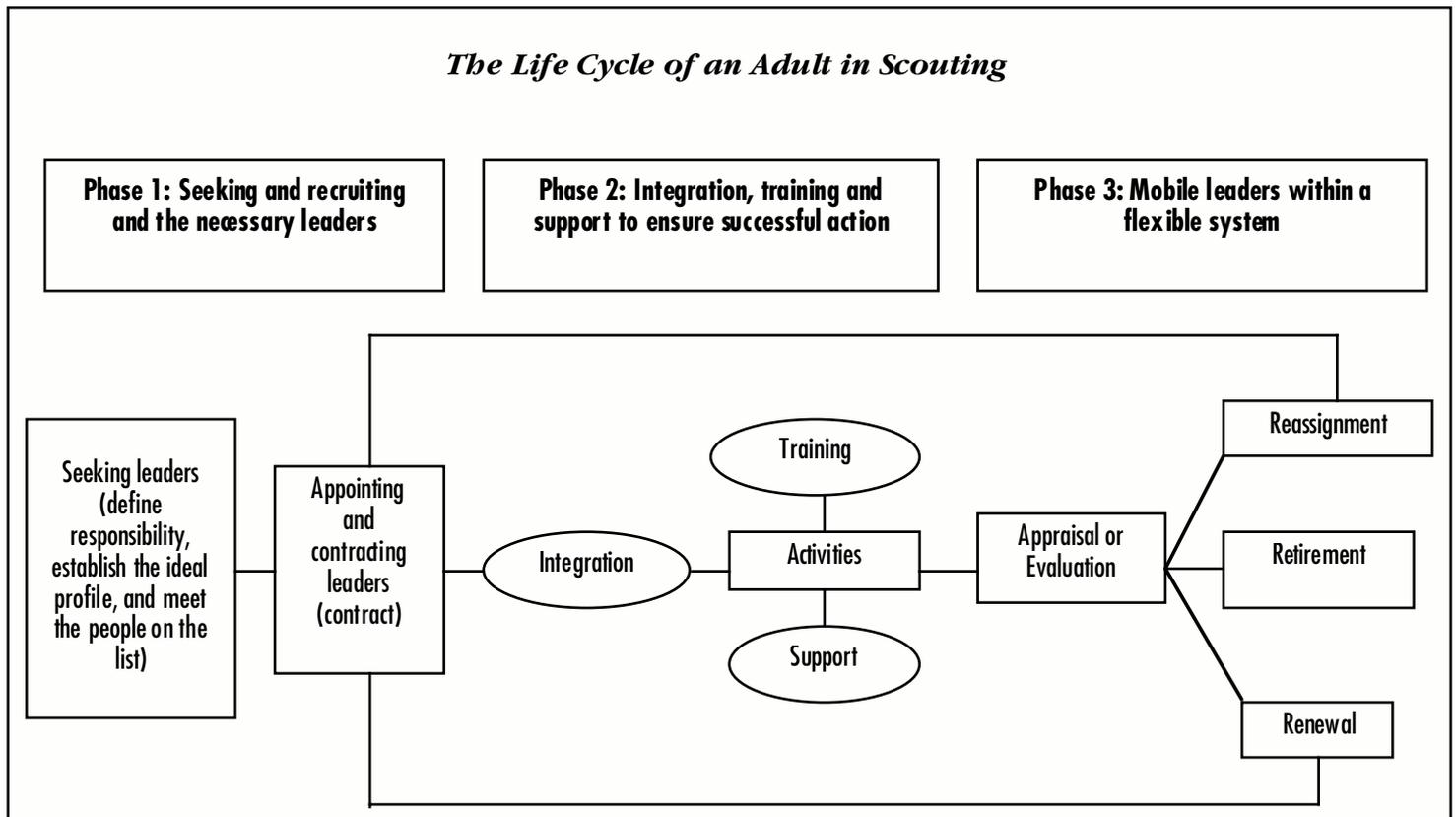
A WELL DESIGNED JOB

From a human resource management perspective, the job must be adequately designed so that it is not only challenging, but also enriching. Mutual goals / objectives must be clearly established to facilitate tracking, monitoring, feedback and evaluation. The job scope should allow the flexibility for job enlargement to include a variety of tasks that are of significant values and identity (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). In short, all jobs, tasks or assignments, that is, the job content must be meaningful and purposeful, offering the jobholder a sense of fulfilment as well as the opportunity for

personal growth and development in an empowered, supportive environment. Research has shown that the job content can have a strong effect and influence on the motivational level of employees, much higher than the tangible rewards such as monetary reward and status (Herzberg, F., 1966).

In voluntary organisations like ours, retaining and motivating volunteers, perhaps can only be or are primarily achieved through such intangible rewards, since the very core of volunteerism implies giving up one's time and talent to do a work which is 'unpaid'. It is therefore imperative for us to recognise the importance of the 'job content' dimensions.

ADULTS IN SCOUTING (AIS)



Introduced in 1990, the AIS approach is a systematic programme for managing, improving the effectiveness, commitment and motivation of volunteer leaders (World Scout Organisation, 1990). Phase I of AIS, recruiting leaders, reminds us that we need to have clarity of purposes. For example, the use of job description as a tool allows us to determine the nature of the job or task and the kind of person required, in terms of experience, expertise and qualifications, in order to do the job well. This will ensure to some degree a 'personality job fit'. In addition, the volunteer is given the opportunity to set goals / objectives together with the person he/she is responsible to and determine the time frame and criteria used for performance appraisal / review. This engagement process as some call it, (whether in writing or not depending on the culture of the country) helps to clear ambiguities and minimise role conflicts. The mutual agreement of goals / objectives acts as a form of motivation, something to look forward to which can be used for evaluation and appraisal. At the end of the agreed term, volunteers can feel a sense of fulfilment at having achieved the desired result accomplishing the goals mutually drawn up earlier.

Phase II of AIS emphasises the need for continuous training and support. Volunteers are given the opportunities to be developed; to identify the resources required and examine ways of acquiring them. This process permits the affirmation of values, reinforced by the enriching interaction and interpersonal relationship with beneficiaries, professional staff and fellow volunteers.

The final phase, decision for the future, specifically transfers the process of decision making to the volunteers. They decide their future course of action through the process of reassignment, renewal or retirement. The good part is that volunteer, in joint consultation with their advisors / mentors (I use it in place of supervisor or superior to reflect the equality of power) are given the leeway to determine their future relationships with the organisations.

NEW CONCEPT OF VOLUNTEERING

The traditional view of volunteering implies the concept of “giving” where the emphasis is on the volunteers contributing resources in terms of time, energy, expertise and at even money to benefits others. It requires a high level of commitment and dedication on the part of the volunteers to make it happen. It implies a one way transaction where the givers give without expecting something in return.

Given the complexities of life where time is a valuable asset and expertise closely guarded, can we still get people to volunteer their resources in the traditional way as in the past?

The new concept of volunteering is about the **management of expectations**. The volunteers have a set of expectations based on their values and beliefs systems about what they can benefit from their involvement. The organisation has an obligation to inform the volunteers in clear, specific terms what are expected of them, failing which there will be a mismatch of expectations resulting inevitably in subsequent frustrations.

The first phase of the AIS needs to be handled properly. A recruitment strategy should be designed to go beyond the job descriptions. We should ask why would a volunteer want to commitment their time, expertise, etc. What can Scouting offer to the volunteers in return for their contributions in terms of their personal growth and development and in making a difference in the lives of young people? And where financial resources permit, basic administrative and operational expenses incurred in the process of executing the responsibilities should be reimbursed. These expectations from both sides should be clearly explained during this phase.

Phase 2 should allows the volunteer the opportunity to challenge assumptions and the status quo to make systemic and even cultural changes, if necessary, for the betterment of the Scout Movement. Training could be provided in the field of creativity and critical thinking so that they could discover new meanings rather than merely accepting mental models as defined by others. For this to happen, we need to be open to new ideas and concepts and be supportive of attempts to change the system if this is the way forward for progress. Once volunteers feel that they can really add value to the organisational functioning and make at least some changes, only then will we able to retain them.

However, for this concept to materialise, volunteers and professionals must work in partnership with one another. The relationship must be one of supporting each other and not that of subordination. The professional will continue to provide all the relevant resources required to support the volunteer while the volunteers engage their work in constant consultation with the professional and vice versa. Both parties are empowered to make decisions based on the established expectations identified

during phase 1. Review of expectations should be done continuously at the agreed pre-determined period and not at the end in phase 3.

Phase 3 should then be constructively used to discuss the future responsibilities rather than focusing on the past and what was accomplished. Volunteers can then feel motivated when they can see a purpose for their contributions in the future whether in the present form or otherwise.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The elements of volunteerism are alive throughout the 3 phases of AIS. They can now volunteer their services with a clearer purpose and take learning as their own responsibility for continuous development. They engage in consensual decision making, reflecting in essence, participatory democracy. In all senses and purposes the spirit of voluntarism forms the core of AIS. Volunteers are not 'added spices' to the organisational mix. Instead, they are one of the ingredients (Ellis, 1986, p. 4).

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