

# VOLUNTEERING & GOVERNANCE

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS IN ACTION

**Governing a not-for-profit organisation is never an easy feat and promoting corporate governance among volunteer leaders can be a tricky undertaking if not managed carefully and in context. As diverse as is the world of associations, so are the number of governance models applied in practice. Some strict, codified and made to last for all eternity, others flexible and loose, reflecting the association's needs at a given moment. 'WHICHEVER MODEL WORKS, DON'T CHANGE A WINNING TEAM' is the credo by which to address your governance needs.**



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But what if change is required? How to engage and motivate those volunteers that are in it for the glory only? What if our organisation requires serious input from its members to enable a 'for the members by the members' approach?

This article will address some of the challenges faced by volunteer organisations that struggle to keep their members motivated and engaged. We will look at some basic governance models and the reputation of volunteering. Motivation via the application of psychological contracts as modes of engagement are equally important to look into as are generational aspects in volunteering as no member is ever the

same. Some of it requires management skills that go beyond the ordinary while other aspects lie seemingly on the hand.

As we go about our daily lives we face it every day: the challenge to run a not-for-profit organisation and add value to membership. While an association board consisting of volunteer leaders may put pressure on the association's (paid) manager to perform, they themselves may feel the pressure from committees and members to advance the agenda of the organisation. How to take adequate responsibility in an environment that relies heavily on the input from members who themselves have a busy professional schedule to manage and for whom the engagement in our association is but something they do in their spare time?

For many not-for-profit organisations the solution lay in taking a peek into the corporate world for answers regarding governance practices. After all, most associations will probably have some sort of a board and an executive function. However, where in the corporate world the board of directors is frequently the stable, long-term governing body with the CEO on frequent rotation, not-for-profits usually see the opposite: a board that is changing in some form or

shape more frequently than the executive function. Institutional memory is thus often located within the secretariat and the people that work for the association on a day-to-day basis, requiring a special kind of trust relationship between an organisation's real leadership and the de facto managers.

We can therefore argue that the adoption of governance practices and thus the motivation and engagement of volunteers depends primarily on the presence of a strong supportive institutional context to reflect the values of the organisation. The challenge herein lies, however, in most cases with the alignment of the psychological contract of both sides, the volunteers and those that stand in a paid contractual relationship with the organisation. Whereas the former might be in it for the glory, the latter might be in it for the money only, two highly contradictory and at times explosive opposites. Based on this argument, many associations have sought to adopt different ways to govern themselves and only loosely rely on input from the corporate world in some aspects of their daily management challenges.

By far the most compelling factor of engagement appears to be the increased reputational aspect of volunteering. 'Doing good' is an approach that many

feel satisfies not only their own need of self-promotion but it adds beneficially to the development of their chosen cause. Engaging oneself in volunteer activities has proven to increase an individual's reputational capital within their professional circles, while often providing them with increased exposure to new thinking and up-to-date information, increasing also their own professional value.

With a lack of corporate metrics, such as ROI and other success measures, how do not-for-profits generate then the necessary motivation required to engage volunteers in governance positions? Is the application of a Social ROI our only tool to benchmark our activities or do we have other, 'soft' KPIs in our arsenal to strengthen an individual's psychological contract with the organisation?

To find answers, we must turn to organisational commitment as a tool to engage those volunteers that advance our raison d'être and act as 'ambassadors' for our cause and organisation. In fact, ambassador programmes have proven quite successful in combination with mentoring the next generation of leaders to set good examples and inspire for the future. In a hypothesis that pride in the organisation and respect from the organisation predicts organisational commitment Clary and Snyder (1999) set out to build a model whereby

the perceived importance of volunteer work acts as an antecedent of pride and perceived support from the organisation is an antecedent of respect. I.e. the better the support and motivation from the organisation, the more support and buy-in from its volunteer members.

Based on **Structural Equation Modelling** (SEM) they developed a **volunteer functions inventory** (VFI) to measure the commitment of volunteers as well as the perceived support from the organisation itself. Breaking down the psychological contract and volunteer engagement into six different stages showed the following motivational aspects:

- 1 **PROTECTIVE MOTIVES** – a way of protecting the ego from the difficulties of life
- 2 **VALUES** – a way to express ones altruistic and humanitarian values
- 3 **CAREER** – a way to improve career prospects
- 4 **SOCIAL** – a way to build and strengthen ties
- 5 **UNDERSTANDING** – a way to gain knowledge, skills and abilities
- 6 **ENHANCEMENT** – a way to help the ego grow and develop

Looking at it from this angle therefore, motivating volunteers and aligning efforts of governance, suggests that we should remain open to the possibility that the psychological contract of volunteers in leadership functions is affected by expectation arising from socio-cultural influences beyond the volunteer/manager relationship and from the expectations of relative freedom and subjective perceptions of volunteering as serious leisure, unpaid work, or activism (Nichols, 2012). In other words, within not-for-profit organisations we need to understand volunteer engagement in relation to governance more as a social relationship with expectations to be managed by both, managers and volunteers, than mere KPIs based on organisational success.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author **CHRISTOPH RAUDONAT**, Business Development & Association Director, International Conference Services, on behalf of IAPCO Vice President, **Mathias Posch**, International Conference Services Events. IAPCO represents today 115 professional organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 41 countries.

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