

# VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT IN ROMANIA - AN EMERGING PRACTICE

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## ***Abstract***

*Volunteering is a social practice still rare in Romania, despite the fact that it is an important component of non-governmental organizations; there are types of public organizations based on the contribution of volunteers and voluntary corporate initiatives.*

*Regarding how the volunteers are included in non-governmental organizations, it is noteworthy that there are differences between how the activities are perceived by the volunteers and their supervisor; hence the importance of a volunteer management as a distinct form of human resources management in non-profit organizations.*

**Keywords:** volunteering, organizational culture, volunteer management.

**JEL Classification:** M<sub>12</sub>.

## **1. Characteristics of volunteering in Romania**

After December 1989, volunteerism started to develop in Romania as a distinct possibility of involvement in community life. Since 2001, volunteering has had its own law (revised in 2002 and 2006). Under the current version of the law, “volunteering is an activity of public interest carried on by any individual at his/her own initiative, for the benefit of others, without receiving a material consideration; the work of public interest is the work in areas such as health and social services, protection of human rights, health care professionals, culture, arts, education, science, philanthropy, sports, environment, religion, community, humanitarian and social areas, and so on”.

Beneficiaries of volunteering activities are especially the non-profit legal persons of private law (NGOs), which are dependent on volunteers to accomplish their objectives, because they generally have (albeit chronic) limited financial resources.

In recent Romania there is an increase in the number of registered volunteers in the public non-profit organizations, especially due to a set of laws on the use of volunteers in certain areas: child protection, emergency services voluntary, civil protection, home care services for elderly, environmental protection, prevention of mountain accidents and organizing the rescue in the mountains. There is also a significant number of projects and employee volunteer programmes of domestic companies (supported by them), and this way of action (known as 'corporate volunteering') seems to be "the middle way" (Andronic , R-L., 2008, p. 143) between social responsibility at a company's level and the one assumed at an individual level (through volunteering). It is a kind of initiative by which the company encourages its employees to become involved as volunteers in supporting the community, an NGO or a cause, starting from the tendency that within social dialogue "human capital has a duty to find the most appropriate means to integrate the informal organization's orientation and objectives within the formal organization's objectives" (Petrescu, I., 2008, 399).

Despite positive trends, volunteering is not enshrined as a social practice in Romania (compared with other Member States of the European Union or the United States of America), both quantitatively (as a share of volunteers in the active population; there are studies showing that in Romania this occupies the last position in this regard) and qualitative (assessment of how volunteering contribute to the community's development). The reasons put forward in literature devoted to volunteering are many: some restriction in the use of volunteers in NGOs because of legal provisions on the compulsory settlement of the medical insurance costs, volunteers' unwillingness of signing written contracts with the organization-recipient or the scepticism of most public non-profit organizations' managers related to involving volunteers in current activities (except the areas listed above, where their work is perceived as a necessity).

## **2. (Under-) use of volunteers and organizational culture**

In addition to cases of volunteers' under-use in (public or private) non-profit organizations listed above (which is more one of general context of the event volunteers in Romania) may add an explanation for organizational culture. It is frequently found that a basic requirement of developing a voluntary programme is not met, one that should ensure compatibility between an organization's culture and a voluntary programme for it to be successful (Silver, 1989). In this context, the volunteers' coordinator plays a very important

role in matching the volunteers' programmes with the organizational culture, as well as in the selection of suitable volunteers. This is contrary to current practice in Romania, where the training of volunteers is made for what an organization should be and how it should work and not for what it is and how it really works.

Such "streamlined" procedures of instruction create problems of adaptation / integration and affect the success of the voluntary program, limiting the benefits of institutions/ organizations and the satisfaction of volunteers involved in the program as we find from the results of a recent study (Rigman, C., 2008) conducted while preparing a national campaign to promote volunteering (the study included 427 volunteers from 12 NGOs). Significantly, the activities carried out by volunteers in NGOs are viewed differently by the organizations and volunteers involved in these (Table 1):

*Table 1*

*Types of activities carried out by volunteers - a question with multiple answers, N = 427*  
*(after Rigman, C., 2008, p. 5)*

Type of activity	Percentage of volunteers who support that type of activity conducted	Percentage of organizations that claim that volunteers carry out the type of business
Working with beneficiaries	29,74%	48,4%
Organization of events	15,97%	83,9%
Management / coordination activities	12,04%	0%
Communication / PR	11,80%	0%
Public campaigns	7,62%	0%
Office and administrative activities	6,15%	45,2%
Editing documents	5,16%	51,6%
Fundraising	3,20%	48,4%
Research and / or social surveys	3,20%	0%
Ecology and Tourism	0,74%	0%
Maintenance assets	0,50%	0%
Coordinating other volunteers	0,50%	0%
Other	0,25%	6,4%

Significant differences of appreciation between organizations and volunteers are also seen in terms of time spent on voluntary activities during a week (Table 2):

*Table 2*

*Number of hours per week allocated to voluntary activities, N = 427  
(after Rigman, C., 2008, p. 6)*

Hours per week allocated a percentage of voluntary activities	Volunteer's reported percent	Organization's reported percent
Less than 5 hours	31,1	30,6
Between 5 and 10 hours	24,4	35,5
Between 11 and 20	25,2	27,4
Over 20 hours	17,8	3,2

For Cristina Rigman (2008, p. 5) these results indicate “a surprising, big difference between volunteers’ demand and supply”, hence the need for measures to improve volunteer management.

The solution required is to encourage a real understanding of the culture of the institution / organization to activate volunteers, which may avoid many problems and failures which may adversely affect the volunteers and the receiving institution / organization.

### **3. Volunteer management - an iterative approach**

Despite appearances, volunteers are difficult to attract and to manage within the local NGO sector. Since this is a special category of human resources (by definition, unpaid), their management is subject to a specific type of human resource management: volunteers management. In defining Pro-Vobis, the National Centre for Voluntary (organization that manages the work of voluntary national network of centres in Romania), volunteer management requires the completion of nine basic steps\*:

1) preparing the organization for volunteer involvement, is the preparatory stage (planning), involving changes to the non-governmental organization’s documents, attitudes. It involves: the declaration of the value of volunteering as an organization, the analysis needs of the organization in terms of volunteer involvement, developing a set of policies / procedures, appointment / hiring a volunteer coordinator, drafting of necessary documents, allocate a

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\* Description of the volunteer management process we have taken from the website of the National Volunteer Center Pro-Vobis, at: [http://www.voluntariat.ro/manageri\\_de\\_voluntari.htm#2](http://www.voluntariat.ro/manageri_de_voluntari.htm#2) (site accessed on 10.03.2010)

budget for volunteer involvement. The involved financial issues should not be neglected (freeing resources associated with the settlement of all amounts of voluntary (transportation, supplies, etc.) paying the insurance premiums, etc.);

2) recruiting volunteers is the process by which the organization calls and gets people to get involved in volunteering for the performance of the proposed activities and the fulfilment of its mission. Typically, volunteers are recruited from us less often in the active population, since this is usually less students and pensioners (despite the fact that they have time and knowledge of many non-profit);

3) volunteer selection refers to the process of finding suitable volunteer activities of the organization and find or create appropriate activities for volunteers to come into the organization and do not match any existing positions. Selection of volunteer activity is closely related to recruitment activities and establishing clear roles of volunteers in the organization must take into account the essential criteria for successful activities. Selection of volunteers is usually conducted through a job interview and containing a modified way (e.g., formulation of a refusal or deferral of concluding a voluntary agreement differ strongly against a decision rejecting a candidate after a job interview);

4) orientation and training of volunteers. Orientation session (or "welcome") is a volunteer opportunity, not only to familiarize themselves with the organization and its specific activities, but also to know the existing training opportunities. Regarding training, it is usually developed as previously described (less appropriate organizational reality);

5) supervision of volunteers is an ongoing task of monitoring the work of volunteers, a task that belongs to the coordinator of volunteers (known in some organizations and "supervisor" or "manager", a term used rather improper purpose). It must ensure that involving volunteers in program organization is carried out normally, so that objectives are met timely and optimal quality parameters, the team is united and has no internal conflicts;

6) motivating volunteers. In order to motivate volunteers, volunteer coordinator should take into account the complexity and diversity of reasons which have led them to offer their time and skills to use the service mission of the organization - hence the need for good preparation of the person responsible for volunteers, both managerial and psychological. Motivating volunteers (which is all volunteer organization to create optimal conditions for conducting their business) and motivation of volunteers are two sides of same coin;

7) recognition of merit volunteers must be at the level of non-governmental organizations a process, an attitude that must exist in everything we do to attract, inspire and maintain the motivation of volunteers. In other words, recognition is not just one event, a gift or a prize offered to reward volunteers for their contributions.

Moreover, the literature on volunteer management, provision of rewards (symbolically, through acts, gestures or events of recognition and tangible forms of reward) is seen as a *sine qua non* component of an efficient. The recognition of the merits of volunteers includes a formal dimension (awards, certificates, medals or organizing events in which volunteers with honours are highlighted and mentioned officially), and an informal dimension (staff are encouraged to express sincere, spontaneous and frequent as volunteer appreciation and thanks for the contribution).

The granting of awards is not without dilemmas and difficulties. For example, among the external rewards even the possibility of being granted an additional score used when wanting to occupy a paid position can be include: "competitions to fill positions where two or more candidates obtain equal scores, public authorities and institutions and private individuals may give additional scoring with one or more certificates nominal voluntary provision which recognizes volunteer work and experience, given that they constitute selection criteria" (Article 17 of Volunteer Law no. 195/2001 with subsequent amendments and supplements). Because of these provisions, during the pre-competition stages of filling in for teaching positions in secondary education, those responsible for volunteer management within NGOs have seen a significant increase for contracts for voluntary.

8) ensuring good relations between volunteers and staff. When the organization has paid staff and volunteers, cooperation between them is essential, especially given the differences in motivational terms. Usually the coordinator of volunteers representing the volunteers in front of the employees must always ensure that employees understand, respect and contribute to increasing the motivation of volunteers who collaborate with the organization. It is about creating and maintaining a delicate balance, because they frequently encounter problematic situations such as that in which the volunteer and the employee perform the same activity or when the volunteer is better qualified / highly skilled than the employee.

9) evaluation of programs / projects and volunteers. To justify the activities undertaken or to attract public support for the initiation, continuation or supporting some activities measurable results are needed, justifying the programme and demonstrating the positive effects it will have on the identified beneficiaries. Also, a program / project that has from the outset a set of clear objectives and measurable indicators of success will be easier to enforce. In practice, however, evaluation is often seen as a marginal or optional component of the volunteers' coordinator, which negatively influences the development of the organization.

#### **4. Conclusions and possible applications**

Within the Romanian nongovernmental organizations the steps of volunteer managerial process are not usually followed; they are followed only partially and in a rather random

sequence. Using this fact, volunteering is not fulfilling its full role as the development of local NGOs, although it is one of the defining components of this type of organization.

Therefore, steps to assist NGOs to develop the essential components of their business are necessary: "in management, the role of applied research is reconsidered and amplified in the light of research results, operational recovery and stimulate their recovery in partnership" (Ștefănescu, C., 2009, p.153). From the methodology of socio-humanistic sciences, the research-action paradigm seems appropriate to study volunteers, at least in terms of the following arguments (Andronic, R.-L., 2009, p.144-145):

a) one of the areas in which research-action has proven effective since its inception is organizational development. Many subsequent approaches have used the research-action study of the development of different types of organizations, including NGOs. One of the few examples of application of this type of research in Romania (Lambriu, M., Mărginean, I., 2004) aimed at assessing the participatory social contracting practices, research and action involving members of NGOs which received government funding for services (as Law no. 34/1998);

b) while studying volunteering the participatory approaches are preferred. Except for research aimed at determining the incidence of volunteering and their initial motivation (quantitative type, usually made by a representative sample survey), other researchers use some degree of participation of volunteers or recipients of volunteering (usually, NGOs) in designing the research design and in its conduct;

c) volunteer management is a cyclical process, with an iterative way. Because of these characteristics, people involved in the coordination of voluntary practice currently iterative activities coupled with their assessments. In other words, the conduct of an action-research by the participation of those involved in the volunteers' management in non-profit organizations is the continuation of the usual way in which they currently do activities;

d) The projects and programs of voluntary non-governmental organizations have had since the planning phase, similarities to the research-action. Of course, it is usually about activities that are primarily aimed at producing a change in an established context, and any research results appear as a secondary result. Thus, very significant are the voluntary programmes developed by a number of nongovernmental organizations known to have developed a methodology for assessing their own volunteering. Since it is about multi-annual programmes of voluntary, the databases on the characteristics of the volunteers involved in their own activities and the assessments of their activities can be analyzed in research on volunteering (although this was not the intention of collecting them).

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