"So, who's in charge?!": Managing Differences in Perceived Leaders Among Volunteers
GRACA proposal by Sanaa J. Ahmed
MA/PhD Student, Industrial/Organizational Psychology

Project Description

Volunteerism is the act of giving time freely in order to benefit a person, group, or cause (Wilson, 2000). Volunteers contribute greatly to the success of many organizations. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), over 62 million people volunteered their time for an organization at least once between September 2014 and September 2015. Volunteers can provide valuable help to organizations for a wide variety of services without organizations having to spend resources on salaries, which is particularly important to nonprofit organizations that find themselves stretched thin financially (Eisner et al., 2009). Ultimately, a majority of non-profit organizations' success hinges on the time and effort put forth by volunteers (Schlegelmilch & Tynan, 1989).

The efforts of volunteers must be goal directed and that may best be accomplished by an identified leader (Penrod, 1991). Leadership is a relationship between individuals who wish to lead and individuals who decide to follow (Posner, 2014). Who manages volunteers and volunteer resources is vital to the success of nonprofit organizations (Backer, Allen, & Bonilla, 2012). The most essential goal of leadership in non-profit organizations is to strengthen organizations through relationship building (Dobbs, 2004). Good leaders provide important guidance, support, and direction to volunteers. Volunteer leaders can provide volunteers with a means of communication and connectedness in an organization (Backer, Allen, & Bonilla, 2012). Research has shown that the quality of the communication between leaders and the individuals they lead can influence performance levels (Hoye, 2004). Good volunteer leaders recognize their volunteers for their efforts and ensure that they feel respected and listened to. It's equally important that leaders provide their volunteers with sufficient training and assistance as well. All of these strategies help leaders keep their volunteer workforce motivated and working to achieve their organizational goals (Williams, 2018). Additionally, leadership styles can have a variety of important volunteer outcomes (Dwyer, Bono, Snyder, Nov, & Berson, 2013). As important as good volunteer leadership is, confusion abounds as to who volunteers should take direction from within an organization. This confusion may influence important organizational outcomes, something that has not been explored in prior research.

Although having a leader for the volunteers is essential, it is not always clear to the volunteers who their leader is or may be in the nonprofit organization. Part of this stems from the fact that there are a number of different positions responsible for leading volunteers. Volunteer resource managers and volunteer coordinators handle the recruitment, training, and overall management of volunteers in nonprofit organizations. These can be paid or unpaid positions, depending on the organization's structure. Furthermore, paid employees oftentimes work closely with volunteers, and may take on leadership roles while working alongside them. Thus, it is likely that volunteers may report different people as their leaders including the volunteer resource manager, a paid staff member, or even another volunteer. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of leadership for volunteers in nonprofit organizations. In particular, I will be looking at who the leaders of nonprofit organizations are. I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Volunteers will identify a variety of individuals as their leaders and this will vary from organization to organization.

With such a wide variety of positions in nonprofit organizations that have the potential to be in charge of volunteers, it is expected that there will be inconsistencies within volunteers concerning opinions of who their leaders are. Research has shown that role ambiguity, defined as the lack of essential information available to a person in an organization, often results in dysfunctional consequences at the individual level as well as for the organization as a whole (Kahn et al., 1964). Although some ambiguity is expected in daily life, lack of role clarity increases the likelihood that an individual will not perform effectively (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Previous literature suggests that organizations that have a clear chain of command in which subordinates receive orders from a single, clearly identified superior experience more desirable outcomes (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Individuals experiencing role ambiguity frequently report greater dissatisfaction with their positions, as well as increased levels of stress (Kahn et al., 1964). Therefore, I will also look at how variability in who volunteers identify as their leader relates to their volunteer experiences. I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Organizations that have greater confusion among their volunteers about who is the leader will have volunteers with less desirable perceptions of their volunteer experiences. In particular, volunteers experiencing confusion on who their leader is will experience greater role ambiguity, less job satisfaction, and higher levels of burnout.

Methodology

Participants for this study will include volunteers from several nonprofit organizations in the United States participating in the Volunteer Program Assessment at UNO (VPA-UNO). VPA-UNO provides free assessment and consulting services to nonprofit organizations to help enhance volunteer retention and satisfaction through the use of an anonymous online survey. Volunteers will be given two weeks to submit their feedback, and results of the survey will be disseminated to the volunteer coordinator via email and in a meeting. The VPA-UNO questionnaire contains 16 self-report measures, three open-ended questions, and several demographic variables. In addition to this, the questionnaire will also have six questions regarding leadership within the organization, four of which are open-ended (e.g. "Who do you see as your leader (or leaders) within the organization? Please list each of your leaders, as well as their role or job title within the organization").

Project Timeline
Description of Activities and Project Timeline

Project Phase	Main Activities	Dates
Data Collection	• Participant recruitment, data collection, data cleaning and aggregation	February 13th – February 28th
Data Analysis	• Coding of collected data • Statistical analysis of data; collaborate with faculty advisor on specific findings and revisions • Draft submission paper • Complete revisions of manuscript	March 1st – April 30th May 1st – May 31st June 1st – June 30th July 1st – Aug 15th
Deliverables	• Results shared in journals and at conferences • Submit to an academic journal • Development of presentation for the UNO Research and Creative Activity Fair 2020	Fall 2019

Student/Faculty Mentor Roles

Sanaa Ahmed (student) is the principal investigator. I will be responsible for cleaning and analyzing the Volunteer Program Assessment archival data collected on Qualtrics and preparing the results for conference presentation, drafting the journal manuscript, and UNO's Research and Creativity Fair. I will also be responsible for creating a new scale to assess volunteers' reactions to their leaders. Dr. Joseph Allen (faculty mentor) will oversee the process, as well as assist in data analysis and interpretation, conference presentations, manuscript preparation, and provide guidance and support.

Previous Internal Funding
I have not received any previous internal funding.

Budget Justification

Project Phase	Details	Budget
Research Design	Background research, IRB application, survey development	$700
Data Collection	Participant recruitment, data collection, data cleaning and aggregation	$700
Data Analysis	Complete all data analysis	$900
Manuscript	Formal write up of the literature review, methodology, results, and discussion; collaborate with faculty advisor on specific findings and revisions	$1525
Deliverables	Preparing conference and journal submissions, preparing final reports for nonprofit organizations, development of poster for the 2020 UNO Research and Creativity Fair	$1100
Travel	No travel expense are necessary	$0
Materials	Copies and printing necessary for manuscript revisions and submissions, and other miscellaneous printing	$75
Resources	Access to Qualtrics is free through the psychology department and SPSS is available to students on campus	$0
Total		**$5,000**

Student Stipend
The proposed budget reflects the time allotment at a standard graduate student pay rate of $10 per hour.

References

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016) Volunteering in the United States, 2015. *Economic News Release: United States Department of Labor*. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm

Dobbs, S. M. (2004). Some thoughts about nonprofit leadership. In R. E. Riggio & S. S. Orr (Eds.), Improving leadership in nonprofit organizations.(pp. 10–18). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dwyer, P. C., Bono, J., Snyder, M., Nov, O., & Berson, Y. (2013). Sources of volunteer motivation: Transformational leadership and personal motives influence volunteer outcomes. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *24*(2), *181-205.*

Eisner, D., Grimm Jr., R. T., Maynard, S., & Washburn, S. (2009). The new volunteer workforce. *Standford Social Innovation Review*, *7*, 32-37. Retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_new_volunteer_workforce

Hoye, R. (2004). Leader-member exchanges and board performance of voluntary sport organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 15*(1), *55-70.*

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational Stress* (pp. 87-95). New York: Wiley.

Penrod, K. M. (1991). Leadership involving volunteers. *Journal of Extension, 29*(4).

Rizzo, J. R., House, R. J., and Lirtzman, S. I. (1970). Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administration Science Quarterly, 15*(2)*,* 150-163.

Schlegelmilch, B., & Tynan, C. (1989). Who volunteers?: An investigation into the characteristics of charity volunteers. *Journal of Marketing Management, 5*(2)*,* 133-151.

Wilson, J. (2000). Volunteering. *The Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*, *215-240.*

Williams, M. C. (2018). Strategies used by nonprofit leaders to motivate volunteers. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences. ProQuest Information & Learning.

December 6, 2018

GRACA Review Committee Members:

With great pride, I write this letter of support for Sanaa Ahmed's GRACA proposal entitled, "So, who's in charge?!: Managing Differences in Perceived Leaders Among Volunteers". Sanaa is a developing researcher with a growing interest in nonprofit management, volunteer program leadership, and community engagement. She works as a graduate assistant for the Service Learning Academy under the direction of the Center for Applied Psychological Services, where she conducts evaluations of the service learning course offerings including surveys with UNO students and faculty and the community organizations served. Additionally, she's a consultant working with nonprofit organizations doing the Volunteer Program Assessment at UNO (VPA-UNO). Simultaneously, she continues to rapidly pursue her degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology as she prepares to propose her thesis, which will likely build upon the research proposed for her GRACA.

In terms of this proposal, Sanaa developed the idea to empirically investigate leadership of volunteers in nonprofit organizations and the potential confusion that volunteers may or may not experience as they serve. She proposed the idea to me and asked for my feedback on the proposal. I provided her feedback on how best to frame the study theoretically and gave practical guidance on structure and formatting. The ideas generated were largely hers and uniquely within her growing expertise in IO Psychology.

Additionally, this GRACA project is undoubtedly within my area of expertise due to my experience as the Director of the Volunteer Program Assessment at UNO. Truly this particular project build upon mine and others robust research stream concerning how to improve volunteer experiences as they serve. However, the proposal is uniquely Sanaa's and would not have been pursued had she not expressed both an interest and desire to lead this area of community engaged scholarship forward. In other words, her tenacity and enthusiasm, as well as growing expertise and competence related to research and data analysis, make Sanaa particularly suited to pursue this project. I feel comfortable advising Sanaa on this project.

It is without reservation that I encourage the committee to recommend funding for Sanaa's research project. I look forward to working with her on this project.

Best regards,

Joseph A. Allen, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, I/O Psychology
Director, Center for Applied Psychological Services
Director, Volunteer Program Assessment
Department of Psychology
University of Nebraska at Omaha
6001 Dodge Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68182-0274
Phone: (402) 554-6017
email: JosephAllen@unomaha.edu

University of Nebraska at Omaha   University of Nebraska Medical Center   University of Nebraska—Lincoln   University of Nebraska at Kearney