

Volunteer Management and the Different Modules of Involved Learning

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An Increase in New Learning Opportunities

- Two forces seem to be converging to create new learning opportunities:
 - Government agencies, nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses, schools, clubs, associations, neighborhoods, cities, etc. are looking for more ways to involve more people
 - Educators seek ways to enrich learning by designing and offering more active and experience-based learning opportunities suitable for different types of learners

The Possibility of Involved Learning

- **Involved learning** refers to learning situations that combine a **planned learning experience** with a **community involvement strategy**
- Planned learning strategies consist of deliberate efforts to facilitate learning or personal growth or development
- For involved learning these strategies must be experience-based, rather than classroom-based (although some activities may take place in organized learning settings such as the classroom)

Potential Audiences for Involved Learning

- Involved learning is applicable to many different types of people:
 - Students
 - Working people
 - Retired people
 - Older adults
 - Unemployed people
 - Targets or recipients of government programs (for example, community service)

Areas in Which Involved Learning May Apply

- Service learning
- Community service
- Corporate volunteering
- Employability volunteering
- Re-entry into labor force volunteering
- Neighborhood volunteering
- Pre-retirement volunteering
- Active aging volunteering

Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning

- Regardless of the particular activity area, in experiential learning:
 - The service is a **Concrete Experience** (CE) in which the participant is engaged
 - The service activity includes **Reflective Observation** (RO) on the service itself and on the behavior of the volunteer
 - The learner is thought to Create **Abstract Conceptualizations** (AC) on what the reflection means for the planned learning objectives and beyond
 - The learning experience supports **Active Experimentation** (AE) in new service assignments, which in their turn restart the process

Commonalities in Volunteer Management Across Involved Learning Modules?

- Other presentations at this Symposium focus on particular Involved Learning Modules (for example, corporate volunteer programs, older adult volunteer programs, etc.)
- Here we examine possible similarities across Modules with respect to volunteer management
- What, if anything, can we conclude about the requirements for effective volunteer management that applies across the various Involved Learning Modules?

Traditional Volunteer Management

- Traditionally, volunteer management encompasses such activities as:
 - Recruitment
 - Screening
 - Selection
 - Orientation
 - Training
 - Assignment
 - Management
 - Evaluation
 - Recognition

Orientation of Volunteer Management

- Traditionally, volunteer management has not focused specifically on the possible interest of the volunteer in Involved Learning
 - Learning is often acknowledged as one of possible benefits for the volunteer, but not the goal of host organizations
 - Training is often mentioned as a benefit for the volunteer, but it is (applied) learning as defined and needed by the host organization

Traditional Orientation of Volunteer Management

- Volunteer management tends to be more oriented toward the organization than the volunteer
- Thus, if the volunteer manager is to be responsible for Involved Learning, a shift in approach is warranted to accommodate this type of volunteer experience -- regardless of the Involved Learning Module (i.e., corporate volunteer programs, older adult volunteer programs, etc.)

A New “Natural Resource” Conceptualization of Volunteers

- *In It Ain't Natural: Toward A New (Natural) Resource Conceptualization For Volunteer Management*, Brudney and Meijs (in press) propose that we conceive of volunteers as a “natural resource”
- As a natural resource, volunteers and volunteer hours -- “volunteer energy” -- must be:
 - Used carefully and not used up
 - Cultivated and grown
 - Sustained and “recycled” through the life course

A New “Regenerative” Approach To Volunteer Management

- Brudney and Meijs (in press) call for a new “Regenerative” approach to volunteer management that understands and embraces the natural resource conception of volunteers
- They compare this approach with the traditional “Instrumental” approach to volunteer management with respect to:
 - The Community
 - The Resource
 - Organizational Management

Comparing Approaches to Volunteer Management: The Community

Dimension	Instrumental Volunteer Management	Regenerative Volunteer Management
Nexus	Organization-centered	Community-centered
Parties involved in volunteering	Focal organization and its current volunteers, clients, funders and supporters	All parties to volunteer involvement, incl. community of users, volunteers, clients, funders, and supporters

Comparing Approaches to Volunteer Management: The Community

Dimension	Instrumental Volunteer Management	Regenerative Volunteer Management
Effectiveness	Impact on an organization's current needs	Impact on current organizational needs and on the possibility to have impact on future needs

Comparing Approaches to Volunteer Management: The Resource

Dimension	Instrumental Volunteer Management	Regenerative Volunteer Management
Volunteer “Resource”	Instrumental	Recyclable / “grow-able”
Valuation of volunteering	Replacement Value	Life-time Value
Time Horizon/Perspective	Single/current volunteer assignment or event (short-term)	Prolonged interaction with volunteer (long-term)

Comparing Approaches to Volunteer Management: Organizational Management

Dimension	Instrumental Volunteer Management	Regenerative Volunteer Management
Offering of volunteer work	Job description	Combination of availability, assets and assignments (Meijs and Brudney, 2007)
Image	The fit	The negotiation
Emphasis	Accomplishments for the organization	Accomplishments for organization and for the volunteer

Volunteer Management Across Involved Learning Modules

- For Involved Learning Modules to be most effective, volunteer management should incorporate the elements of the Regenerative approach
- Volunteer management should seek greater balance:
 - Balance the viewpoint of the organization with more attention to the growth and development of the volunteer
 - Balance the focus on the current volunteer placement with a succession of placements of the volunteer over the life course
 - Balance the needs of the organization with the role and place of the volunteer in the larger community

Volunteer Management and Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning

- In Kolb's terms, Traditional (Instrumental) volunteer management succeeds in:
 - Offering a **Concrete Experience** (CE) -- a volunteer assignment -- in which the volunteer participates
 - Allowing (but not necessarily supporting) the volunteer learner to create for herself or himself an **Abstract Conceptualization** (AC) on what the assignment means

Volunteer Management and Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning

- Traditional (Instrumental) volunteer management is less successful in:
 - Including **Reflective Observation** (RO) on the volunteer service itself and on the behavior of the volunteer
 - Supporting the “learning experience” through **Active Experimentation** (AE) in new service assignments, which in their turn restart the learning process

Variables to Consider in Enhancing Involved Learning Modules

- In addition to moving toward the Regenerative approach to volunteer management, other variables are important for Involved Learning Modules to be most effective:
 - Characteristics of the Volunteer Manager
 - Characteristics of the Volunteer
 - Characteristics of the host organization

Characteristics of the Volunteer Manager

- Given the emphasis on Involved Learning, it would be useful if the volunteer manager had:
 - Background in education, especially in adult education and in experiential education
 - Background in human resource management
 - Knowledge of other volunteer opportunities in the community

Characteristics of the Volunteer

- Effectiveness of Involved Learning Modules will also vary based on the characteristics of the volunteer:
 - How interested is the volunteer in the Involved Learning experience?
 - What are the incentives for the volunteer to participate in the Involved Learning Experience?
 - What are the obligations for the volunteer to participate in the Involved Learning Experience?
 - Is guidance or oversight of the Involved Learning experience more likely to be needed?

Characteristics of the Host Organization

- Effectiveness of Involved Learning Modules will also depend on the characteristics of the host organization:
 - Organizational support for volunteer management
 - Organizational support for Involved Learning
 - Organizational interest in offering and coordinating Involved Learning experiences throughout the volunteer life-cycle

Decentralized Versus Centralized Structures for Involved Learning

- In the decentralized approach we can think of several different types of organizations and programs each offering their own Involved Learning Modules with little coordination across them
- Alternatively, we might consider a centralized approach to Involved Learning in the community, that might be housed and coordinated by, for example:
 - Government
 - Volunteer Centers

Thank you!!

- Questions? Comments?
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