

The relationship between the 'Loose and Baggy monster' (Kendall and Knapp 1994) and 'A Fat Lady in a corset' (Monroe, 1994)¹

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Abstract

This scoping paper intends to prompt a debate and does not profess to provide any firm conclusion. It discusses whether we are witnessing the commodification (Arai, 2004) of formal volunteering within 21st century Britain. Given this, it questions if the shift compromises the normative parameters of how we define and understand formal volunteering. Namely, that it is freely undertaken, without pay and for the benefit of others (see for example Sheard, 1986; Smith, 1981; Cnaan et al., 1996; Handy et al., 2000; Snyder and Omoto, 2008). In addition it will explore whether 'commandeering' volunteering in this way might necessitate broadening the altruism /egoism spectrum² of motivating factors to the point where altruism is allowed to drop off the end. Thus calling for another 'paradigm shift' (Lyons et al., 1998; Rochester et al., 2010) in the way we perceive formal volunteering in 21st Century.

¹ This is how Monroe (994:861) describes traditional explanations of altruism, 'the overall effect may be aesthetically pleasing, but it does fundamental distortion to the underlying reality'.

² See Page, 1996:15

Paper

Background

This scoping review provides preliminary thoughts about the changes affecting formal volunteering currently and is part of a larger PhD study. The working title of which is 'How is the nature of volunteering being shaped (and reshaped) in 21st Century Social Care (organisations) in the UK?

The research I will undertake has been informed by and has developed from recent primary observation within the voluntary organisations and from my 15 years working for a social care charity. I acknowledge and accept that my professional experiences as well as my cultural background influence my perspective (Fook and Gardner, 2012) and provide me with a lens through which to conduct my study.

Definition of volunteering

The etymology of the word 'volunteer' is derived from the late 16th Century French word 'voluntaire', someone who offers themselves for military service. This has come to mean 'A person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014: online).

Several attempts have been made to provide a definition of volunteering in modern society (see for example Sheard, 1986; Smith, 1981; Cnaan et al., 1996; Handy et al., 2000; Snyder and Omoto, 2008). Cnaan et al., (1996) adopted a broad-spectrum approach with four key dimensions; free will, reward, context and the relationship between giver and recipient. Davis Smith (2000:2) discerned a broad conceptual framework also of four key elements: with benefit replacing the relationship between giver and recipient. Viewing the elements as existing on a spectrum or continuum allowed 'for significant differences in interpretation within clearly delineated boundaries'. An Institute for Voluntary Research Paper (Ellis Paine et al., 2010) that aimed to readdress the definition of volunteering also employed spectrums to demonstrate the span of the various elements.

Despite various nuances and codicils that are becoming manifest, there appears consensus on three definitive basic points. Namely, that volunteering is an act of freely undertaken beneficence towards others which is without financial gain. The definition from National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO, 2014: online, ncvo.org.uk [accessed May 25th 2014]) seems to best convey current thinking and will be employed in order to further this discussion.

We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

Whilst Ellis Paine et al., (2010) questioned the very utility of the term volunteering, they acquiesced that trying to come up with an alternative all-encompassing term for the vast array of activities that are becoming accepted as forms of volunteering will prove equally as nebulous. However, they do urge that the term is continually revisited to ensure it includes more contemporary activities without it being exploited and, without it negating the differences that occur between the various types of activities that are grouped under its' umbrella (Ellis Paine et al., 2010). Given this directive there

appears to be a fine line to be negotiated between over manipulating the term on one hand and decrying its use on the other. Such 'tightrope walking' seems apt as the Welfare to work 'enforced volunteer' debate rages. Kendall and Knapp's (1994) augury of a 'Loose and Baggy Monster' with an identity crisis (Sheard, 1994) comes to mind.

Definition of Altruism

August Comte is said to have coined the term in the 1830's (Monroe, 1994: Page, 1996) originally from Latin, it means "for the other", caring for the "alter" (Haski-Leventhal, 2009:271). It is understood as 'a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare' (Batson (1991:6 cited in Haski- Leventhal, 2009:271). An 'ultimate' goal is one which is an end in itself and not a means to an end (Haski- Leventhal, 2009:271). Put simply, an act done to further one's own interests is not altruistic. However, as Page (1996:5) admits '...there would appear to be some room for latitude'. Therefore, in the same way that the parameters of voluntary activity are contested using a spectrum or continuum, altruism may also be seen so, with 'pure' altruism at one end and egoism at the other (Page, 1996:15). Academic stances vary depending on the influence of socio-economics, biology and psychology for example (see for example, Handy et al., 2000; Wilson, 2012; Snyder and Omoto, 2008; Clohesy, 2000; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Bekkers, 2004 and Smith, 1981).

Psychologically, at one pole is Monroe's (1996) definition which identifies an altruistic action as '... designed to benefit another, even at the risk of significant harm to the actor's own well-being' (Monroe, 1996:4). The critical essence is a feeling of a shared 'perspective' about humanity (Monroe, 1996:14). It is simply that altruists according to Monroe (1964:1)

...have a different way of seeing things. Where the rest of us see a stranger, altruists see a fellow human being.

One argument for the existence of such altruism was the behaviour of the non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during World War II (see Monroe, 1996 cited in Clohesy, 2000). It is argued that it was their moral perception of shared humanity that led them to act despite the potential danger. '...we all are like cells of a community that is very important...the human race...every other person is basically you' ('Tony' in Monroe, 1996: 92). The selfless dedication of doctors currently working with victims of the Ebola virus seems also to exemplify such belief. '...self- satisfaction played no part whatsoever' (Clohesy, 2000:241). Therefore, according to Clohesy, altruism exists.

Not all agree, for example, Horton Smith (1981:23)

'...there is literally no evidence to justify a belief in some "absolute" form of altruism, in which the motivation for an action is utterly without some form of selfishness.'

Rather, people behave pro-socially to recoup to a greater or lesser degree, either a tangible benefit, or a 'warm glow' (Andreoni, 1995a cited in Khalil, 2004) or both. That is not to say however that altruism is totally absent. Social psychologists purport that certain people with a pro-social personality have a propensity to volunteer because they possess certain personality traits such as altruism, empathy and generosity, emotional stability and an extrovert personality (Bekkers, 2004; Oliner and Oliner (1998).

The above makes brief mention of some of the explanations for the existence of altruism and its constituent parts. Fundamentally, it is about helping another and it is here that it links with volunteerism. Debating the relationship between altruism and volunteering, Haski-Leventhal (2009:271) is adamant '...the connection between the two concepts is so strong one cannot speak of one without the other'.

She explains

Definitions of volunteering also focused on aspects of helping another without material rewards, but emphasised the helper's free will (2009.272).

The link between volunteering and altruism

Currently, concerns are being voiced within the voluntary sector about the erosion / corrosion of the fundamental principle of 'free-will' in relation to volunteering³ (for example Ockenden, 2014). I suggest there is a similar erosion of the tenet of altruism. While, the 'heavily romanticised view' of the Victorian 'voluntarist Garden of Eden'⁴ has been rejected as an unhelpful idyll occupied by only the very few, it appears that we are gravitating towards the other end of the continuum by accepting volunteering as means to an end rather than an end in itself.

The question here is whether the 'purity' of the motive matters; when there is an underlying overt motive does that somehow negate the impact of volunteering? If the outcome is the same and the work furthers the cause the answer would seem not. Indeed, what may be the initial altruistic motive may not actually be the driver that keeps someone involved after a period of time; with, concern for others being replaced with concern for personal growth (Finkelstein, 2008). Sometimes, those who have been volunteering for some time begin to see it more, '...as a mutually beneficial exchange relationship', rather than a gift relationship (IVR, 2004; p.25 cited in Ellis Paine et al., 2010). So, although altruism may be the initial driver to volunteer, it is not necessarily the retainer.

Others suggest that the opposite may also occur; that those who initially begin volunteering for non-altruistic reasons find that such sentiments actually develop through their experience. They experience that warm fuzzy feeling, the 'warm glow' (Andreoni, 1989) that manifests from giving of oneself for the benefit of someone else (Eley, 2003 cited in Dean, 2014; McLaughlin et al, 2014).

It may thus be suggested that the traditional image of both the nature and motive of volunteers 'may have become an unrealistic and old-fashioned ideal' to be replaced by people who are motivated by a 'more attenuated form of altruism' (Hustinx, 2001; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Hustinx and Meijs, 2011 cited in Dean 2014:3). Actually, concern about the motive of volunteers is not new. According to Holman (1999:37), the socialist reformer George Lansbury '...disliked the middle-class 'slummers' who did a short spell of community work and then used it to further their own careers'.

Political background/Influence

³ See below

⁴ Hilton, M. and McKay, J. (2011:2)

Sheard (1994) suggests that since the 1960s especially, successive governments have sought to influence the development of volunteering. With the emphasis on community and personal responsibility under the Blair government, Slight (2002) speaks of volunteering beginning to be a constituent part of policy rhetoric on the socialisation of responsibility. Thus a volunteer was now being projected as an active citizen who was going to revitalise civil society. Subsequently, at the core of the Big Society agenda was a push for citizens to actively participate in civic life 'We want every adult in the country to be an active member of an active neighbourhood group' (Conservative Party, 2010a). After all, 'We are all in this together,' (Cameron, 2009). Accompanying this rallying cry however were austerity cuts which saw Local Authority budgets shrinking and their provisions either being significantly reduced or withdrawn (Taylor-Gooby, 2012)⁵.

When talking about the policy discourse such as the Giving White paper (Cabinet Office 2011a), Ramsey (2012:10) notes 'in the context of significant public spending cuts, the issue is whether this belief in volunteering is in fact founded upon its potential to replace public service provision or an idealistic vision of community, where the community fills the gaps'. Holdsworth and Brewis (2013:204) note

...from the popular celebrations of Olympic volunteers to political support for volunteering as part of the 'Big Society'; the figure of the selfless volunteer has been reinterpreted as a key social actor who can bridge community needs with individual reward and recognition.

Hardill and Baines (2003:102) acknowledge 'More and more is expected of volunteers themselves as they take on increased responsibility for service provision'. In relation to the example of library services, rather than this being a true transfer of power from 'governors to governed', Goulding (2013) found the rhetoric about community empowerment and social action to be an expedient cloak to hide cutbacks and closures. As local authorities are cutting back on services, it is up to volunteers to pick up the mantle or see services withdrawn completely. However, even with the greatest will, the suggestion is that community managed libraries will only flourish in areas high in social capital (Holman, 2012 in Goulding, 2013). So, potentially and somewhat ironically only in those communities who can afford the time and financial resources to volunteer to pay for the library services will social capital and mobility be increased. Libraries provide access to resources that people cannot afford to buy as well as providing a community space. Without these, the gaps between communities have the potential to become even further divisive.

Volunteer typology

Although the overall number of volunteers may not be changing (Hustinx, 2008, Hill, 2014: online), the typology is (Jackson, 2014). '... individualisation and secularisation are redefining volunteering..., it is today ... tied more to specific needs, self-interest and greater individual choice (Anheier and Salamon, 2001:3). New volunteers are less likely to be religiously motivated; the cause being secondary to their personal development (Low et al., 2007).

⁵ The service cuts are targeted mainly on local government, with a 27 per cent cut in the central support that finances the bulk of local services and a 68 per cent cut in the communities' budget that supports social housing (Taylor-Gooby, 2011:64)

There is evidence of an increase in single, episodic or short term volunteering commitments⁶ and online volunteering. The more novel ways of giving time are in keeping with the fast flowing technological and consumer culture in which we now live. 'Plug in style volunteering' (Lichterman, 2006) particularly appeals to the younger generations. In this style of volunteering, contact is instant and results are expected to be the same.

Young people

Holdsworth and Brewis (2013:205) discuss the way volunteering is being 'pushed' particularly for young people who are being

...subsumed by a wider narrative that emphasises the benefits of participation and the potential loss in terms of skills, employability and personal worth of not getting involved.

For young adults and students in particular, the incentive to volunteer is strongly linked to their own development. A study carried out by the National Union of Students found that amongst the student population, potential volunteers are more likely to be interested in enhancing their CV and career opportunities⁷ (Ellison and Kerr, 2014). It has been questioned whether this demotes volunteering to a mere 'stepping stone' to employment (Rochester 2009; Hill, 2009, cited in Ellis Paine et al., (2010). Indeed Volunteer week 2014 was '*celebrated*' on the guardian professional webpage using the strapline 'Volunteering: how giving a helping hand can boost your career' (Friend, 2014: online, the guardian.com).

This group's savvy relationship with volunteering continues once they are employed. The student who may initially have volunteered to boost employability skills and make themselves more attractive to the employer (Pozniak 2014; Friend, 2014: online, theguardian.com) are then in a position to choose the company which has the 'best' corporate social responsibility reputation. Those companies who are considered the most socially responsible may 'attract larger and more motivated pool of graduate applicants than their less admirable counterparts' (Brammer, 2006).

The significance of the return to companies who create Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes is being realised. Lukka explains how this matches the shift in perception of volunteering from 'a' gift of time' into a mutual exchange relationship' (Lukka, 2000:3).

'Corporates' are recognising the potential business impact of employee volunteering and its strength in fostering organizational commitment. It could be suggested that the 'corporates' are using their employees' altruism to 'buy' their commitment and enhance their bottom line? Does this really matter if the result is a healthier, more fulfilled workforce⁸ and an improved, bolstered community?

Does 'enforced' volunteering work?

⁶ Cabinet Office, Giving of time and money: Findings from the 2012-13 Community Life Survey

<http://communitylife.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/assets/topic-reports/2012-2013-giving-time-and-money-report.pdf>

⁷ 'This group of students is much more likely to be motivated to volunteer by gaining work experience and developing their CV – 72 per cent compared to a base of 60 per cent across all student respondents' (Ellison and Kerr, 2014) .

⁸ See for example Cassiday et al., (2008) and Warbuton, 2006)

The introduction, promotion and encouragement of volunteering programmes by English Governments has a long history ‘...in part at least to enhance ...employability and increase...chances of securing paid work’

(Finnegan ,2013, cited in Kamerade and Ellis Paine, 2014; see also Sheard, 1986) . However its’ success in leading to paid employment is questionable (Kamerade and Ellis Paine, 2014).

In April 2014 the Community Work Placement scheme was launched as part of the larger Help to Work measures. The mandatory work placements are for 30 hours per week and can last up to six months(Cabinet Office, 2014: Online). This follows the previous scheme of September 2013. At that time, Sir Stephen Bubb, head of the charity chief executives body *ACEVO*, commented thus, ‘Volunteers should be motivated by passion, not by the threat of lost benefits’ (Bubb, 2013). The concern here is about the apparent disparity between mandatory or enforced practice and the element of free will, acknowledged above as one of definitional markers of voluntary activity.

While some organisations may benefit from having additional volunteer input, there can also be costs. Those seeking to demonstrate their employability skills, tick a box on a job application form and improve their CV for example may volunteer for a short time until their need has been met. Alcock Tyler (2014: online) decries those who ‘just flirt with being a trustee’ for being ‘so disrespectful’ to those whose are ‘...caring and give a dam’. Although volunteers freely give their time, this is not cost free for them or the organisation. Induction, training and supervision do incur costs and a higher turnover will incur a greater demand than if the volunteer team has more consistent, longer commitment (Dean, 2014).

Coupling the values of community empowerment and social action with a resurgence in neoliberalism and the growth of market influence on all areas including social welfare, it seems we are now witnessing greater commodification of care service provision within ‘not just a society with a market economy but a ‘market society’ (Rochester, 2013:pp.96-97).

What is most troublesome is that the voluntary sector is being used in this way and that ‘work’ within the sector is being commodified and may not be valued at its true cost. Volunteering and the resources it takes to maintain it are not cost-free and when resources are already stretched there is also the concern that organisations will struggle under such added pressure.

Is Commodification necessarily corruption?

Perhaps, the commodification of the act of volunteering might be seen as an inevitable progression following on from the commodification of the voluntary sector as a whole which has been taking place since the ‘contract culture’ of the 1980’s .⁹ The changes do not necessarily need to be seen as problematic. Hustinx talks of volunteering being ‘...reinvigorated with a new strength’ through this ‘individualization’ (2010:237). Perhaps we should be accepting, as the young volunteers in Jon Dean’s article (2014:11), ‘No interviewee complained at the use of the word ‘sell’- all understood its relevance to their work’. The carrot and stick approach was absolutely understood and accepted, implying that if, as a student you don’t volunteer you will miss out on the job to another student who had. There was a mix of altruism and instrumentalism but... for some ‘as soon as they got their

⁹ See Whelan, 1999.

qualification they disappeared'. So, effectively, 'The *work* had been supplanted by the *experience*'. (Dean, 2014:13).

When viewed as a commodity, the worth of the act of volunteering seems to be increasing. As the value of paid work has become of '...of central importance to social policy' (Hardill and Baines, 2003:103)¹⁰, so has volunteering as a route to attaining it. The suggested changes also exemplify how the worth of volunteering is increasingly being costed in order to contribute, supplement or replace what was previously provided by Local Authorities. Stealthily, the concept of 'incentivised' volunteering is being mooted elsewhere. In 2012 *The Guardian* reported a proposed Government housing scheme that planned to give priority on [housing](#) lists to those who volunteered for their communities over those who were homeless or destitute. The 'deserving' were to be rewarded for their efforts over the 'undeserving' (Butler, 2012). Most recently, it has been suggested that volunteers should be given a council tax discount (Local Government Association, 2014: online ,[www.local.gov.uk](#)). Although not mandatory or enforced, this type of activity still appears fundamentally incongruent with the principle of free will; hence Davis Smith's response to the proposal:

'There comes a point where rewards for volunteering muddy the water and undermine this principle, and this proposal is certainly approaching that point.'

(Davis- Smith, 2014 cited in Ainsworth, 2014: online , [www.civilsociety.co.uk](#))

Aside from corrupting the perceived essence of volunteering, we should be mindful that this may serve to create further divisions in society between those '*community heroes*' who can 'afford' to volunteer and those who cannot because of other commitments which ironically, may include their paid work (Local Government Association, 2014: online ,[www.local.gov.uk](#)). Finally, such a scheme acknowledging and rewarding the work of formal volunteers negates the efforts of all those who volunteer informally.

Within voluntary organisations, commodification may also create divisions between volunteers, as those with higher valued skills "'ready-made' volunteers' (Third Sector Futures Dialogue, 2012) are being taken on over those without. When the value/ importance of the experience gained supplants the work even the most basic tasks can become embroiled in a power dynamic. Such is the case at a day centre for older people where there is a hierarchy of volunteers. Those higher up got to do the washing up (O'Connor, 2013).

Allowing activities to be subjected to market values, something to be bought and sold for gain, can create inequality and corruption (Sandel, 2012). Whilst it can certainly be argued that volunteering has never been completely open to all, it must surely be inevitable that by continuing to be bartered in the current manner the rift of inequality will continue to grow. As, 'What begins as a market mechanism, becomes a market norm' (Sandel, 2012:61).

¹⁰ Hardill and Baines, (2003:103) continue 'Social inclusion is achieved through paid work and all adults of working age have a 'duty' to engage in it'

Apart from creating inequality of access, Sandel (2012) suggests that because of their essence, some things should not be for sale. Such things are normatively perceived as holding greater moral worth. Thus the question: Is the experience of volunteering is diminished if turned into a commodity? Does it

...demean(s) and degrade(s) it' and '...treat(s) it according to a lower mode of valuation than is appropriate to it. (Sandel, 2012:34). It is up to us to decide whether these norms are worth protecting (Sandel: 2012:91).

Rochester (2013:97) reminds us that 'Voluntary organisations used to exist in a very different moral universe'. He explains that many have had to compromise their morals as society as a whole has been permeated by market norms. If this is happening then perhaps it is even more of a reason for individuals to try to protect their activity from such influence.

A paradigm shift

Hustinx and Meijs (2011:10) suggest that rather than decrying and being pessimistic towards what may appear as the 'dis-embedment' of volunteering because of the weakening of traditional drivers, it should be embraced and seen as a chance to 're-embed' volunteering within current societal norms. So for example they accept that 'Organisations and volunteers increasingly use an exchange models'. Each knowing what is expected of the other up front. This would surely satisfy those who criticise UK charities for 'stifling' innovation by spending too much time on definitional semantics (Greene, 2014 cited in Weakley, 2014).

Albeit crude, perhaps then we should be talking about an 'agenda paradigm'¹¹. A changed model more befitting of current societal norms; those that believe more in volunteering as overtly being of mutual benefit within an exchange relationship. An acceptance that this type of incentivised volunteering is simply an exchange activity in which something is given such as time or, knowledge, with the expectation that something will be gained in return¹². This can be tangible in form of or not. Whilst, some form of exchange may have been ever present in the volunteering process, what differs here is the acceptance that the main driver is the gain. Accepting this new concept of 're-embedding' '....may lead to changes in our common perceptions of volunteering' to follow the shifts that are taking place at organisational and institutional levels (Hustinx and Meijs, 2011:16).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to sketch a framework for debate. I do not claim to have covered all aspects of any potential definitions. It has served to show how volunteering has become increasingly commodified. To the student, the unemployed, the graduate, the employee and even the unwell, volunteering is being marketed, costed and sold by the employer, the doctor, the local authority and ultimately, the government as a means of delivering on their own individual agenda.

¹¹ Kuhn (1996:x) defines scientific "paradigms" as '...universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.

This also alludes to the use of the term 'paradigm' already being used to describe different perspectives of volunteering (Rochester et al., 2010).

¹² See for example the Carebank scheme operating in Windsor and Maidenhead (http://www.rbwm.gov.uk/web/carebank_scheme.htm)

My aim here has been to provide a scoping exercise to highlight the contested and contestable nature of volunteering. This critical analysis and synthesis will inform my empirical research.

There are at least two competing alternatives for the parameters of voluntary activity in the future. One, the voluntary sector could agree to widen the boundaries to allow for the oxymoronic, 'enforced' volunteering and those that are completely motive-led. Or, the sector could seek to tighten up the definition only to include those who freely volunteer and certainly not the 'voluntold'¹³ (Irving. 2014). However, as the above has suggested this camp would inevitably be quite sparse; even Lady Bountiful had her reasons!

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