

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FOR ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION – NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS STRIVING FOR MISSION FULFILLMENT¹

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Abstract:

The organizations analyzed in the paper, are public serving nonprofit organizations. Empirical evidence is based on the (earlier and present) research of the research team of the University of Pécs Hungary. Earlier research involves the European Capital of Culture project, the recent research, interviews in connection with professionalization of the nonprofit sector.

Both the results of the EU surveys and the author's own research show that education and training opportunities for volunteers regularly depend on the tasks that have to be carried out by them. Training is basically provided by the nonprofit organization where the volunteer helps with his skills and knowledge, and also works as a knowledge transferor between nonprofit organization and public.

Keywords: knowledge transfer, nonprofit organizations, engagement, inclusion, learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

When Johns Hopkins University conducted a survey world wide among nonprofit leaders and asked them, what is it that makes nonprofits special they answered: Nonprofits are productive, empowering, effective, enriching, reliable, responsive and caring (Salamon et al., 2012). We could say, this is how nonprofit leader see themselves and their organizations. And at the same time we should also add, that this is what makes the difference between other sectors and the nonprofit sector organizations: the latter ones are driven by their mission to work for the sake of the poor, for people without a job, for disabled and other groups of the society on the periphery. Two elements of this list seem to be extremely relevant for present paper, precisely empowering and caring. Empowering means in the case of nonprofit organizations mobilizing citizens, gaining them for active participation in affairs concerning social issues, providing opportunities for civic engagement in interest of the community. Caring equals providing services or programs at reduced costs or for free to disadvantaged and/or underserved populations and also means focusing on the *community*. These two factors help us understand why and how nonprofit organizations try to reach out to people and get them engaged in activities, to volunteer at times when everywhere around us values are changing, profit becomes priority, when because of the growing competition and growing professionalization a fear grows that the role of voluntarism is going to diminish.

It is well-known that organizations of the nonprofit sector contribute to the performance of the economies as major service providers in areas such as health, social, educational, cultural and other services. They are doing this since their main aim is to serve public or their members, as opposed to business sector organizations where primary aim is making profit. These organizations provide services to the public in order to improve social situation. This is one fact to be mentioned as particularly important for the author to choose this topic.

Another fact that deserves to be mentioned as introduction is that nonprofit organizations are increasingly *involved in community projects*. Berry (2005) draws attention to the potential of nonprofit organizations to engage their clients and members in community events and in public policy making. It is theoretically huge potential, however, they are regulated by government so that they feel often discouraged to participate in public affairs. However, we can be sure that civic engagement is a good thing to make reality.

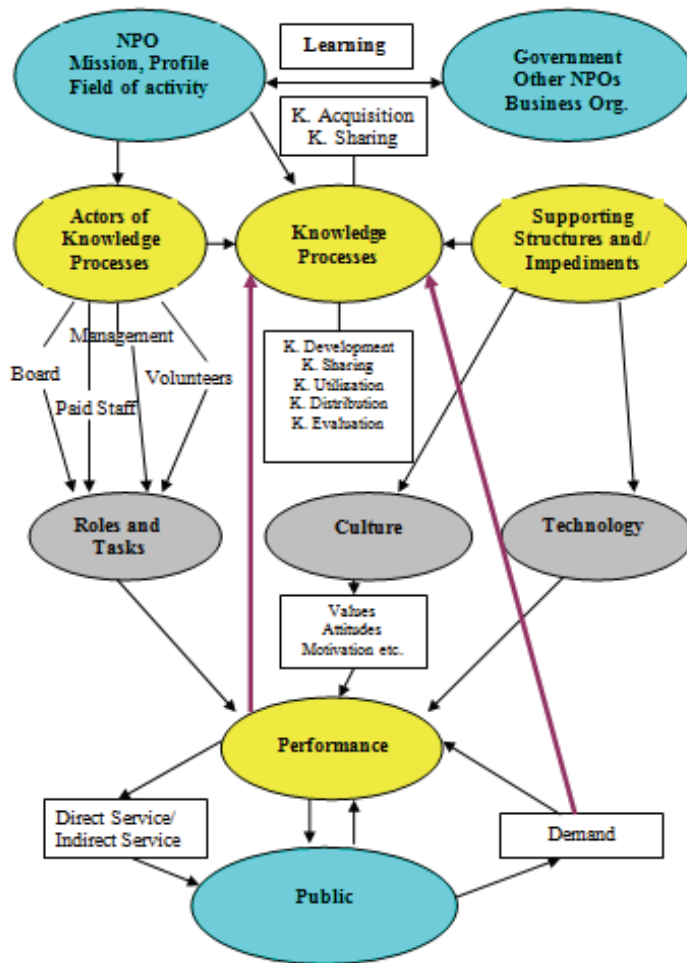
It is also known that nonprofit organizations are active participants of the processes of life long learning by providing formal and informal ways of learning to people of all ages. This topic is becoming popular in international research; especially since the EU agenda is focusing on achieving the goal of turning Europe into the most developed knowledge-based region in the world. The EU is also giving more attention than earlier, to the nonprofit/voluntary sector. As proofs of it we can mention that the year of 2011 was called Year of volunteers and volunteering, and the movement focusing on active citizenship draws attention also to this sector. This paper also wants to acknowledge the role that nonprofit nongovernmental organizations can play in this process and address some of the issues that are related to knowledge transfer and engagement of people.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methods used for this paper contain desk and field research. The *desk research* deals with international research results dominantly of the last decade and consists of two main topics. So the paper:

- on one hand, analyzes theoretical issues that have relevance for knowledge transfer features of nonprofit organizations;
- on the other hand, it studies recent surveys about the nonprofit sector and volunteering in Europe with some insight over the USA.

Picture 1: Managing knowledge in public-serving nonprofit organizations



Source: Dobrai & Farkas 2008, p.19.

The *desk research* and literature is used to explain the *overall state* of the sector regarding the involvement of volunteers and knowledge transfer characteristics of the nonprofit organizations².

Empirical evidence is based on the (earlier and present) research of the research team of the University of Pécs Hungary. The earlier research involves the European Capital of Culture project, the recent research, interviews in connection with professionalization of the nonprofit sector, both carried out in Hungary. Though, based on issues in connection with the nonprofit sector (such as knowledge management and professionalization), these projects can deliver a message also for readers in other countries. They help us prove the following hypothesis:

Nonprofit organizations are major players in knowledge transfer processes with the aim to make people committed to important societal issues.

The organizations analyzed in the paper, are public serving nonprofit organizations. When we study these organizations, numerous features should be viewed such as: actors of knowledge processes, a supporting organizational culture, communication system, barriers of knowledge transfer, availability of knowledge to all interested people, knowledge flows, cooperation with other organizations, willingness and capability of nonprofits (NPOs) to invest in technology, and performance measurement (see Picture 1). These factors have already been addressed in different publications (Dobrai & Farkas, 2008; Dobrai & Farkas, 2010). This paper focuses on the elements of the model, that are relevant for

² In this paper, the terms nonprofit organizations, volunteer organizations, nongovernmental organizations, third sector organizations are used for nonprofit sector organizations.

present analysis, namely actors of the knowledge-related processes and the role of knowledge transfer between organization and volunteer, and between organization and public, between organization and public, through the volunteer.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the past decades the number of nonprofit (third sector) organizations has grown, and they also have become stronger in their activities, and also in their impact on their environment. They influence public policy not only at local but also at national level (Balassiano & Chandler, 2009).

3.1. Mission as a Factor to Motivate Knowledge Transfer

Regarding the above mentioned factors, Milne, Iyer and Gooding-Williams (1996) stress the importance of cooperation in fulfilling the missions of nonprofit organizations. Based on a national survey and interviews, by studying alliance in the environmental field between environmental nonprofit organizations and government agencies, for-profit businesses and other environmental nonprofit organizations, implications are formulated for their contribution to improving the environment. Questions such as effectiveness, formality, influence, and political position associated with different types of alliances are also addressed. Similar issues are analyzed in a recent paper of Nolte and Boenigk, in connection with disasters: they show how important it is to work together across sectors, in order to get the necessary knowledge to those in troubled situation and to be able to help them through this.

3.2. Cultural Factors of Knowledge Transfer

Liu and Fang (2010) find when examining the issue of motivation in knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer by using the example of different types of social welfare organizations that internal motivation influences knowledge sharing most, and the hygiene factors also have an impact on the knowledge sharing willingness. The motivation and altruism in connection with knowledge sharing shows a significant and positive correlation to knowledge sharing willingness and behaviour. Similarly, a positive correlation was found between reputation and mutual benefits and knowledge sharing. Apparently, external motivation influences only the knowledge sharing behaviour but not the willingness.

Salary, benefits and promotions act for nonprofits as incentives in promoting knowledge sharing, however these are not the main factors. The researchers found that for people who work for a nonprofit organization reputation, how the outside world perceives them counts more. The same applies to awarding honours to them, getting compliments from colleagues, or getting certificates for the job they have done. People working for nonprofit organizations are generally altruistic and willing to serve the public, hence they are more likely to share their knowledge and experience (Liu & Fang, 2010; Dobrai & Farkas, 2008). Through communication and coordination organization members establish a knowledge sharing platform, for sharing experience. When NPO workers have a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing, it influences not only the internal but also the external knowledge processes, transferring knowledge to the public (Dobrai & Farkas, 2008).

3.3. Knowledge Transfer Through Co-operations and Partnerships

Many nonprofit organizations are joining different organizations, regional, country-wide, national level organizations, associations such as the National Association of Nonprofit Organizations (NCNA) in the USA (Balassiano & Chandler, 2009) or the House of Civil Communities in Pécs, Baranya (Farkas & Dobrai, 2010) that help them building capacity, and through that nonprofits are able to have an impact on social issues. NCNA for example is a network of local and regional nonprofit associations and has over 22000 members in the USA. Its aims are promoting collaboration, networking and advocacy. It connects small organizations and helps them work more efficiently, collaborate and share experiences and ideas, hence it is a good frame work for learning and knowledge transfer (Balassiano & Chandler, 2009). The same can be said about the above mentioned Hungarian umbrella organization.

Chan and Graddy (2008) find that the motivation for building partnerships as co-operation form influences the success of nonprofit organization operations. They consider three factors that are relevant from the perspective of effectiveness, namely to which level the client's goal is achieved, how well inter-organizational relationships are enhanced and how organizational learning improves. The emergence of networks is also an organizational answer to the economic challenges of the knowledge based society and requires flexibility, fast learning ability, service tailored to the needs of customers. We can observe that nonprofit organizations join a network to become more efficient in their operations, to combine or share capacities. As an outcome of cooperation the *capacity* of the nonprofit organization can improve. This is one of the findings of an ongoing research of the University of Pécs on professionalization of nonprofit organizations, where a majority of the interviewed 38 organizations emphasize the importance of joining a network for becoming more powerful in achieving their goals. As a conclusion of this research overview, we can say that certain factors, besides the organizational mission, other factors are also important to reach results in a collaboration, precisely attitudes and experience, and of course trust.

4. IMPACT OF THE NONPROFIT SECTOR – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In the past decades the number of nonprofit (third sector) organizations has grown, and they also have become stronger in their activities, and also in their impact on their environment, partly because of the above mentioned reasons, partly because of becoming professional in their operations and services.

4.1. Similar Trends in America and in Europe

Blackwood, Roeger and Pettijohn (2012) and also (Salamon, 2012) state that the nonprofit sector in the USA continuously is growing. Its financial and social impact is improving. In the last decade the number of organizations increased by 25 percent. It is even more important if we take into account that the nonprofit sector has long tradition in the USA, and that it is a sector of great impact. In Hungary, the same trend is observable, the number of nonprofit organizations is around 65000 (KSH, 2012).

It is characteristic for both countries that not only the number of the nonprofit (third sector) organizations is increasing but also the number of people employed in the sector, and its contribution to the GDP. We also must consider the high percentage of volunteers (in Hungary, ca. 420000 at the moment, and increasing).

4.2. Focusing on the Interests of the Community in the European Union

The EU provides a number of programs in connection with volunteering issues. The program Europe for citizens (2007-2013) consists of four areas that support experiences for the citizens of the Union, such as Active Citizens, Active Civil Society in Europe, or Together for Europe (Angerman & Sittermann, 2010). There are also research projects going on and announced that are addressing social issues and regarding the nonprofit/ volunteer sector as topic and as participants (e.g. FP7). 92 to 94 million adults are involved in volunteering in the European Union. There are however differences in the level of volunteering in the EU member states (Table 1): there are countries with long traditions in the third sector, and there are countries that have a poorly developed nonprofit sector.

Table 1: Level of volunteering in EU countries

Very high (over 40%)	High (30-39%)	Medium high (20-29%)	Relatively low (10-19%)	Very low (under 10%)
Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, UK	Denmark, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg	Estonia, France and Latvia	Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia	Greece, Italy and Lithuania

Source: Volunteering in EU, 2010, p. 7.

Although the level of volunteering is different, in the last ten years it has grown in most EU Member States. The reasons for this increase are among others the increased awareness of social and environmental concerns, public initiatives to promote volunteering, the increasing numbers of nonprofit organizations.

According to the Study in the Eastern and Central European countries there is a somewhat negative attitude towards volunteering. However there is a growth observable in the number of organizations. Looking at the overall trends we can assume that this will end up sooner or later in a change of attitudes, which underpins the importance of the education of people, the transfer of values and knowledge that makes them more aware of societal issues and more committed to doing something to solve them.

5. EDUCATING AND ENGAGING PEOPLE THROUGH KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

We have to consider two categories of knowledge transfer to educate people.

5.1. Knowledge Transfer to Volunteers to Become Knowledge Transferors Themselves

The providers of education for volunteers and employees of nonprofit organizations are usually large national organizations which are able to deliver professional service to other nonprofit organizations, very often large umbrella organizations. The aim is usually to become effective volunteers. According to the above mentioned EU survey there is a wide range of trainings provided for volunteers. The final report (*Volunteering in EU, 2010*) also addresses the issue of the increasing professionalization of the nonprofit sector. This shows on the level and variety of training opportunities provided for the sectors organizations and for the volunteers. The training programs shall help them gain competencies that are inevitable for the effective fulfilment of their mission.

5.2. Knowledge Transfer to the Public

However, there is another aspect that needs to be taken into account when talking about *knowledge transfer* and active citizenship. Not only volunteers working for an association or other type of nonprofit organizations need to get the necessary knowledge but also a broader public, as it can be proved by the *European Capitol of Culture (ECoC)* projects. It is everywhere accompanied by an increased activity of both organizations and individuals. In the case of Hungary it meant 98 nonprofit organizations winning grants to support their project execution, that they offered in the framework of the ECoC project (Farkas & Dobrai, 2010).

The most important *aims of the projects* offered by nonprofit organizations included equality of chances (18%) and integration of people in the society (43%). Other goals were: visual education (42%), reservation of heritage (38%), sport/recreation (35%), skill development (14%), environmental education (13%), search for talents (12%) and introducing Hungarian gastronomy (11%).

Many organizations *targeted disadvantaged groups* with their projects so it is clear how important this issue is for them, how much they tried to address large groups of the citizens. It was important that nonprofit organizations offered a lot of programs which were meant *for every age group* of the society; many had their *target groups* in the neighborhood and in the city. Many programs tried to include *disadvantaged layers of the society*, such as poor people, or people with disabilities.

Similarities with the EU survey results: The *kind of knowledge transferred* during the project accomplishment was dependent primarily on the aim of the project and the field of activity. The ECoC program also strengthened the society of volunteers; it drew attention to the social impact of the activities of volunteers. The transferor role of volunteers in the ECoC project can be recognized if we think of 100 nonprofit organizations with 5.000 volunteers served 100.000 customers which could be viewed as an attraction for other interested parties to join.

6. CONCLUSION

Both the results of the EU surveys and the author's own research show that education and training opportunities for volunteers regularly involve the aspect of the voluntary activity that has to be carried

out by the volunteers. This training is basically provided by the nonprofit organization where the volunteer helps with his skills and knowledge.

Limitations of the research presented in this paper are that the author had to face were similar to the limitations that were mentioned in the survey analysis of the European nonprofit/volunteer sector research and that were experienced in the case of the survey results of the Johns Hopkins University Baltimore, namely that the data used in the analysis are sometimes scattered, not based on systematic research, so comparison of the data for the different countries has certain level of limitation, although the trends are showing now towards unification in this field.

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