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On the outskirts of volunteering:
College students' involvement in scholarship-rewarded social projects

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The concept of volunteering evolved in the military context and was associated with recruitment of citizens who mobilized for their homeland, not expecting any reward for their service. Throughout the years the concept of volunteering has continued to take shape and develop further and, as a result, to comprise extending assistance in various other contexts. There is general agreement that <u>volunteering is a contribution from one individual to another or from an individual to the public, out of free will and without material reward.</u> However, this consensus does not distinguish between diverse perceptions of volunteering. Can helping a relative or a friend be considered volunteering? Is a one-time-only activity without compensation considered volunteering, or does volunteering have to be done continuously?

Moreover, many existing projects reward social action in various forms of compensation including scholarships, and it is hard to determine whether these deprive the activists of the definition of being volunteers. What is the degree of material reward which crosses the line between volunteering and paid work?

In this lecture I would like to focus on the issue of college students' social involvement that is rewarded by scholarship. How do the students perceive what they do? Is it paid work with unclear boundaries or is it an activity on the outskirts of volunteering? I think that in-depth understanding of the perceptions of scholarship recipients in extending help to others may not only enrich and broaden our understanding of the concept of volunteering, but also enable us to

better manage the students (as volunteers) in such a way that will encourage the further extension of their activities.

So like I said,

Volunteering is defined as a service provided by one individual to another, or an individual to the public, out of free will and without material compensation. Through this definition we can see the defining boundaries of volunteering, and from them, it is clear that <u>the involvement of scholarship students is not volunteering.</u>

And indeed, recently the definition of volunteering has been expanded with added emphasis: Now, it seems that volunteering is a service provided by an individual without material compensation **equal to its market price**. This raises a question: for instance, is a lawyer who provides a service for a person lacking financial means, at 20 percent of his usual fee, regarded as a volunteer for the sum of the difference (80%)?

The reference to 'free will' also raises questions: What about a certain degree of obligation, for example, compulsory social volunteer projects for high-school students as part of their education? The rationale behind the project is that this type of activity might help to shape a future social identity of awareness and socially active citizenry. Seemingly, this approach too does not fall under the category of volunteering, because it is not done on the basis of free will, but actually obscures the boundaries for the students in that it includes regulated social activity without pay.

Nowadays there is growing recognition of both a broad and a narrow definition of volunteering: While the narrow definition will include only volunteering done out of complete free will, without any financial compensation and where the beneficiaries are complete strangers to the volunteer, a broader definition will include volunteering which takes place out of a certain degree of coercion (for example, the 'personal commitment program' in high schools) with some financial compensation (for example, a scholarship or a refund for expenses).

There is another more circular perception, which defines three theoretical spheres of volunteering:

1. First sphere - Traditional volunteering - which includes providing a service without pay
2. Second sphere - The outskirts of volunteering - where providing services without pay is a broader concept which includes funds and scholarships
3. Third sphere - The spiritual dimension - which includes activities that an individual performs out of a spirit of volunteering and a sense of emotional well-being which cause him/her to volunteer.

According to this circular approach, students in scholarship-rewarded social projects operate in the "outskirts of volunteering", and it is reasonable to assume that they experience this activity as having unclear boundaries. So at this point I asked: How do the college students perceive their work in projects - as paid employment, or as volunteer work?

Methodology: 45 students who were active in a scholarship-rewarded social project (PERACH – an after-school tutorial project for underprivileged children and teens) were interviewed and asked about the meaning of the project for them.

Findings

1**. Ambiguity in motivation for the work:** At the outset, the students note that they decided to take part in the PERACH project in order to partially finance their studies. The pay is quite substantial too: about 40% of the annual tuition fees (between 4500 and 5000 shekels), and the hourly pay (40 shekels) is 35% higher than minimum wage. The ambiguity starts when the interviewees explain that they entered the project for social more than financial reasons and emphasize that they could have earned the same money at any other job and, despite this, they chose to earn it in a social action project. Some of the female students claimed that they could have earned an even higher hourly wage by waitressing, which increased their perception of the project as being volunteer work.

3

2. Ambiguity in the perception of the wages: Continuing from finding 1, the students experienced ambiguity about the wages. The fact that they were not handed a monthly paycheck gave them a sense of volunteering. Even a student's basic ambition to earn the sum of the scholarship monthly, and not yearly, obscures the perception of earning wages, and positions the scholarship as an attached benefit. As a result, most students also work at part-time paying jobs while doing their volunteer work, thus adding to the perception of volunteering having a separate added benefit.

3. Asymmetry in expenses: Unlike paid work, the students claimed that they are required to pay various out-of-pocket expenses that are not refunded: Traveling to the child they are tutoring, buying sweets for him/her, celebrating his/her birthday and so on... All these obscure the boundaries of the job into the realm of volunteering. Most students noted that the expenses can be considered a form of contribution, and that they are not compulsory.

> "The kid [I'm tutoring] has a birthday, so you buy him some candy… This costs money, too, and that means you are giving of yourself... This is time to go and get him a present and generally to think about giving him something… Or…Uh… If you want to do something with him like planting some herbs or something … Then you have to buy the seeds."

In this illustration we see that it is easy to confuse part of the scholarship-rewarded work and characterize it as volunteering.

4. Ambiguity in the boundaries of the job: The experience of working in social projects can be very intense. Frequently, students need to stay and talk with family members or with the child's homeroom teacher; and they often feel that they're doing this beyond the hours and limits of the job and out of goodwill to contribute and help. Some students described feeling that they had to fill the role of a surrogate father for the tutored child because he had lost his dad; and they reported that this experience was a heavy load and an emotional burden. The transition from perceiving the tutoring job as fulfillment of the terms of the scholarship, versus tutoring as a

meaningful contribution to the tutored child, raises not only concerns and uncertainty at the personal level, but also enhances the experience of genuine volunteering.

> "She is always saying 'stay a little longer'; I make her laugh and smile, I feel like I've taken her in like a little sister, my protégé. I feel a real improvement [in her], so I stay…"

So in effect, the perception of going beyond the boundaries of the job fosters a clearer perception of volunteering.

5. Ambiguity in employer-employee relations: The students reported that lack of organization or systematic regulation in employer-employee relations reinforces their experience of volunteering. The scarcity of the meetings (only 2 per year – once every semester) and lack of ongoing communication with the coordinator tend to obscure employer-employee relations.

> "PERACH is a project designed for college students. That means that in order to attract students, who are the target audience, they need to be rewarded in some form. In order to reward students, you need to contribute to them in some way. We know that students have a more difficult financial situation than other populations, and that is why in order to attract that population of students, we need to do so by offering some financial reward. So I don't think that this reward of 4 and a half thousand shekels a year is an actual job because someone who wanted to have a proper job would aspire to do other things and wouldn't settle for this tiny amount of money."

We can say, therefore, that the source of the ambiguity is the delicate balance between reward and contribution. On the one hand, the hourly "wage" received for the activity is relatively high compared to the average market wage. On the other hand, the tutoring work and the direct contribution to the child are more significant compared to the reward, and this fosters the perception that the project is indeed an act of volunteering.

Why is all this important?

I suggest considering scholarship-rewarded social action projects as being on the 'outskirts of volunteering' and as a reward that is <u>not</u> equal to wages. It is a reward that encourages and promotes social involvement that has a volunteering component.

Why really?

The literature shows that the lowest rate of volunteering in society is in the 20 to 35-year age group. During this period, the individual is occupied with self-development and financial survival, so that he/she cannot expend the resources needed for volunteering. Hence, we have a core group which chooses social action over other occupational endeavors. I suggest that we consider this group as one that has special volunteering potential because, while they seek financial leverage for their higher education, these young people tend to seek it in social action.

Role Identity Theory claims that a person's self-identity forms when he carries out a certain action over a prolonged period of time, because it is then that he projects the norms of the group onto his own self-identity. Therefore, those students that engage in social action in exchange for scholarships are closer to developing an identity as social activists and volunteers than any other population of students due to the role they fill, and this identity should be encouraged and nurtured.

How do I suggest this identity be nurtured?

By correct management of the students involved, whereby the type of management chosen comes from the practice of volunteer management. What underlies this claim is the perception that, practically speaking, the students perceive themselves as volunteers and therefore will respond better to rewards and to a type of management which recognizes their status as volunteers.

6

The timeframe of this lecture is too short to reflect on models of volunteering and perhaps this topic requires a separate lecture or theoretical elaboration.

However, I would like to present a few principles of volunteering:

1. Management that corresponds to the goal of the Third Sector – Prof. Benny Gidron (2011) formulated the notion that management of Third Sector organizations needs to be one that promotes their social mission – the development of a civic society. So, the practice of volunteer management should be one that cultivates active citizens. According to Gidron, this outcome is achieved by <u>open management</u>, which enables the volunteers to participate in decision-making, encourages volunteer initiative and entrepreneurship, and gives them the autonomy and freedom to develop projects of their own.

2. Furthermore, in a model I have constructed for managing volunteers I proposed (Yanay-Ventura, 2014; Yanay-Ventura and livne, 2010) three dimensions of management: Business management, Flexible management and Sensitive management.

   <u>In business management</u>, I propose treating volunteers like hired employees: both in the demand for commitment, and in the demand for discipline and keeping to schedules and also challenging them by including them in the decision-making and in building a professional plan.

   <u>In flexible management</u>, I propose demonstrating flexibility in motivation and a differential treatment of the volunteers; flexibility in terms of hours and project allocation.

   <u>In sensitive management</u>, I propose establishing a management setting that provides a comprehensive emotional response to volunteers – starting with a personal connection, expressing appreciation, maintaining an informal approach, and other means that correspond to expressing gratitude for the act of volunteering and for fostering the human resource.

Other models are possible as well… But, we know that managing volunteers is <u>not</u> similar to managing salaried employees and requires a unique professional practice. Therefore, management of the scholarship students in a sensitive manner, which recognizes that their work is <u>unlike</u> paid employment, will, in my opinion, yield significant future benefits – both in terms of motivating them while on the job and in shaping their future civic identity.

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