



What organisational factors affect volunteering?

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This study aimed to shed light on the organisational factors affecting volunteers that were previously captured in academic literature.

The authors systematically analysed abstracts of 396 publications tackling volunteer coordination from different scientific disciplines and research traditions.

The study resulted in a holistic analytical framework for future research endeavours. Instead of definite conclusions, the publication provides a starting point for practitioners willing to reflect on gaining, orientating, retaining, and organising volunteers in their formal organisation.

[#Volunteer](#) [#Coordination](#) [#Management](#) [#Organization](#) [#Review](#)

Background

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Context



- Most volunteering studies were devoted to unravelling which individuals volunteer and why they volunteer or understanding volunteering in different societal contexts. This study was **the first to provide a thorough overview of characteristics of the organisation that affect its volunteers**, primarily how it coordinates volunteers.
- The study defines volunteer coordination as **gaining, orientating, retaining, and organising volunteers** in their formal organisation to provide for the public good. A quest for books, journal articles, electronic articles and reports, conference papers, PhD and master thesis studying volunteer coordination resulted in 386 pieces. The final of 232 publications written from 1967 to 2011 was used for the in-depth analysis.
- Authors identified three clusters of so far studied organisational characteristics mediating the coordination of volunteers, either explicitly or implicitly. The first cluster of identified organisational characteristics is **volunteer coordination practices and instruments**.
- The second one captures organisational **attitudes toward volunteers** co-determined by social processes between paid staff from the organisation and volunteers, their mutual production of the meaning of volunteering.
- The third cluster gathers different **structural features of the organisation that limit** the possibilities for volunteers and volunteer coordination.

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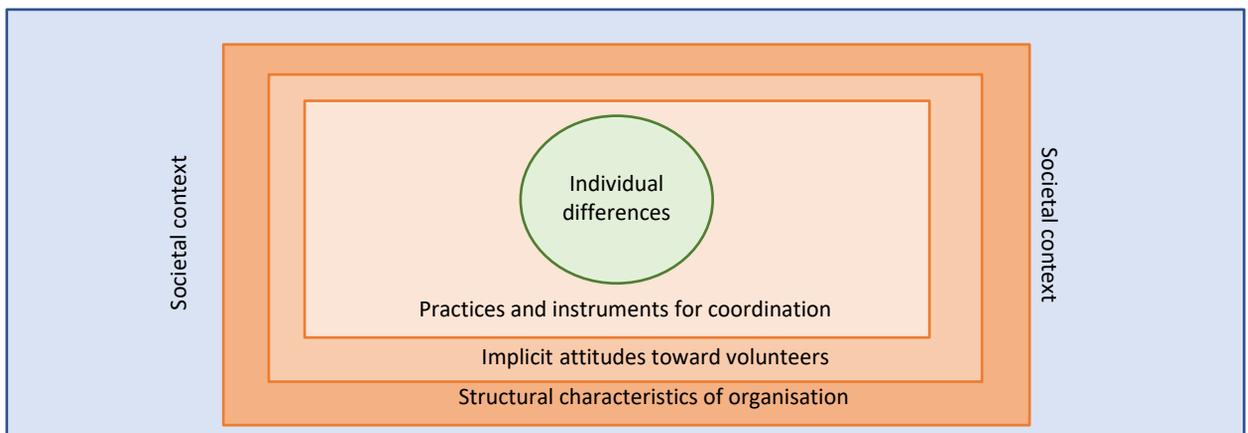
Academic articles on philanthropy through a practitioner lens

Take aways & Learnings



- Many nonprofit organisations adopted human resource management strategies relying on the logic of the profit sector, while some advocate the self-contained ones, depending on volunteers for snowballing. Both strategies have their pros and cons.
- **Volunteer training, ongoing support and contact, providing a choice of activities and defining roles** positively affected volunteers' perceived contributions and personal benefits and commitment.
- **Organisations should rethink if they perceive and treat volunteers and paid staff differently.** Whether volunteers differ from paid staff in the meaning of activities, their motivation, time investment, their career paths. Therefore, organisations can adjust expectations and tasks delegations collaboratively with their volunteers.
- **Integration of volunteers in organisation** by engaging them in decision making process and offering identification tools (branded t-shirts, sense of community) increase chances in retaining volunteers.
- Organisations differ in how many volunteers they can recruit and retain. Several studies that the length of organisational **history, size, number of objectives, flexibility versus strict bureaucracy ment for volunteers, and formalisation of human resource department**, somewhat follow the principle of **“the more the merrier”**. However, some causes are just more engaging (e.g. local community development).

Figure 1. An ecological model of factors affecting (potential) volunteers at three levels. (1) The orange rectangles represent meso-level factors or organisational factors detected in the study. (2) The green circle represents the micro-level and (3) the blue rectangle macro-level.



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