

EVENT VOLUNTEERS AND THEIR LEADERS

Author:

Dag Vidar Hanstad

email:

dag.vidar.hanstad@nih.no

University:

Norwegian School of Sport Sciences

Faculty:

Department of Cultural and Social Studies

Abstract

Volunteers are fundamental for any successful event. Ensuring that the sport event volunteers are managed and appropriated trained and motivated has a direct bearing on their level of satisfaction (Farrell et al., 1998). Human resource management (HRM) is an integral part of the event management process and vital to the success of the event. However, the relationship between event volunteers and leaders has been less empirically explored.

The objective of this paper is to look closer at the relationships between operational volunteers (those working "on the floor") and the supervisory level volunteers (e.g. section leaders) at the 2011 FIS Nordic World Ski Championships (WSC) in Oslo (Holmenkollen), Norway. During 12 competition days there were 21 events, covering cross country, ski jumping and Nordic combined. 2200 volunteers were organized in 36 different sections. In this study attention is focused on one particular section, categorized as support (hereafter Section Support), with 77 volunteers (52 women and 25 men).

Theoretical background

The leader-follower theory, also known as the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) focuses on the interactions between leaders and followers. The dyadic relationship between leaders and followers is the focal point. LMX challenges the assumption that leadership is something leaders do towards all their followers. Instead, there are two general types of linkages; followers belonging to the in-group and the out-group. Effective leadership is found when communication between leaders and subordinates (such as volunteers) fosters respect, mutual trust, and commitment of both parties (Northouse, 2010). LMX

Methods

The data were gathered from (i) a survey sent out to all volunteers by e-mail after the event (n=1337, response rate 62%) which included 58 (response rate 75%) in the Section Support, and (ii) qualitative interviews with volunteers in Section Support (n=12, including 9 operational volunteers and, 3 leaders/coordinators) carried out in the last five days of the event.

In analyzing the data from the survey, two statements were put under scrutiny: one about the leaders' opinion about the volunteers, and one about the volunteers' opinion about the leaders. One sample t-tests were conducted (using the mean of one statement as test value for the other statement), testing the difference between a) statement one and two in the sample as a whole, b) statement one and two in the Section Support, and c) the statement about the leader in the sample versus the statement about the leaders in Section support.

Transcribed interviews were categorized. Segments that had similar themes and represented the same stressor were grouped together.

Results and discussion

In the sample as a whole, the mean value for the leaders' satisfaction with the volunteers (mean = 4.53) was significantly higher than the mean value for the volunteers' satisfaction with the leaders (mean = 4.00); t-value = 16.80 ($p < .001$). In the Section Support, the same tendency was found, higher satisfaction with volunteers among leaders (mean = 4.55) than with the leaders among the volunteers (mean = 3.64); t-value = 5.28 ($p < .001$). Although the t-value was lower in the latter test (probably due to higher standard deviation), the descriptive statistics show an interesting point: the mean value among the volunteers in Section Support reporting their satisfaction with their leaders, was much lower than the mean value for the whole sample of volunteers when reporting satisfaction with their leaders (4.00 versus 3.64), while the leaders' satisfaction with volunteers was approximately the same in the whole sample and in the Section Support (4.53 and 4.55 respectively). Therefore, a t-test between the whole sample and the Section Support was conducted, on the same statement (about volunteers' satisfaction with leaders). It revealed a significant difference (t-value = 11.21, $p < .001$).

The interviews showed differences between the in-group and out-group. A group of volunteers had been working together in several events. One of the section leaders stated that she had developed close friendships with other volunteers. Volunteers who were not part of the in-group felt they were not at the same level. One of them said: "New volunteers were pushed slightly into the background of those who have previously been volunteers in Holmenkollen, or during the trial event. Some volunteers felt significantly more important than others and released no new volunteers for the "fun" tasks, but referred them to cleaning, waffle baking, etc., while they took the tasks at press conferences, etc." Interviews indicated that volunteers in the out-group were less satisfied with their leaders than volunteers in the in-group.

References:

Farrell, J. M., Johnston, M. E., & Twynam, D. (1998). Volunteer Motivation, Satisfaction, and Management at an Elite Sporting Competition. *Journal of sport management*, 12, 288-300.

Northouse, P. G (2010). *Leadership. Theory and Practice* (5. Ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.