

# MORE VOLUNTEERS IN FOOTBALL CLUBS - A METHOD TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

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## Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Volunteers are the most important resource for non-profit sports clubs seeking to bolster their viability (e.g. providing adequate sports programs at a fair price). Although many people already volunteer in sports clubs, an increasing number of clubs experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of volunteers to manage and staff their clubs (Lamprecht, Fischer, & Stamm, 2012). In order to facilitate volunteer recruitment, sport clubs need a specific strategy describing how to recruit and retain volunteers for both formal positions and ad hoc tasks. Therefore a specific intervention method "More Volunteers in Football Clubs" was conceptualized and implemented. The questions this research wants to address are: (1) Can football clubs recruit and retain volunteers successfully by implementing the intervention concept "More Volunteers in Football Clubs"? (2) What are the decision making processes in volunteer management that are taking place within the football clubs that lead to a successful implementation of the intervention concept "More Volunteers in Football Clubs"?

## Theoretical background

Strategies drawn from for-profit management practice to manage and staff an organization cannot easily be transferred to non-profit sports clubs as sports clubs primarily rely on the voluntary participation of its members to maintain viable (Nagel & Schlesinger, 2012). In facilitating volunteer recruitment on the one hand the characteristics of the institution sports club must be considered (Thiel & Meyer, 2009); on the other hand special characteristics of the personnel in sports clubs (motives, expectations of the volunteers) and the facets of volunteer management (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006) have to be regarded. To cater for the need of more volunteers, an intervention was designed based on concepts of non-profit human resource management and organizational development management, with a strong emphasis on club-specific counseling and support. This resulted in a volunteer strategy in which the assets a potential volunteer brings to a sports club as well as the availability is matched with the clubs assignments, hereby generating "winning volunteer scenarios" (Meijs & Brudney, 2007, p. 68).

## Methodology, research design and data analysis

Task forces of the twelve participating football clubs attended four workshops in which they received tailor made counseling to reach the desired number of volunteers. The size of the clubs varied from 150 to 650 members. Five were urban clubs; the remaining seven

were from a rural area. More specifically, the intervention consisted of five steps. First, an inventory of current volunteers as well as a complete list of tasks to be done by volunteers was created. Second, an elaborate communication campaign was launched primarily aimed at improving the image of volunteer work. As third and fourth steps, every club member as well as all the parents of junior players were first informed, and later personally approached by a member of the task force and asked to be a volunteer. As a final step, all new volunteers were assigned to their new task and the planning of measures to retain volunteers was initiated.

To test the effectiveness of the developed intervention, it has been implemented and tested in cooperation with the Swiss Football Federation with twelve Swiss football clubs following a pretest, intervention, posttest design starting at two different dates. The first group of six football clubs started in August 2012 while the second group started in January 2013. The data will be gathered and analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Outcome measurements are: volunteer rate, number of new volunteers, number of filled volunteer positions and volunteer satisfaction. Furthermore, the complexity of the interaction between the (external) intervention and volunteer management in sport clubs necessitates that the complete decision making process is followed and analyzed. Therefore, before, during and after the intervention interviews and questionnaires were implemented to assess which steps proved to be most beneficial in volunteer recruitment and what the underlying processes for the different decisions were. These interviews will be analyzed by means of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010).

## Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

At the time of abstract submission, the intervention of the second group has not yet finished. However, all clubs that have already completed the proposed intervention were successful in recruiting the desired number of volunteers. Further, all participating clubs of the first group found the intervention helpful and would recommend other clubs to participate as well. With the development of this practical intervention a solution for football clubs is provided to overcome the difficulties in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of volunteers.

## References

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