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Working Paper Series

The Dilemma of Judging Volunteers: The Recruitment and Selection of Unpaid Workers

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Working Paper No. 142

November 2008

**The Dilemma of Judging Volunteers:
The recruitment and selection of unpaid workers**

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper provides an insight into the recruitment and selection of volunteer workers and draws comparisons between paid and unpaid workers to assess the implications of the findings for the management of volunteers.

Design/methodology/approach

A triangulated research design was adopted, which involved a series of qualitative interviews of managers and volunteers, in conjunction with a postal questionnaire of volunteers across twelve case study sites.

Findings

The findings show that the effectiveness of the recruitment and selection process is undermined by a lack of formality and supporting resources. This brings about questions concerning the reliability, validity, and equality of volunteer recruitment and selection. It also raises further questions about the effectiveness of human resource management for volunteers.

Research limitations/implications

The research was of an exploratory nature and so further investigation is needed to consider the impact of these findings on the effectiveness of volunteer recruitment and selection and more general HRM performance issues.

Practical Implications

This research highlights the existing practices in place for volunteer management so raising issues for managers regarding the challenge of achieving a balance between informality and the need for formality to address resourcing, performance, and equal opportunity issues.

Originality/value

This research takes a micro-level approach to examining the recruitment and selection of volunteer workers. It provides a link in the literature between the management of volunteers and human resource management practices, of which we currently have inadequate knowledge.

Keywords

Volunteers, HRM, recruitment, selection, UK

Paper type

Research Paper

INTRODUCTION

This paper uses empirical data to illustrate one of the dilemmas evident in the management of volunteers - the difficulty managers have in making judgements about people who work for them on a voluntary basis, particularly involving the recruitment and selection process. It is the purpose of this paper to begin to provide an insight into some of these issues. This is to be done in three stages. The first provides a background to volunteering and reviews the literature regarding the nature of recruitment and selection of volunteers. This is followed by a presentation of results from an exploratory study undertaken to investigate the nature of recruitment and selection processes for volunteers. The paper concludes by comparing the recruitment and selection of unpaid and paid workers and assesses the implications of these findings.

BACKGROUND

Volunteer workers make up an increasing proportion of labour in the UK economy (NCVO 2006) and their growing importance was exemplified when 2005 was deemed as "Year of the Volunteer". Despite an increasing use of volunteers there is a dearth of research and discussion on the 'employment' and management of such workers, particularly in mainstream human resource management (HRM) literature. This paper focuses on the recruitment and selection of unpaid workers because it is known that early experiences with an employer, starting with recruitment, have powerful effects on the psychological contract of workers (Rousseau, 2004). There is little reason to suggest this does not equally apply to both paid and unpaid workers, particularly as employer decisions about the selection of employees are central to the operation of organisations (Wilk and Capelli, 2003).

Volunteering is becoming an increasingly important component of the workforce. Vast numbers of the population are involved in voluntary work at some time in their lives and volunteers make a significant contribution to the workforce in a range of sectors, particularly, but not exclusively, within the voluntary (or not-for-profit) sector, and the public sector (NCVO 2006). Traditionally, volunteering "means any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organisation" (Wilson, 2000:215) and definitions have encompassed three main elements: a gift of time; the element of free choice; and a lack of a payment (Hedley & Davis Smith, 1992). In 2006, it was estimated that 42 per cent of the UK population had been committed to some voluntary activity in the previous 12 months, and an estimated 1.1 million full-time workers would be needed to replace existing volunteers at a cost of approximately £25.4 billion (NCVO 2006).

The focus of this paper is on the management of volunteers and not the voluntary sector as a whole. Volunteers are also referred to as 'unpaid workers', and the terms will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. Despite the rise in importance of volunteers to many organisations, interest in management within the sector is minimal, receiving little attention from management theorists (Batsleer 1995; Cunningham 1999; Hay et al 2001). Where research has been conducted it is largely focused on volunteers' motivations, rather than the management of these 'workers' (Ziemek 2006). Research has shown an increasing move towards formalisation and professionalisation of volunteer management over recent years, particularly since the 1980s (Cunningham 1999; Davis Smith 1996; Kay 1997; Morris 1999). Yet there are also reports of serious shortfalls in management effectiveness in the sector (Kramer 1990; Landry et al 1991), particularly with regards to human resource (HR) practices (Hay et al, 2001). Wilson and Pimm (1996) argue that there needs to be greater understanding of, and capability of, operating an efficient human resources structure. Notwithstanding, any developments towards formalisation have not been adopted without caution, as Davis Smith (1996:187) summarises when discussing whether volunteers should be formally managed:

"Critics have argued that the new management culture imported from the paid workplace is inappropriate and at odds with the culture and values of volunteering."

Davis Smith (1996:198) concludes his discussion by emphasising that neither organisations, nor volunteers, are homogeneous and thus adopting formalised paid workforce systems is only one option; other less formal or bureaucratic approaches are also available:

"Organisations need not abandon management altogether but to choose a style most suitable to the culture and ethos of the agency."

For example, Ambrose & Paine (2006) note that the degree of formalisation is likely to be related to the size of organisation and the number of volunteers involved. In her study of small arts organisations, Kay (1997) cautions that whilst directed management is important, the more formal management processes being adopted by larger scale voluntary agencies in fields such as health and social welfare, may be inappropriate in the case of small community groups.

There is evidently a lack of agreement surrounding the direction that volunteer management should adopt. Much of the disparity concerns the level of formalisation that should be adopted and the extent to which HR systems used for paid staff in the commercial world are appropriate for the management of volunteers. The remainder of this paper will concentrate on the recruitment and selection of volunteers because this is a key area of HRM within organisations that can have serious implications for the successful management of 'employees' – both paid and unpaid.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

The initial process of evaluating staff in the employee resourcing process is through recruitment and selection. This is concerned with identifying, attracting and choosing suitable people to meet an organisation's employee resourcing requirements. In reality, recruitment and selection are rarely separated. The recruitment and selection process is vital to any organisation's success because the consequences of inappropriate recruitment and selection are extensive. These consequences apply equally for organisations using both paid and unpaid workers, and hence it would seem logical that organisations managing volunteers would need to apply the same care and attention to their recruitment and selection process as in the commercial world. This is particularly apt given the pressure towards formalisation and professionalisation of volunteer management and the adoption of 'best practice' from the commercial world (Cunningham 1999).

Models of the recruitment and selection process, such as the dominant prescriptive psychometric approach, identify three stages of specification, recruitment, and selection, which when deployed are said to contribute to a successful appointment (Newell and Shackleton 2000). Based on this approach, each of these stages will be considered to summarise the previous research in this area, and then empirical data used to examine the application of these processes in the recruitment and selection of unpaid workers in a variety of case study sites.

Specification

The prescriptive HRM literature outlines the initial stage of the recruitment and selection process as 'specification' where the nature of the vacancy is established through drawing up a job description and person specification. Wilson and Pimm (1996) suggest the task of recruiting volunteers would be more effective if flexible job descriptions and person specifications were adopted by a greater number of organisations and that a similar approach to that used by commercial organisations would provide a more structured approach to recruitment. Survey evidence indicates that almost two-thirds of employers of paid workers review the job description against the aims of the job (IRS 1996), compared to only 17 per cent of UK volunteers being given a 'job description' for their voluntary work (Davies Smith 1998). Of those volunteers without a job description 27 per cent thought it would be 'a good thing', and 65 per cent were against the idea. This might suggest that a move towards greater formalisation of volunteer management is not necessarily supported by those actually volunteering.

Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of attracting people who might make a contribution to the particular organisation (Newell and Shackleton 2000). For most organisations that use voluntary workers, recruiting volunteers is extremely difficult (Wilson and Pimm 1996). There are two main recruitment challenges: not enough volunteers and not enough of the 'right' volunteers, with the required skills (Gaskin & Davis Smith, 1995; McCurley & Lynch, 1994). Similar problems are reported by organisations recruiting paid workers, with 84 per cent of UK organisations in a recent CIPD survey reporting difficulties recruiting. These organisations most commonly cited a lack of specialist skills (65 per cent) as the key reason for recruitment difficulties (CIPD 2007). Thus, the recruitment challenges faced for both paid and unpaid vacancies appear to be quite similar.

Seeing volunteering as a recreational or social activity, Ellis (1996) suggests that competition for volunteer's time is with other leisure activities rather than paid work. On a similar basis, Fisher & Cole (1993) note that organisations are in competition between each other for volunteers' time and efforts, which equals a tight labour market and only exacerbates recruitment difficulties, particularly in a climate of near full employment.

It has been found that there are few recruitment difficulties for positions where there is "...a definite measurable perk" (Wilson & Pimm 1996:29), and volunteering sometimes brings tangible rewards such as free tickets or discounts on products or services. However, the fundamental difference between recruiting volunteers is that the delivery of benefits are more likely to be of a non-material kind; these intrinsic factors include a sense of achievement, self-actualisation, and quality of working life. Reward is therefore concerned with these intrinsic or self-worth 'feelings' which require satisfaction (Lester and Kickul 2001). The intrinsic benefits of voluntary work led Wilson and Pimm (1996:39) to claim that organisations require a "more than average understanding of what motivates people" when recruiting volunteers.

As with paid staff, there is a range of recruitment methods that may be deployed when recruiting volunteers. These include informal personal contacts such as existing employees; informal grapevine (word of mouth); speculative applications; via membership; formal personal contacts, such as open days, local media, including advertisements and articles; posters and leaflets; notice boards; and specialist external assistance such as the Volunteer Bureaux. Personal contact is a principal route for people to get involved in voluntary activities (Fisher & Cole, 1993) and the most common way for volunteers to have found out about their voluntary work was through family and friends (Gaskin & Davis Smith 1995).

Informal recruitment methods have the advantage of being much less expensive, which might prove attractive to organisations that already have to rely on volunteer workers for their labour. Word of mouth and the encouragement of speculative applications are popular recruitment methods for paid workers in the UK with forty four per cent of employers using this method (CIPD 2007). Wilson and Pimm (1996) outline how word of mouth recruitment can be very effective as the new volunteers are more likely to share the same aspirations, objectives and activities as existing volunteers. However, this assumes that existing volunteers are quality workers, committed to the organisation, and as such, the success of informal recruitment rests on this presumption.

Selection

It is claimed that for credible selection decisions to be made, the criteria against which applicants will be measured should be explicit (Newell and Shackleton 2000). The tools available to determine selection criteria are the job description and person specification. They determine the criteria for selection, and a means by which the organisation's expectations, priorities and values are communicated to applicants. Wilson & Pimm (1996) point out that the recruitment of volunteers may be almost the reverse of procedures typically used to recruit paid staff. Commonly, for a paid vacancy one applicant is selected in preference to others; with voluntary posts it may be "...a question of seeing where a volunteer best fits into the structure and work of the group" (p.29). It could therefore be argued that the nature of voluntary work necessitates some element of flexibility and informality. The selection process for volunteers may therefore in reality be seen as less structured than for paid employees. Volunteers may be seen as unsuitable for one position, but could be involved in the organisation in a way that better fits their skills and experiences, motivations and availability.

Various methods for the selection of employees exist, including application forms, interviews, references, tests, assessment centres, and a trial or probationary period. Sixty six per cent of organisations recruiting volunteers claim to use interviews as their main selection tool (Gaskin & Davis Smith, 1995). This is lower than in organisations employing paid workers, where at least 92 per cent of organisations claim to use selection interviews (CIPD 2007; Newell and Shackleton 2000). However, research into the selection of volunteers has found significant differences between organisations' and volunteer applicants' experiences of the selection methods deployed. While the majority of organisations claim to use selection interviews, only 14 per cent of volunteers claim to have been interviewed for their current post (Davis Smith, 1998).

This may suggest a difference in perceptions: a volunteer's interview may be a very informal undertaking and the applicant may not even realise they are being evaluated. Research has highlighted the dangers of such an approach, concluding that "what is gained in informality is lost in effectiveness" (Taylor 2002: 178).

Other selection methods, such as references and application forms, were used even less frequently for volunteers than interviews (Davis Smith 1998; Gaskin and Davis Smith 1995). This is in contrast to paid employment where 77 per cent of organisations claim they always check candidates' references (CIPD 2007). However, despite recommending the use of application forms and references, Wilson & Pimm (1996) acknowledge that such selection methods may act as a deterrent to potential recruits because of the nature of voluntary work. Some may find it presumptuous of an organisation to question their integrity when they are freely offering their time and skills. Nevertheless, Millar (1994:276) believes that careful selection procedures encourage rather than discourage volunteers by giving "the volunteers the chance of greater job satisfaction and a sense of worth to their organisation".

One of the most difficult elements of selection for those organisations recruiting volunteers is the notion of rejection and may be one of the reasons why organisations are reluctant to use formal selection procedures. However, simply accepting everyone who volunteers can often be counter-productive as inappropriate recruits can have a negative effect on other workers (McCurley & Lynch, 1994; Wilson & Pimm, 1996). Selection, and the associated notion of rejection could be viewed as necessary if organisations are to adopt a more formal and professional approach to the management of volunteers, as suggested by a number of practitioners (Lord & Lord, 1997; Schmidt, 1997). However, as with the recruitment process, the amount of formalisation of selection differs between organisations: larger, national, staffed organisations tend to have more formal procedures than community and local group level organisations (Gaskin & Davis Smith 1995).

This review of the literature has highlighted some of the major issues in recruiting and selecting volunteers concerning the effective deployment of recruitment and selection methods and the role of formalisation in the process. Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to explore the issues of recruiting and selecting unpaid workers in the UK to determine the extent to which formalised HRM policies are applied to volunteers and the potential implications of this. Hence, we raise three questions for this study, which are:

Research Question 1: What are the recruitment and selection methods adopted by organisations seeking to 'employ' unpaid workers?

Research Question 2: To what extent does the recruitment and selection of unpaid workers differ from the recruitment and selection of paid workers?

Research Question 3: What are the implications of these findings for organisations and managers?

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on empirical data investigating the role and management of volunteers at heritage-based visitor attractions in the UK. Although volunteers in heritage make up only a small part of volunteer activities (Davis Smith, 1998a; Gaskin & Davis Smith, 1995), they are an important component of the cultural workforces of many countries (Gaskin & Davis Smith, 1995; Gratton & Richards, 1996; Hjalager, 1996; Richards, 1996). A triangulated research design was adopted, combining both multiple methods and groups of respondents. A series of qualitative interviews were carried out with fifteen managers responsible for volunteers and nineteen selected volunteers at twelve sampled tourist attractions. A postal questionnaire was distributed to volunteers at the same locations [n=107] and these were triangulated with observations and documentation collected at the sites.

FINDINGS

This section will outline the recruitment and selection methods adopted by the case study organisations using the dominant prescriptive psychometric approach. In doing so it will seek to address the first research question: 'What are the recruitment and selection methods adopted by organisations seeking to 'employ' unpaid workers?'

Specification

The organisations in this research project adopted a range of approaches to the preparation of job specifications. Those with the most formalised volunteer programmes had the most conventional job descriptions, written in a format similar to those for paid staff. In contrast, other sites, particularly those with smaller volunteering programmes, took less formal approaches, for example, detailing job description and information about duties in a letter of acceptance and introduction to new volunteers. Other sites relied on a verbal discussion with individual volunteers to clarify the nature of the role. As a result, volunteers were not always clear about the nature of their role within their property. For example, at one site where the job description formed part of an introductory letter, one volunteer remained unclear about her role at the site:

“For 42 years I worked in a very disciplined service [nurse] - it is strange to be occupied in an area where there is no stated role; and I must create my own. I have not been doing it for long enough to feel totally comfortable with that. We shall see!” [Volunteer, *survey*]

Recruitment

Recruitment drives, such as appeals, were primarily used when a new property opened, a new project was begun, or there was a realisation of an acute shortage of volunteers. More commonly, organisations had an ad hoc approach to the recruitment process and relied heavily on word of mouth and speculative applications for recruitment purposes.

The research found that location operated as a constraint on recruitment in a number of ways. Rurally located visitor attractions generally had a small immediate population and were often inaccessible by public transport, thus limiting the pool of potential volunteers. Conversely, urban sites highlighted the problem of strong competition for potential volunteers. An associated problem was concerned with the perceived prestige of different attractions and organisations. The grander sites, especially stately homes and well-known attractions, were associated with prestige and tended to attract greater numbers of volunteers.

Selection

Across the study sites a range of selection methods were in place. As with the private sector, the three most commonly adopted selection methods were written applications, references and interviews. When examining the selection processes used by the case study sites, there were differences in the degree of formalisation. The selection process in large, national organisations had the most formal selection procedures in contrast to smaller, local sites where informality prevailed.

The use of application forms was rarely found. In only two areas of work (cash-handling and working with children) were references seen as anywhere near essential. Yet, many volunteers have privileged access to collections and play an important role in their security and so for some managers, volunteer references were integral to the overall security of the collection:

“...it’s not casting aspersions in anyone’s character. But we do have a duty to the collections so we do have to be careful”. [Custodian, *Interview*]

However, other managers largely ignored the potential security problems an unvetted volunteer could bring, or did not rate them as serious enough to take up references:

“But obviously you don’t know what people are going to be like, it is something you have to be wary of, especially when you’re giving them security capacity, they are looking after your site for you, and we do give them certain duties that could be, you know, leave them open to the ability to be a thief, and you do have to be considering these things, and we do rely on them to control the security to some extent as well, so maybe we should take references, but then they’re only as good as the next thing anyway.” [Visitor Services Manager, *interview*]

Although not all sites used the formal term ‘interview’, face-to-face meetings with the applicant were commonly used as a selection method. It was at this stage of the recruitment and selection process where the highest level of informality was apparent. Some sites did produce clear guidelines for staff concerning their right to reject volunteer assistance:

“A volunteer should only be accepted if there is sufficient work for him/her to do. It is the prerogative of each member of staff to refuse to take on a volunteer... if they do not feel able to meet the criteria laid out in these guidelines.”

Yet, in general, the absence of a job description or guidelines as to what was required of a volunteering job meant that the basis of rejection was often unclear. Even those organisations with volunteer job descriptions tended to treat each case on its individual merits:

“When we first hear from them I normally invite them to come in and have a look round and then I talk to them for a bit,...the way we work, introduce them to the other members of staff, probably spend at least an hour sometimes two hours with them, by then you can usually get a reasonably accurate picture of them, the sort of person they are, whether they are genuine or not.” [Custodian, *interview*]

A lack of selection criteria in many of the case study sites could be attributed to the absence of a job description or person specification. As a result, managers overwhelmingly relied on their own judgement to assess the suitability of candidates for voluntary posts. Managers’ definitions of suitability were linked to the characteristics of the attraction and the volunteering task, rather than the identification of essential skills. This issue was compounded by only a small number of organisations in this research mentioning the role of equal opportunities. One example appeared in a training manual for volunteers:

“In the recruitment of volunteers *Organisation* applies a policy of equal opportunity on the grounds of sex, marital status or ethnic origin. This policy also extends to cover people with disabilities, many of whom are already making a significant contribution to *Organisation’s* work. The only selection criterion, therefore, is your ability to do the job required.”

Nevertheless, the implementation of such a policy remained open to interpretation. A manager of the above organisation defined unsuitably as:

“Well I think if anybody.....didn’t look as if they were going to fit in.” [Property Manager, *interview*]

In the case study sites, the actual selection or rejection of volunteers was seen by managers as being very difficult because of a reluctance to 'judge' applicants for volunteer posts:

"...its a difficult area that, terribly difficult because you know that people are offering their time, and I think there is a certain amount of people thinking 'Well if I'm offering my time its on my terms', but there is a level there, offering their time is not on their own terms, well it is to an extent but then you have to accept the person's terms who is, who I am helping." [Visitor Services Manager, *interview*]

When questioned about rejecting volunteers, many managers' responses were long and complex, attempting to explain and justify their selection decisions, which suggests that they found a fundamental difficulty and dilemma in the idea of selecting or rejecting voluntary assistance. Their approach to rejection was often avoidance; for example, not responding to an offer from someone they perceived as unsuitable. Such an approach was also adopted even after an interview had taken place:

"Well normally I'll have a chat with them and normally I'll say yes, unless I really took exception, and I really didn't think they were suited, I'd probably say I'd put them on a stand-by list, and the years would go by and they weren't asked [*laughs*], and usually I think the message gets home." [Custodian, *interview*]

Those managers who chose or were forced to actively reject were unlikely to be openly honest about an individual's unsuitability. This empirical research has found that selection methods at the case study sites typically involved at least an informal interview, occasionally references and rarely an application form. Meanwhile, a lack of formal guidelines meant that line managers generally conducted the entire selection process independent of specialist HR intervention, which led to informality and inconsistencies in the recruitment and selection of unpaid workers across the case study sites.

DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the findings of the primary research and provide an insight into the second research question: "To what extent does the recruitment and selection of unpaid workers differ from the recruitment and selection of paid workers?". It will initially consider the similarities between the recruitment of paid and unpaid workers, before examining the differences that have been brought to light by this case study research and then move on to the third research question concerning the practical implications of these research findings.

It is clear that the recruitment and selection of unpaid workers holds many similarities to that of paid employees. As with paid employment, organisational size appears to influence recruitment and selection practices. Larger organisations, employing both paid and unpaid workers, were more likely to have established policies and procedures for recruitment and selection. Conversely, smaller organisations were more likely to

recruit irregularly and be inclined to rely on informal methods of recruitment and selection, particularly word of mouth for recruitment and informal interviews for selection. In these smaller organisations, there tended not to be access to well-developed HR functions or recruitment and selection systems, and responsibility was passed to individual line managers. Often these managers had not received relevant training, and tended to have less time and experience to dedicate to HR issues. This supports previous research that has found the degree of formalisation in the management of volunteers to be related to the size of organisation (Ambrose and Paine 2006; Gaskin and Davies Smith 1995). Such a distinction also exists between large organisations and smaller organisations within the private sector (Hay et al 2001; Marlowe 2002; Marlowe and Patton 2002), which might suggest that formalisation of HRM is more closely related to organisational size than a paid/ unpaid worker distinction.

All the case study organisations reported difficulties in attracting volunteer workers, although similar problems are also reported by organisations recruiting paid workers (CIPD 2007). Labour market conditions played a key role in the recruitment of volunteer workers. Smaller, rurally located attractions had the greatest difficulties recruiting volunteers and operated in a tighter labour market than larger, more prestigious sites. However the more well-known sites in urban locations had greater competition between each other for volunteers' time and efforts, which contributed to a tight labour market. Despite this, the majority of organisations in this research study continued to rely on ad hoc methods of recruitment, namely via word of mouth, which while a popular method for the recruitment of paid workers, is not as widespread as with unpaid workers.

The use of selection methods for unpaid workers bore some semblance to the recruitment and selection of paid workers where the 'famous trio' of application form, references, and interview is the prevalent combination of selection methods (CIPD 2007). However, this research found that such methods were generally less widely used with unpaid employees. Organisations which did deploy the 'famous trio' of selection methods tended to be national, large organisations, and even here the approach was of a more informal nature.

The most distinct difference between the recruitment and selection of paid and unpaid workers appears to be in terms of the selection decision. Within the study, selection was largely considered on an individual basis; the criteria on which these decisions were undertaken were rarely explicitly laid down and rejection was based on the perceived 'unsuitability' of the individual. This suggests a lack of formalisation in the

selection process and a reliance on managerial judgement as the sole criteria for assessing suitability. It is in contrast to paid employment where a variety of selection methods are more likely to be used, together with more than one individual being responsible for the selection decision. Such informality with paid workers is more likely to be found in the SME sector (Ram 1994), which again suggests that some of the differences between the recruitment and selection of paid and unpaid workers is more attributable to organisational size than a paid/ unpaid worker distinction.

Managers at the case study sites outlined that selection can be a difficult area in relation to volunteers because of the nature of the volunteering relationship and this is one difference that can be attributed to a paid/unpaid worker distinction. In addition, as many of the case study sites were competing in a tight labour market, managers were even more reluctant to reject volunteer applicants. However, it could be argued that managers of paid workers find the rejection of candidates equally as difficult, although a formal recruitment and selection process, using a standard rejection letter is more likely to be in place, thus minimising any personal requirement to reject candidates. The actual process of the selection decision has not been examined in depth in previous research and is highlighted in this study as being a key area of difference in the recruitment and selection of paid and unpaid workers. It could be linked back to the lack of HR specialist intervention and formalisation of the process, which exacerbates the difficulties managers seem to face in this process.

The remainder of this section will consider the third research question: "What are the implications of these findings for both organisations and managers employing unpaid workers". One issue to consider is whether the lack of formality in the recruitment and selection procedure evident in this research is actually a problem or an issue that employers of non-paid workers need to be concerned with. There are arguments against greater formalisation of HR processes where non-paid workers are involved. Previous research (Davies Smith 1998) would suggest that volunteers would not support a move towards greater formalisation of volunteer management and it may actually deter potential recruits (Wilson and Pimm 1996). Kay (1997) argues that the current ad hoc approach complements the nature of volunteer management, particularly smaller community-based organisations. Nevertheless, the difficulties in attracting and recruiting enough volunteers or volunteers with appropriate skills reported by the case study organisations would suggest that the current informal approaches to recruitment and selection are not particularly effective in resourcing organisations with the required number and quality of volunteer workers that are needed. Therefore, more targeted recruitment akin to methods deployed to attract paid workers might go some way to addressing this problem.

The recruitment techniques adopted by organisations in the empirical research could be termed as either active or reactive methods. Active recruitment, where the organisation positively and *actively* seeks new volunteers, combines both ongoing activities and targeted recruitment drives for a specific purpose, project or shortage. Reactive recruitment can be defined as occurring where contact is volunteer initiated and the organisation reacts. The majority of organisations in this research adopted a reactive approach, relying heavily on personal contacts. It could be argued that the principles of formalised recruitment & selection should apply as much to recruiting unpaid workers as they do to any commercial activities because the recruitment of unpaid workers is subject to even greater challenges than the recruitment of paid workers. Organisations need to consider the issue of volunteer motivation and attempt to offer “a definable measurable ‘perk’” (Wilson and Pimm 1996:29), which appears to help alleviate recruitment difficulties.

More formal methods of recruitment and selection may also yield a more diverse pool of candidates if designed effectively; as such methods would reach a wider community than word of mouth and direct approach methods. This would address equal opportunity issues within the organisations and be beneficial in terms of addressing recruitment problems. Such recruitment techniques could raise the profile of the site thus improving awareness in the community, both in terms of increased visitors and potential volunteers. This would particularly aid smaller, rurally located attractions that appear to have the greatest recruitment problems.

The greatest issue for managers of volunteer workers appears to involve the selection decision process. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which this may be a problem from an organisational perspective – are inappropriate volunteers being recruited because managers are reluctant to reject candidates? Or does organisational image suffer when the tactic of avoidance is deployed and candidates are simply not communicated with? Greater formalisation of the selection process may help to tackle the dilemma managers have in terms of the selection decision.

Considering the evidence from both previous research and this research study, it would seem that the current tendency towards informal HR processes contributes to both the recruitment difficulties organisations evidently face, and the difficulty of the selection decision as outlined by line managers. Such an informal approach to recruitment and selection could cause further problems in the working relationship. All workers, whether paid or unpaid, have a psychological contract. A clearly defined, balanced and equitable psychological contract is essential if the relationship between worker and

organisation is to be based on mutual trust, commitment, stability and co-operation (Sims 1994; Herriot and Pemberton 1995). Therefore, without solid foundations, built during the recruitment and selection process, the psychological contract of volunteers in this study could be compromised, which might lead to problems in organisational performance. Further research would be needed to assess the impact of current recruitment and selection practices on the subsequent psychological contract of unpaid workers and the implications of this for organisational performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Whilst the importance of effective recruitment and selection in the overall management of volunteers is acknowledged in both practitioner and academic literature, Wilson & Pimm's (1996) suggestion that this process is often overlooked was confirmed by this research. In common with previous research, recruitment relied heavily on word of mouth and speculative applications, while interviews were the most frequently used selection method. The effectiveness of selection methods was undermined by a lack of job description and person specification, which meant managers had to rely on their own judgement during this single, often relatively informal, one-to-one meeting to assess the suitability of potential volunteers.

This brings us back to the opening focus of the paper discussing the move towards formalisation and professionalism of volunteer management, whereby it is claimed by some (for example, Batsleer 1995; Cunningham 1999; Davies Smith 1996; Kay 1997; Morris 1999) that there has been the emergence of a recognisable culture of management in the management of volunteers. However, this research would suggest that formalisation of the recruitment and selection process is minimal and limited to large, national organisations. This brings about questions concerning reliability, validity and fairness of the recruitment and selection procedures in place at the case study sites and raises more general questions about the effectiveness of human resource management in the management of unpaid workers and subsequent impact on organisational performance.

Further research is needed to consider the impact of informality on the effectiveness of volunteer recruitment and selection. Therefore research needs to be directed towards assessing the effectiveness of the current propensity to adopt an informal approach to HRM in the management of unpaid workers to determine whether it is a major contributing factor to resourcing problems. This also brings about the question of the impact of these informal processes on the psychological contract of volunteers and effectiveness of HRM. One of the greatest challenges would appear to be achieving a balance between the informality that complements the characteristics of volunteer

management and the need for formality to address management, resourcing and equal opportunity issues.

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