Review

The Challenges for Female Professional Managers in Turkish Women NGOs[1]

Dr. Erhan ATAY
Monash University
erhan.atay@monash.edu
ORCID: 0000-0003-4190-3452
Dr. Habibe ILHAN
hilhanphd@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-8426-3662
Prof. Dr. Serkan BAYRAKTAROĞLU
sbayraktaroglu@hotmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-1430-9442
Fatma ÖZCAN
fatmaozcan02@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-8426-3662

Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand volunteer management practices and to identify challenges for women volunteer managers in a Turkish women NGO federation. Open-ended interviews conducted with fifteen women NGO managers are subject to content analysis. The inquiry shows that there is a negative perception towards voluntary associations in Turkey. NGO work is not considered as professional work. The volunteers are limited by social and cultural boundaries and are unable to take responsibilities as expected by volunteer managers. Analysis furthermore shows it is also difficult to motivate volunteers to work in teams. Women NGOs frequently emphasize universal values, create mentoring among their volunteers, organize project groups for volunteers and meetings to raise awareness of social responsibilities and show sensitivity to the individual and family needs.

Keywords: Volunteer; Management; Women NGO; Volunteer Management.

INTRODUCTION

NGOs are civic organizations, which assume responsibilities such as mediation between the society and the state in the public spaces. NGOs are self-organizing, self-supporting are autonomous social structures between the private and the state. They are the institutions to identify the needs of the society and raise their awareness through democratic means by using their rights and liberties regarding these needs. These organizations are able to direct politics and even state structures in a free and independent manner in the context of today's ethical rules and democracy.

One important issue in NGO research is volunteer management practices and challenges of NGO managers to manage their volunteer resources. NGOs that build their works on volunteering need healthy volunteer management policies and practices to keep their members together, to increase their motivation, to manage their material and spiritual capital, and to collaborate with volunteers in a sustainable way.

Recent years have witnessed an increased interest in the function of voluntary organizations. Some 200 years ago Alexis de Tocqueville has voiced the significance voluntary institutions have in

---

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at International Management and Social Research Conference in Istanbul at 17-19 November 2018.

developing a sense of citizenship and belonging to a greater community (Tocqueville, 1994). Jürgen Habermas has described them as 'more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements' (1996, p.367), that compromise civil society. He also states that they are the individuals' gateway from the private sphere into the public sphere. There is much ambiguity about terminology and definition however most scholars agree on five key characteristics (Salomon & Anheier, 1997, p.9): 1) they are organized institutions; 2) they are private and not belonging to any government entity; 3) they do not distribute profit, however they use their excess income for programs defined in their mission statement; 4) they have their own governing bodies; and 5) they are voluntary associations. It is important to note though that these organizations are often managed by paid professional staff however always include a volunteer component. While these organizations have many names with nuanced differences, such as *nonprofit*, *non-governmental, voluntary* or *civil society organizations*, or are called collectively the *third* or *independent sector*, we can generally define them as institutions that lie outside the perimeter of family, state and market (Salomon & Anheier, 1992). Many times countries in the developing world prefer the term non-governmental organizations (NGOs henceforth), probably due to a sense of legitimacy therefore we will be using the term NGO to designate the organizations we studied. NGOs have been introduced by the United Nations in 1945 (UN Charter, Article 71) as accredited actors for consulting purposes. While at the time these actors were exclusively international, that clause was removed in 1996 (Martens, 2002). Simmons (1998, pg.83) cites a definition from a UN document stating that a NGO is;

(a) Non-profit entity whose members are citizens or associations of citizens of one or more countries and whose activities are determined by the collective will of its members in response to the needs of the members of one or more communities with which the NGO cooperates.

For the purpose of this study, we consider NGOs as civic organizations, which assume responsibilities such as mediation between the society and the state in the public spaces. They are the institutions to identify the needs of the society and raise their awareness through democratic means by using their rights and liberties regarding these needs. These organizations are able to direct politics and even state structures in a free and independent manner in the context of today's ethical rules and democracy.

One important issue in NGO research are volunteer management practices and challenges of NGO managers face. NGOs that depend on volunteering need tenable volunteer management policies and practices to maintain member base and increase their motivation, to manage material and spiritual capital, and to collaborate with volunteers in a sustainable way.

As to the region where the study was conducted, Turkey is located between Asia and Europe carrying cultural and social similarities of both continents. The majority of the Turkish population is Sunni Muslim, nevertheless it is the only secular democracy in the Middle East region. The major goal of the Turkish Republic at the beginning of 20th century was to developmental and modernize its institutions mirroring western institutions. However, deeply rooted conventions such as culture, traditions and social perceptions about the role of women and their participation in social life cannot be easily transformed. This case study aims to understand volunteer management practices and challenges for volunteer managers of women NGOs, by studying a Women's Associations Federation in Turkey.

1. WOMEN NGOs in TURKEY

Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Turkish Republic, wanted to establish a new society with a modern culture starting by giving more rights and freedom to women. He aimed to end the traditional roles reserved for women and expected them to be equal with men.

In the years between 1950-1980, women have organized around two ideologies apart from feminism. These are Kemalism, and socialism from the mid-1970s. An association called the Turkish

Women's Union was established in 1949. The aim of this union was to segue Turkish women from their traditional dress style to a modern or westernized fashion. Another association founded in 1949 is the Association of Profession of Women. This association was established to express Kemalist principles and reforms to the society and especially to women. In the 1970s, there were 27 associations whose aims were to preserve Kemalist ideology. While to this day Turkish women are not very civically active, the number of women participating in civil society movements is increasing. Despite this increase, only 2.5 percent of women in Turkey are members or volunteers in NGOs (Çaha, 2005). It is crucial to understand reasons for this low participation rate in Turkish Society.

1.2 Volunteerism and Volunteer Management

The most important sources of NGOs are their members and volunteers. NGOs are considered as robust and resourceful when they have a high number of dedicated members and volunteers. NGOs have to manage professional managers, members, and volunteers as their human resources. Professional managers are those who work for salaries in any company for profit purposes. Members participate in activities and meetings held monthly or at regular intervals of the association, and may also have a say in the management. The volunteers are those who have no compulsory grounds for participation, who only participate in activities with a social responsibility conscious. The individual is a service-loving service competent, and it is called volunteerism (Palabıyık, 2011; Sevindi, 2006; Yaman, 2003).

 While volunteers are not paid for their work, they help each other or help fulfill the social needs and in this way both win a lot. Volunteerism contributes to person's development and satisfaction. There is no official agreement linking them to the non-governmental organization. Therefore, they cannot be forced to do any work. What motivates them is the pleasure they have for doing useful things. The most important factor for volunteers to continue their activities is their motivation (Coşkun, 2006; Dinçer, 1996).

The below activities can be applied to volunteer management process: 1-Determining the works to be done in the organization and planning in this regard (Akatay, 2008). 2-Finding new volunteers and join volunteers for the work of NGOs so that they can continue their work consistently (Akatay, 2008; Sarıkaya, 2011). 3-Making various programs for induction of newly participated volunteers (Yaman, 2003). 4-Assigning tasks to the volunteers according to their abilities (Argüden, Yılmaz, Ilgaz and Pınar, 2006; Betil, 2010). 5-Ensuring that volunteers receive training on volunteerism, social and social benefits (Yaman, 2003). 6-Registering the activities done. 7-Evaluating the activities done by volunteers (Coşkun, 2006). 8-Providing rewards in various forms (Karataş, 2015).

2. METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative phenomenological research. The aim of the phenomenological research is to understand a "lived experience" of a phenomenon. Interviews are used for data collection in order to understand women manager's descriptions of their experience. This technique is a method of observation that gives flexibility and depth to both the researcher and interviewee (Karatas 2015; Karasar, 2012; Punch, 2011; Baş & Akturan, 2008).

Women's Associations Federation is an umbrella non-governmental federation, carrying out activities since 2012. 24 associations from six different cities are within the federations' structure. Their aim is to raise awareness of women's rights issues in the public sphere, develop projects for disadvantaged women and provide educational assistance and scholarship to children. The associations under WAF have an average of 500 volunteers. Their activities are mainly focusing on disadvantaged regions of metropolitan cities. 15 women association managers were interviewed, of whom all are university graduates and four have master's degrees. Age ranges between 30-45. Their average experience in NGO related jobs is 11 years.

The interviews were held in 2016. Each conversation lasts between 2 to 3 hours. The interview process was finished in three weeks and was followed by transcription. Two researchers read the text separately and created codes on an individual basis. After that, individual codes were compared and reduced to five common codes.

Table 1. Codes and Definitions

	Codes	Definition	Example
1	**Negative overview of NGOs**	They are non-profit organizations, compromised of individuals to meet the needs of the community (Akatay& Yelkikalan, 2007	NGOs are considered as the institutions to meet the needs of the poor, and their activity areas are not fully known. (Manager 15)
2	**The perception of a volunteer manager**	They are the professional managers who can decide the strategic direction.[2]	In our society, the volunteer managers see that their work has not been perceived as a professional one and therefore most of the time, they do not tell what they do. (Manager 10)
3	**Volunteers avoid assuming responsibility**	They may think that the responsibility may tire them more and take a lot of their time	Volunteers are not willing to participate in by making excuses and hiding by the word "volunteerism" (Manager 13)
4	**Challenges in teamwork**	Social aid activities are complete teamwork (Keçecioğlu, 2002).	Today, it is hard to create a team spirit since an individual life is in the forefront. (Manager 11)
5	**Volunteer Motivation**	Activities that bound volunteers to organization	We are forcing ourselves to initiate innovative programs that may attract volunteers more (Manager 12)

Code 1: Negative perception of NGOs

Turkish people's overall perception of civil society is not well developed. Manager 3 states that; 'NGOs volunteer institutions are viewed by the public with very limited knowledge. We have a social structure where people do not ask questions about these organization about their activities and what, why and how these activities are done and care about the answers to these questions. We encounter many men, asking "What do women do when they come together, anyway?" about the women's non-governmental organization, especially when they are trying to do something'. Noting that volunteers are uncomfortable about voluntary activities after they hear criticism such as don't waste your time there, take care of your children, do more overtime, take care of your husband, most importantly your relatives etc. Manager 5 expresses that she has to occasionally do an extensive program for her volunteers and try to motivate them by telling them that this activity is valuable for the community.

'We are noting that the word NGO in Turkey, is a word that induces fear in the general public. During the foundation of the Republic and even in the 80's, the word "organization" has been a name for the gathering to disturb the public peace and organized despite the state. In fact, we are perceived neither as an organization nor an institution. For associations: the word, organization is dangerous,

---

[2] http://panel.stgm.org.tr/vera/app/var/files/g/o/gonulluluk.pdf

and the institution is not an extenuated word. Combining this contradiction in terms with our historical mind codes, we have a hard time to believe that we are doing good deeds'. Manager 4 expresses that they are seeking ways to break this negative perspective in the society.

Code 2: Perception for Volunteer Manager:

Managers 1 and 4 note that; "When people around us asked what we do, it is immediately followed by "what's your real job? When I say, I am a manager in an NGO" then they respond with the following question with sarcasm. "What are you doing over there!" Manager 5 expresses that "Our society must know that association, federation or similar NGOs require a manager and be fully aware that such organizations conduct works and projects that direct the society. We have to express ourselves more for this perception to be created and changed". In this sense, she states that they organize breakfast's tea and breakfast events for meeting and greeting to raise awareness of the immediate vicinity and districts at least, on the NGO in their association.

Another important issue in this code, as expressed by the managers 7 and 8, is the response that they get from their circles about their work as a professional manager in their association. Facing many people, stating "Are you being paid for what you do? How could such a thing happen?" The managers note that for society to understand this, the importance of non-governmental organization needs to be understood. They also expressed that members of associations have a negative view of paid managers. Manager number 9 notes that she has to tell that she does not get paid due to such reactions.

Code 3: Volunteers avoid assuming responsibility

It is observed that volunteers are timid and distant about taking responsibility. "Since volunteers here are women, they think about their domestic work, childcare and workload at their jobs, and therefore they hesitate to assume workload in the association and do not act willingly in the division of labor. Marital status, the level of education and age factor are effective for participation in social responsibility projects. It has been noted that women, who are college graduates and parents, constitute the applicant base for such activities; and they try to participate in the projects which have an aim to meet the education and mandatory needs of especially young people and children by empathizing their own children. "Having limited permission from their partners young women have a hard time to participate in our association's activities. The biggest problem for us is to create a common time slot to suit all of us. "As expressed by Managers 5 and 7, evening and weekend activities are very hard to organize and they turn into a crisis, especially in out of town and international projects.

Managers 1, 3 and 8 noted that volunteers turn away from the association and its activities when they start thinking that the charity they collected are not spent efficient and purposively, and the time they spent in the association is not of the anticipated quality. Negative interactions between manager and volunteer insinuate feelings of not being useful for the association. Another issue maintain volunteers is related to the level of belonging to the organization. When volunteers are not fully aware of the mission and vision of the association, they often have a hard time to take responsibility. This is common, especially for new members.

Code 4: Challenges in teamwork

Manager 11 stated that "the main reason for unsuccessful team-work is the lack of trained on being organized. Having always worked individually at our jobs and in school reflects on our social life".

Managers 2, 5, 4 and 9 have expressed the following about the teamwork: "We may experience disorder in times when we expect our members to organize among themselves. The volunteers are usually thinking of doing what is necessary on an individual basis, and we are required to do the

division of labor one by one in groups that we create. It is of a great significance for our volunteers to have the reflex of creating teamwork and organize in an emergency".

Code 5: Methods for volunteer motivation

"How many ways are there to motivate the volunteers?" was answered as "It differs according to the nature of every person". As a result of the interview, it is observed that female managers have the following agenda for motivating the volunteers.

Table 2. Methods for Volunteer Motivation

Making sure that all time of volunteers is used in a qualified way

We try to inform our volunteers of weekly, monthly and annual plans and have them include association programs into their agenda and try to satisfy the volunteer that her time will not be wasted

Reminding the universal values

We prepare reminder program about values such as peace, love, respect, sacrifice, altruism, brotherhood, helping, sharing, searching and finding the people in need and helping them.

Bringing together the people who have the exemplary life stories:

It is one of the most important motivating factors to bring together the volunteers with the people with a high NGO-conscious and meet them with concrete examples and listen to their life stories, show the spiritual pleasure that they get from their activities.

To meet them with the people in need, which drives them to help:

It is of importance to help volunteers to gain the awareness about the necessity to help the right people at the right time and revive the sense of helping.

Surveying the needs and issues of the society:

We try to identify the social needs of the region that we live in together with the teams of volunteers. In this way, the volunteers act as a project coordinator.

Providing training and seminars to increase the social responsibility awareness:

We provide training on the level of education of the people, economic problems, the status of the youngsters, and social activity area of the children, environment pollution, neighborhood relations, and regional reflections to the domestic problems in the area where association carries out activities.

Engaging with other volunteers:

We organize meetings and trips to bring together the volunteers with other volunteers who engage in activities in the NGOs and have social responsibility awareness like them on the regional, domestic and international basis from time to time.

Ensuring that former volunteers mentor new volunteers:

One of the best learning methods is to express or teach others what we learn to keep it in the long memory. We make sure the establishment of mentorship relations by matching up the former volunteers with the new ones.

Remembering them on their special occasions by taking care of their families:

The volunteers sometimes have family problems and education of their children and feeling themselves as worthless. We try to solve the problem of our volunteer by personally talking with our friends who could solve such problem through the existing social network between our members and volunteers. Furthermore, we try to be with them in their red-letter days such as birthdays, marriage anniversaries, births and weddings and at days of sorrow such as disease, accident or death.

3. CONCLUSION and COMMENTS

Our analysis concludes that unfortunately negative views towards the women's associations in Turkey prevent the full emergence of the real mission of these associations. If these associations want men to understand the scope of their contribution to solving societal problems projects that allow men to participate need to be developed.

 Also, awareness about the necessity of professional volunteer managers needs to be raised. Women working at NGOs and society in general underestimate and underrate the work they perform. While they perform serious tasks and generate public benefit outcomes, their occupation is considered as a leisure activity, or as extra work. Volunteer management needs to develop into a professional job that provides pay for full-time managers and employees.

People in the NGOs have to learn to work together and act as a whole. The greatest characteristic that brings them together is to think and act together. In general terms, it is required to create small workgroups, to develop and cooperate as teams in the social life, family life and the education system.

NGOs evoke negative opinions, especially in the generation x. It is observed that today's societies further develop with the NGOs that consist of members that come together to positively contribute to the life of the people with their material and spiritual savings, who do not expect everything from the state and have a high awareness level.

The non-regular work of civil society affects the institution and its image negatively. The necessary time allocations for activities have to be planned in advance and time-frame for activities have to be clearly set out.

Social assistance activities, especially in childhood, enable children to gain awareness. Organizations that encourage voluntarism from childhood should be fostered. One major constraint in women's NGOs is limited time. This is equally relevant for employed and unemployed women. It could be solved by working women with the weekend and evening meetings, however it is very hard for women with children to participate in NGO activities. It is required to employ people that may care for the children and work in the certain time period. In general terms, non-working women have a hard time to participate in the events for they have an excessive workload in the house and they have a limited green time, allowed by their husbands from time to time. If we combine two cases for working and non-working women, we experience crucial problems about finding the time frame for a common activity. Especially for married women, it is required to create projects and programs that their husbands can join in. Their husbands have to be informed in a persuasive manner on the social

value of the activities of the organization. For women with children, children's clubs have to be established for their children to engage in a social activity according to their age groups.

Especially financial misuses weakened the reflexes of people to help and donate. However, NGOs have to convince people about their honesty for they are the institutions that maintain their activities with the donations that they receive. Associations have to announce their financial income and expenses in a transparent manner.

If volunteers avoid assuming responsibility, the different ways may be used to engage them in the activities. First of all, to increase the organizational commitment; they can meet with the founder members and volunteers, who fulfill the duty willingly and adopt the mission and vision and foundation phases of the organization. There may be reminding events of the previous activities and go into their details, the volunteers who participate in such activities may tell these activities. New participants can participate in the activities as an observer without any responsibility and take small duties in the next activity by showing that the workload is not so heavy. It is required to identify any negativities that the volunteers had in the past for them not to take duty in the NGOs, and show effort for them not to have the same incidents.

Breakfasts, historical trips, and picnic and so on may create sincere environments for synergy that help them know each other in a dialog developing and qualified manner between the volunteers. Groups have to be created for volunteers to be organized themselves according to their qualifications by starting from the small activities for them to work in groups and the number of such groups has to be increased by referring positive examples in such activities.

Women's NGOs in Turkey have many obstacles to overcome even though they are established with a high vision and objective and have motivated employees and volunteers. They have to row against the tide by fighting problems such as perception of an organization that they face of closure at any moment and act against the official discourse and the role of housewifery, traditionally imposed, cultural pressures and motivating the volunteers. Turkey, as a Muslim country, transformed itself from a tradition orientation nation to westernization from Ottoman Empire period to today. It was one of the first countries who gave rights to women being elected as Member of Parliament and political participation in 1934. However traditional roles imposed on women is still strong. It will be not an easy work to overcome such issues in the short term. The general perception of Turkish population needs to be developed about NGOs and female roles in society. This has to be done through continuous collaborative education with state and civil society.

REFERENCE
Akatay, A. (2008). An educational solution to human resources problems of voluntary organizations. *Çanakkale On Sekiz Mart University Entrepreneurship and Development Journal,*3(1), 117-139.

Argüden, Y. Ilgaz, P. (2006). *NGO management*. Istanbul: Ar-ge Danışmanlık Yayınları.

Baş, T. Akturan, U. 2008. *Qualitative research methods with Nvivo 7.0*. Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.

Betil, I. (2010). Civil society, social capital and social entrepreneurship. *Çanakkale On Sekiz Mart University Entrepreneurship and Development Journa*l, 5 (1), 21-25.

Çaha, Ö. (2005). *Civil society and democracy*. Istanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları.

Coşkun, A. (2008). *Performance management in NGOs*. Ankara, Seçkin Yayınları.

Coşkun, A. (2006). A new approach to NGOs strategic performance management: Performance scorecard, *Civil society*, 4 (15), 103-117.

Karasar, N. (2012). *Scientific research methods: concept, principles, and technics*. Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım.

Karataş, Z. (2015). Qualitative research methods in social sciences. *Social Service E-Journal*, 1, 62-80.

Keçecioğlu, T. (2002). *Team architecture and texture*. Istanbul: Literatür Yayıncılık.

Martens, K. (2002). Mission impossible? Defining nongovernmental organizations. Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 13(3), 271-285.

Palabıyık, H. (2011). An explanation on voluntarism and voluntary participation in local services. *Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 9 (1), 87-114.

Salamon, L. M., & Anheier, H. K. (1997). The third world's third sector in comparative perspective. Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Policy Studies.

Sarıkaya, M.(2011). *Volunteer management and management in social service organizations*. Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık.

Simmons, P. J. (1998). Learning to live with NGOs. Foreign policy, 82-96.

Punch, K. F. (2011). *An introduction to social research, quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi.

Yaman, Y. (2003). Volunteer psychology and volunteer management. *Journal of civil society thought and research*, 1 (2), 99-107.