

UBICOOL - FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Helena Alves

ABSTRACT

Recruitment and management of volunteers in non-profit organizations is a fundamental activity in increasing these organizations' capacity and one that can benefit considerably from applying marketing principles. However, these organizations are found to have difficulty in applying marketing principles due to the lack of capacity in this professional area. This article aims to draw a parallel between theory and practice based on the literature in this field and the case study of CooLabora in its activity of university volunteerism - UBICool. The case study shows that many of the principles suggested by theory are applied in this specific case, although often informally and unplanned, and so recognizing the positive and less positive factors can contribute to future improvement with benefits for the organization, volunteers and society.

Keywords: Volunteers, Non-profit Organizations, Case Study, Marketing

JEL Classification: M31

1. INTRODUCTION

The non-profit sector is increasingly important in the economy. In a study of the Portuguese non-profit sector compared to that of other countries, Franco et al, (2005) showed that in 2002 the sector had expenditure representing 4.2% of Gross National Product and involved the efforts of a quarter of a million workers.

The non-profit sector is taken to mean non-State organizations whose primary aim is not commerce or profit creation. They are self-governed and people can freely join or support them through volunteerism (González et al, 2002; Andreasen and Kotler, 2008).

Although the importance of strategic marketing thinking for non-profit organizations is recognized academically (Bruce, 1995; Gonzalez, Vijande and Casielles, 2002; Sargeant, Foreman and Liao, 2002; Macedo and Pinho, 2006), there is little consensus as to how to carry it out, since these organizations have the task made more difficult by being directed to various targets (Rothschild, 1979; Pope et al., 2009). On one hand, the actions of non-profit organizations are directed to target publics from whom a change in behaviour is wanted, but simultaneously these organizations need to attract volunteers and funding, and so they have to draw up different marketing strategies according to their target public.

Therefore, one of the main marketing challenges these organizations face is recruiting and holding on to volunteers. This article will focus on that aspect, based on the case study of CooLabora_{CRL} – Consultancy and social intervention cooperative, and the volunteer group UBICool – University Volunteerism. Firstly, the concepts of marketing in the non-profit sector will be approached considering the specificities of this sector. Then the focus will be on the importance of volunteerism for these organizations and the marketing approach to acquiring and retaining volunteers. Next, the case study of CooLabora and the volunteer group of UBICool will be analyzed, attempting to find out how theory and practice come

together and also the possible improvements for a successful partnership for the actors involved and society as a whole.

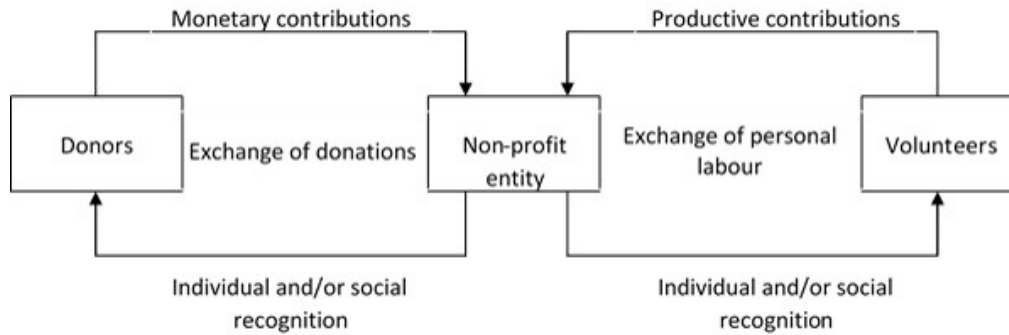
2. NON-PROFIT MARKETING

Various characteristics make marketing in the non-profit sector different from marketing in the for-profit sector. As stated by Rothschild (1979) and Andreasen and Kotler (2008), non-profit organizations “sell” a “product” that is very intangible and difficult to convey through communications, one which is often associated with collective benefits, with it being difficult for the individual to perceive any personal benefit. Another characteristic is the fact that the demand for that “product” is often non-existent. In addition, whereas in the for-profit sector, price is based on monetary cost, in the non-profit sector this does not happen as often this does not even exist. It is therefore non-monetary costs that are considered in the price, but these can be considered costs for some and be considered as benefits by others.

Difficulties in terms of segmentation and the very management of the marketing-mix can be mentioned (Rothschild, 1979; Andreasen and Kotler, 2008). While the segmentation process in the for-profit sector aims to select the most attractive markets, in the non-profit sector this usually has to be directed to the least attractive sectors of a society, for the latter to function correctly as a whole. Moreover, speaking of management of the marketing-mix, it is easily understood that in the non-profit sector these tools cannot easily be altered to accompany customers’ wishes, unlike what happens in the for-profit sector.

Another difference between these two types of organizations derives from the target publics they have to serve. According to Bruce (1995), non-profit institutions have several types of customers. Final customers and intermediate customers (all those who contribute to the institution’s operations, but cannot be seen as principle customers), with direct customers being further divided into beneficiaries, supporters, stakeholders and regulators. And according to Kara, Spillan and DeShields (2004), each of these customers needs a differentiated marketing strategy. For Chías (1995a), in non-profit institutions there are exchange processes parallel and complementary to those carried out with customers, donation exchanges (between the organization and its donors) and labour exchanges (between the organization and its volunteers), as can be observed in Figure 1. The first type of exchange is based on the fact these organizations have donations as their only or partial source of finance, whether they come from sympathizers, patrons, sponsors or others. In turn, the second type of exchange, that of personal labour, derives from the fact that these organizations are totally or partially managed by volunteers. So the marketing of these organizations not only needs to be directed to their beneficiaries, but also to their sources of both capital and labour (Padanyi and Gainer, 2004).

Figure 1– Capital and labour exchanges in the non-profit sector



Source: Adapted from Chías (1995a: 62-63)

Nevertheless, as yet there is little evidence of how marketing strategies are developed and how they should be developed according to these different target publics. If in the private sector, the first and priority target public is the organization's customers because the organization's financial survival depends on them, in the non-profit sector this is not so linear, as the direct beneficiaries of the organization's service are not always those who bring financial resources, and as such it is difficult to predict and prioritize marketing actions (Padanyi and Gainer, 2004).

One of the main problems faced by non-profit organizations is understanding what motivates people to work voluntarily for them, as this variable contributes critically to the creation of capacities in these organizations (Penner, 2002). While employee recruitment lies typically in the sphere of human resource management, the recruitment of volunteers can benefit considerably from marketing considerations (Andreasen and Kotler, 2008). Also in this field there has been considerable development with studies carried out since the 1970s, including those by Tapp and Spanier (1973) and Howarth (1976), but also in the 1980s (see for example, Henderson, 1981 and Philips, 1982), 1990s (see for example, Farrell, Johnsto and Twynam, 1998 and Anderson and Shaw, 1999) and 2000s (see for example, Raman and Pashupati, 2002, Stamer, Lerdall and Guo, 2008). Generally speaking, these studies conclude that the main motivations to work voluntarily are above all altruism, the feeling of belonging, social recognition and personal learning and development. Compiling the different empirical evidence found in the literature, Wymer and Starnes (2001) proposed an explanatory model of volunteers' behaviour based on personal influences such as self-esteem, values and beliefs, the stage in the life-cycle and personal experiences; on inter-personal influences such as having friends/acquaintances who are volunteers, social norms and the influence of parents who are volunteers; on attitudes towards the organization, its mission and its customers; and also on situational factors such as time, geographical distance and the feeling of security versus insecurity in voluntary service.

Andreasen and Kotler (2008) state that the main benefits perceived by volunteers are: gaining career-related experience, enhancing self-esteem, reducing negative feelings, strengthening social relationships, learning more about the world, and expressing important values such as humanitarianism. Then again, the main barriers to becoming a volunteer are a too full personal schedule, being too young, lack of transport, not knowing how to become involved and not having the necessary skills.

By understanding these factors, non-profit institutions could improve their process of recruiting and retaining volunteers, with it being important that marketing strategies tie in with their motivations and expected benefits. However, Chinman and Wandersman (1999) also warn about having to take into consideration volunteers' possible costs and barriers so that these can be tackled in marketing messages.

Wymer and Starnes (2001) claim that at the first stage it is very important to define the profile of volunteers to be recruited, as well as the duties they will perform, so that volunteers with the appropriate skills will be taken on. Furthermore, besides understanding volunteers' motivations, it is also important to have appropriate supervision, information, social support and rewards for voluntary work, to achieve success and keep volunteers motivated. At a later stage it is also important to assess the process.

3. CASE STUDY

3.1 Methodological aspects

To carry out this study, the case study technique was chosen. According to Yin (1989), the case study involves intensive analysis of a relatively small number of situations, and sometimes only one case is studied. Emphasis is given to complete description and understanding of the relationship of factors in each situation, whatever the numbers involved. According to Yin (1989), use of the case study method aims to explore, describe, illustrate and explain different phenomena. Although frequently used together with other research techniques, to complement and connect the subjects of study, it cannot be considered a sub-component of another method. It is therefore a method with its own merits and can be used on its own.

According to Stake (1995), case study strategies can be direct interpretation, whereby through observation the researcher draws some considerations and makes an analysis and direct synthesis of the phenomenon, without any data aggregation; or aggregation of circumstances, through which the researcher in certain cases can feel the need to aggregate the data collected for better understanding of the phenomenon under study. Here, the latter strategy was used, i.e., that of aggregation, considering various sources of secondary and primary information. Therefore, in secondary terms, information was gathered through brochures, web pages and official documents of Coolabora, highlighting among them "Coolkit – Games for Non-Violence and Gender Equality" and the questionnaire drawn up by Coolabora to understand the motivations of volunteers associated with university volunteerism. In terms of primary sources, a semi-structured interview was held with one of the persons in charge of the initiative. As Stake (1995) claims, the aim of interviews is not to obtain yes or no answers but rather the description of an episode, a link between facts and an explanation. Therefore, one of the main advantages of using interviews is the fact that the questions are open, with no restrictions on the answers, i.e., the study can be of a more exploratory nature. Indeed, one advantage of using the interview is that the interviewee can more easily relate unique experiences and situations gone through, something which is only possible through oral presentation.

Since this is a case study, the aim is not to arrive at any kind of generalization, but rather explore the phenomenon and show how it can be explored in the light of theory.

3.2 Coolabora

According to the information contained on the website of Coolabora (Coolabora, 2015a) and in its statutes "Coolabora is a cooperative of consultancy and social intervention created in 2008 whose mission is to contribute to the development of people, organizations and the territory, through innovative strategies to promote equal opportunities, civic participation, education, training and social inclusion".

According to its action plan for 2010 (Coolabora, 2010), its spheres of intervention are centred on consultancy for public and private entities "aiming to support their organizational development through providing technical support, project conception, strategic development plans and assessment plans" and Social Intervention "so as to contribute to a more united

and cohesive society through implementation of actions to include the most disadvantaged groups”.

Its financial sustainability is ensured by public and private funding and also capital resulting from consultancy services, and part of its services is to provide innovative methodology to elaborate social intervention studies and projects, the preparation of applications to financing programmes, management support, and accompanying and evaluating projects. Its service provision regarding consultancy also extends to organizational development in terms of assembling and developing networks and partnerships, production of reception and procedure manuals, consultancy in quality certification processes and development of organizations’ social responsibility. In the field of training, CooLabora is a training entity accredited by DGERT – Department of Employment and Labour Relations, providing services related to the elaboration of training plans in various fields, such as inter-personal relations, motivation and leadership, group dynamics and teamwork, but also training plans for IPSSs (Social Solidarity Institutions) and social intervention professionals in areas such as strategic planning, and preparing applications, inter-personal relations and conflict management, activities in old people’s homes and day centres, among others. CooLabora also provides services in organizing events and activities, namely seminars, congresses, workshops and entertainment activities in institutions supporting senior citizens.

Its partnerships are very diversified, including both public and private agents, highlighting schools of various levels of education from nursery to university, community councils, local authorities and public services, private companies, local development networks and also several international partnerships.

Its intervention is above all in the following areas:

- Social entrepreneurship, in which initiatives are developed to promote entrepreneurship, such as training for the creation of micro-firms, stimulating entrepreneur networks, projects to promote young entrepreneurship and encouraging Job-Seekers’ Mutual Help Groups (GEPE). Within this area of intervention, responsible, humanitarian consumption is also promoted, through collaborative consumption platforms and exchange fairs using social currency.
- Domestic Violence and Gender Equality, carrying out actions aiming to alert to and prevent domestic violence, with a support office for victims of domestic violence providing psychological support, referral to the appropriate bodies and legal information; promotion of mutual help groups; accompaniment of aggressors; holding pedagogical activities on the subject in schools; and organizing awareness initiatives. In this line of intervention, gender equality is also promoted through training actions, awareness sessions, debates and campaigns, drawing up and developing plans for equality and production of pedagogical material.
- Social inclusion of socially and economically vulnerable children and young people. Here, the organization promotes young entrepreneurship, non-formal education, runs a Digital Inclusion Centre, organizes parental training workshops, stimulates local partnerships and provides vocational guidance for young people.
- Volunteerism, developed through drawing up volunteer programmes, running volunteer groups, promoting training, volunteer participation in seminars, workshops and other events on gender equality and non-violence.

The case study focuses on the last sphere of intervention, promoting volunteerism through the UBICool initiative.

3.3 UBICool – University Volunteers

The UBICool initiative was born in 2011 (Figure 2) in the scope of the European Year of Volunteering and Active Citizenship aiming to challenge students at the University of Beira

Interior (UBI) to hold activities promoting a culture of peace and non-violence in schools in collaboration with CooLabora. The voluntary action “centres on encouraging pedagogical games in school playgrounds, with a view to preventing problems such as bullying or violence between boyfriends and girlfriends, and strengthening pupils’ capacity to solve conflicts without resorting to violence” (CooLabora, 2015c).

Figure 2 – UBICool Logo



Source: CooLabora (2015b)

To analyze this initiative, it will be set in the circumstances that led to its emergence, its orientation towards the target public, its operation, the underlying processes and the communication channels and strategies used to publicize the voluntary action.

So beginning with the circumstances motivating the initiative, two types can be pointed out. Firstly, commemorating the European Year of Volunteering and Active Citizenship, in the scope of which various national and international initiatives were carried out, and secondly, the need or problem associated with this initiative – violence at school. According to the national study by Caridade (2009) about the prevalence of violence in romantic relationships, which involved 4.667 young people aged 13 to 29, 25.4% of young people said they had been a victim of at least one abusive action in the last year and 30.6% admitted being the aggressor, with emotionally abusive behaviour being most frequently reported (19.5%), followed by physical abuse (13.4%) and serious physical violence (7.6%). Similarly, the UNICEF (2014) report on violence perpetrated on children reveals that the percentage of adolescents victims of bullying in Portugal, between 2003 and 2013 was 37%, showing the relevance of this type of intervention.

Concerning orientation to the target public, this type of initiative can be said to be directed towards its target public at two levels. Firstly, this is a volunteer action directed to adolescents carried out by young people at the start of adulthood, and therefore it can be noted there was great concern that the initiative should use a type of language that came close to the target public – adolescents, but that it should also have a motivational interest for the volunteers, as the situation is also close to them, and many of them may become involved, especially in violence between boyfriends and girlfriends.

Organization of the initiative was as follows. Initially a collaboration protocol was signed between the University of Beira Interior and CooLabora, as partners in this initiative. Volunteers are recruited directly in UBI by the members of CooLabora, this being done in the first year of the initiative through organizing a seminar in the scope of the European Year of Volunteering and Active Citizenship held on UBI premises with the participation of Elza Chambel, president of the National Council for the Promotion of Volunteerism. In subsequent years recruitment has been carried out with the presence of CooLabora members in classes where students participate, leading to a very positive take-up. To spread the word, initially contact is made with some university lecturers who agree to receive CooLabora members at previously agreed times in certain classes. To carry out voluntary action, the process is quite similar, i.e., after establishing partnerships with the schools where intervention is to

be carried out, teachers responsible for the 5th to the 12th years are contacted in order to organize places and times to perform the initiative.

At the agreed times, members of Coolabora together with the UBI volunteers, who previously received training about the action to be carried out, on the subject of gender equality, as well as in a dramatization, set the action in motion. This consists of addressing the topics analyzed and organizing pedagogical games previously tested by the volunteers. These deal with subjects such as gender stereotypes, violence in romantic relationships, bullying, conflict management and others.

Those games are part of a Coolkit, which is “an educational resource containing a set of entertaining-pedagogical activities (group dynamics, cooperative games, role-playing activities and other techniques) directed towards dealing with gender issues and work on competences for conflict management in adolescents and other young people” (Rojão et al., 2011:11).

Concerning processes, elaboration of the Coolkit involved the collaboration of pupils and teachers at Quinta das Palmeiras Secondary School in Covilhã and Coolabora members. Its conception allowed organization of the results of the experience in this school and creation of an instrument to be shared which can be used by other teachers. Also regarding processes, it is of note that the actions are thought out together with the volunteers, who can suggest new approaches or games to implement.

As for the communication strategies used to publicize the initiative, various actions were developed through several channels. One of the strategies involved producing the initial campaign, carried out by UBI students in the scope of a communication discipline. This strategy allowed an orientation to the target public, as it was carried out from students to students and therefore using a language and appeals that were certainly known and recognized by the students targeted, also allowing the word to be spread by the students involved in its creation. Also used as a strategy were dramatization actions held in the university bars. Regarding communication channels, these were varied, including leaflets about the initiative, the Coolkit, the Coolabora website, posters and email messages to all students from the university itself.

It is also of note that in terms of motivating volunteers, they signed a volunteer contract, officially recognizing the importance of their functions. Whenever possible they attend seminars about violence, together with Coolabora, to present their experience and also help in other events related to violence.

For assessment of the action, this is done informally, but also formally through a questionnaire for volunteers. In that questionnaire, Coolabora evaluates what volunteers enjoyed doing most and the actions in which they most enjoyed participation, as well as the skills the volunteers considered they had developed. As the main competences acquired, the results of the study made by Coolabora point to the development of communication skills, especially with young people, interaction and socializing with others, cooperation, not giving up, self-esteem, appropriate behaviour, openness to others, overcoming obstacles, mutual help, trust, the ability to speak in public and personal development in general.

4. REFLECTIONS ON THEORY AND PRACTICE

In the first part of this article, reference was made to the importance of marketing for non-profit institutions and the difficulty these often have in putting into practice marketing principles that can make their strategies more effective, and more specifically their strategies to recruit and hold on to volunteers.

The case study presented here deals with a university volunteer action born from a partnership between CooLabora and UBI, aiming to recruit volunteers for action in the field of promoting non-violence and gender equality in schools.

The importance of volunteerism for developing non-profit organizations' capacity is widely recognized in various studies (e.g., Brown and Moore, 2001; Eisinger, 2002; Lough et al., 2009), and also by the United Nations (UN Volunteers, 2002). Data from the study characterizing volunteerism in Portugal indicate a rate close to 20% in 2011 (PROACT, 2012), a much lower rate than in other European countries (EVMP, 2011), and so analysis of the strategies used by non-profit organizations related to this subject becomes relevant.

Underlying analysis of the case study was the literature review carried out, above all the studies by Andreasen and Kotler (2008) who mention the motivations and barriers usually found for participating or not in volunteerism, and the study by Wymer and Starnes (2001), who point out various factors to take into consideration in forming these strategies, namely identification of the motivations and barriers to volunteering, definition of the functions and the necessary capacities for successful volunteering; the development of reward and motivation strategies, and the communication channels to use, among other factors; and final assessment of the process.

The analysis showed that in this specific case of the UBICool volunteering action, various factors are taken into consideration, despite some still lacking a degree of formalization. There was concern about identifying the type of volunteer to recruit, in this case young university students, as from their profile they will be more able to communicate with school pupils who look up to them due to being at a more advanced stage of study. According to the elements of the interview with the person in charge of the initiative, the volunteers are above all female. Furthermore, there was also concern about defining the functions to perform, as these are communicated to the volunteers, to the extent of having practice and preparatory sessions before going into the schools.

As for identification of the underlying motivations and barriers, CooLabora is concerned with identifying formally, a posteriori, volunteers' preferences in terms of the activities they most enjoyed and what they liked doing most, and there is an identification of what motivated them to volunteer for the initiative in the first session. Although, no barriers identification is carried on what might have prevented other students from doing so, and so this a factor that should be improved. Nevertheless, CooLabora gathers important information about volunteers' perceptions of the skills they acquired and that can be fundamental information for future campaigns and for motivating volunteers in subsequent efforts. According to the data from the surveys collected by CooLabora, volunteers say they have developed skills of communication, interaction and socializing with others, cooperation, not giving up, self-esteem, appropriate behaviour, openness to others, overcoming obstacles, mutual help, trust, the ability to speak in public and personal development in general. So in future efforts, CooLabora will be able to use this information to attract more volunteers, as these competences are transversal to all areas of study and fundamental for any student's future career. In addition, as a way of extending this effect, CooLabora could also articulate with UBI a form of accrediting these competences, based on a co-curricular programme, similarly to what is done in many other universities worldwide or even integration in a curricular programme based on service learning, as in both aspects empirical evidence of very satisfactory results has been found (Keen and Hall, 2009; Lizzul et al, 2015).

Analysis of the case study also showed there was concern about how the message was conveyed to potential volunteers, namely through creation of the campaign by university students and also the channels used to publicize it, i.e., classes, the internet, leaflets and also dramatization in university bars.

Concerning motivation, there is found to be strong support for volunteers, in terms of both information and training, and support during voluntary actions, as they are always accompanied by members of Coolabora. In addition, recognition of the work done by issuing a volunteer contract is also very positive, as suggested by Wymer and Starnes (2001).

In post-recruitment, it stands out that although Coolabora shows concern about understanding what went well and badly, this procedure should become more formal and be linked to a previous study about volunteers' expectations before recruitment.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on a case study, this article intended to build a bridge between the theory and practice of recruiting volunteers by non-profit organizations, specifically by Coolabora in the UBICool volunteer initiative. That action benefits both Coolabora and UBI. Through it, Coolabora can increase its capacity for intervention and its effectiveness with a very specific target public, pupils in pre-university education, and UBI can provide its students with complementary ways of developing transversal capacities and also strengthen the community and social aspect of its mission.

The case studied shows, without attempting to make any kind of generalization, that non-profit organizations can indeed gain efficiency and effectiveness in their operations by applying theoretical principles of marketing to their actions, and so when those capacities are absent from their institutions they can also be acquired through volunteerism, once again in Win-Win-Win partnerships, with gains for the institution, the volunteer and society.

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