

ISSUES OF HUMAN RESOURCES, MEMBERS OF PROJECT TEAMS IN THE NGOS: A CASE STUDY

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Romanian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have the specialists and the capacity necessary to attract funds from European Union for European integration aim. For this purpose they create and implement different kind of projects (social, cultural, etc.). To create such project it is only needed one or two specialists in writing a project, but to successfully implement one, it is needed a whole special united team, motivated and committed to the purpose. In making this successful team, the project team management confront with a lot of challenges. This paper illustrates, from a human resources perspective, some of the most common issues that a project team manager has to deal with. Using the case study method, this thesis suggests the challenges that the manager has in building the team, creating a united team, motivating the members and solving potential conflicts.

Keywords: human resources, project teams, NGO, voluntary work.

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1.Introduction

In the past decade increasingly European funds were allocated for Romania's integration in European Union, funds that were either pre or post accession. The purpose of these funds is to reduce the gap between the Romanian economy and other European Union's members. Romanian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have an important role in this process because they have the experts and knowledge for attracting the necessary funds for development and European integration.

In Romania, NGOs have emerged as a result of the desire to mitigate social problems of society, once economic prosperity began to enlarge.⁶⁸⁶ Currently, non-governmental organizations create projects for supporting society and the economy default, not only in social matters. Specificity of these organizations is given by their way in structuring the activities - project teams - which involve different personnel management issues.

This paper refers to the challenges and implications that arise in human resources management, members of project teams. The issues presented below should be taken into consideration by project team managers given the fact that members can easily become unmotivated. If the team members are unmotivated, then the work quality will become poor, the project's objectives will not be reached (both qualitative and quantitative goals) and the European values will not be transmitted, making the European integration more difficult. Consequently, funds provided to reduce disparities between Romania and other European Union members will no longer be efficient (further efforts, projects and additional money are needed) and effective (not doing what is required).

This thesis offers an approach of human resources management challenges that an NGO is facing in our days. Even if these organizations meet a lot of other problems like financial, marketing, management, the personnel problems seem to be more complex and determinant in facing the

⁶⁸⁶ Ioan Strainescu, Ben-oni Ardelean, 2007, *Managementul ONG*, Ed. Didactica si Pedagogica, Bucuresti, p.3.

other challenges. Peter Drucker claimed that there is no other area in which more differences between businesses and NGOs are, than in managing people and relationships between them.⁶⁸⁷

2.NGO's role in Romanian economy

In the emergence of NGOs they offered only social services, but in present, there is a much wider range of services that the community benefits. This services were classified according to International Classification of Nonprofit Activities in twelve categories: culture and recreation, education and research, health, social services, environment, development of housing, law advocacy and politics, philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion, international, religion, business and professional associations, unions, not elsewhere classified. NGO's actions are support activities for the economy (besides those of the state) and their necessity appeared together with economic prosperity. The actions of these organizations rely mainly on voluntary work and come often to supplement services provided by local public authorities. This relationship is inclined to create a positive image of the public institutions and to facilitate the access of the community to public services. Without substituting public sector, NGOs mobilize funds that would be inaccessible, offer a quality service and solve additional semi-free community social problems.

In Romania, NGOs have a facilitator role in helping for European integration and often promote European values and determine their clients – in contrast with public sector - to become active. These organizations also create links between users and public authorities using a referral system and sometimes even offer support for benefit the supplementary services.

Jose Luis Monzon Campos (1992) identified a growing need of NGOs in business practices, as there are a lot of problems (both new and old) that capitalist companies, public enterprises and public sector generally can not solve. NGOs integrate "(...) both social and economic function and they are capable of creating wealth in an efficient manner, and then distribute them fairly."⁶⁸⁸

3. Teams features of a non-governmental organization

David Mason claims that there are fourteen NGO's characteristics that differentiate the non-governmental sector from other types of organization. Of these, those that have direct relationship on staff and team member are illustrated below:

- the main tool used in staff motivation is voluntarism produced by persuasion;
- money are just an instrument for NGOs, not the aim;
- NGOs tend to accumulate more targets, therefore volunteers and employees are always exposed to newer needs;
- NGOs tend to have a great social feature, which influence the management style (for example: the staff has a great need for affiliation - McClelland motivational theory);
- NGOs are more complex, in a characteristic way than other types of organizations;
- performance standards tend to be replaced by the ethical standards.⁶⁸⁹

The literature review on teams and teamwork offers a wider range on classify them, taking in consideration criteria like: the purpose of building the team, the amount of control over the objectives that team has, the team composition, the size. Romanian NGO's teams are project teams, a common type that also exists in profit organizations. Project teams are the key to success of an NGO functioning and therefore highlights the need of human resources management skills for those that manage these type of teams. Even though the NGO still need a strategic vision on

⁶⁸⁷ Peter Druker, 2001, *Managing the Non-profit Organization*, Ed. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, p.143.

⁶⁸⁸ Jose Luis Monzon Campos, 1992, *The "Social Economy"*, Third Sector in a Evolving System, pp.22-23, in Ion Boboc, 2004, *Managementul organizatiilor non-guvernamentale*, Ed. Didactica si Pedagogica, R.A., Bucuresti, p. 49.

⁶⁸⁹ David E. Mason, 1984, *Voluntary Nonprofit Enterprise Management*, Ed. Plenum Press, New York, pp. 67-165.

human resource management at the top of the management hierarchy. The project team manager's actions have been often linked to those that human resource management does and often the accent was on leadership skills.

According to Larson C.E. and LaFasto F. M.J. team's classification, depending on the broad objectives, the teams are: problem solving, creative and tactical. NGO's teams can be both creative type designed teams and tactical. The creative type involves skills such as persistence, independent thinking, self-determination and their process emphasis exploring possibilities and alternatives for successfully project implementation.⁶⁹⁰ Another team classification is offered by Hackman J. R. and take in consideration the amount of authority of the team. According to this criteria the teams are: manager-led teams, self-managed teams, self-directed teams, self-governed teams.⁶⁹¹ The NGOs ordinary develop manager-led teams and sometimes, when the team cumulated some experience in working together, they develop self-managed teams.

4. Research method

This paper uses the case study research method in order to illustrate the most common challenges faced by Romanian NGOs. It was used a single case study applied on a subsidiary organization of a national NGO, named Romanian Association Against AIDS, ARAS Iasi. Choosing this NGO was due to their extensive experience of fifteen years in local activities and also due to the fact that it was among the first NGOs appeared in Iasi. ARAS Iasi was, until the year 2000, the only local NGO who worked in HIV/AIDS domain.

The case study proposed in this thesis is mainly descriptive and less explanatory and answers most often to the question: "how?". The information described below resulted form two semi-structured interview guidelines with two project team managers of the organization. For illustrating the volunteers motivations it was used a number of thirty "entrance questionnaires" of the volunteer department taken at the last two recruiting sessions. The research's results asserted that the situation in NGOs is more complex then in profit companies and that people require a lot more attention.

5. Human resources issues in project teams from ARAS Iasi NGO

5.1. Brief description of the NGO

ARAS Iasi is an NGO with fifteen years experience in educating the general public on health issues and in providing primary social assistance to vulnerable groups. Because young people are the main target group of the association, its members are dynamic, flexible and innovative people willing to promote the values of the European Union for the benefit of integration. According to the classification made in the year 2000 by teachers Frumkin and Andre-Clark from Harvard University, ARAS Iasi is a charitable organization having a strong commitment to values and a weak commitment to performance.⁶⁹²

The association has seven employees, specialists in various fields - psychology, social work, health care, economy, public relations - and twenty volunteers involved in information, education, counseling and advocacy projects. Given that Iasi is a university city and that most volunteers are students (80%), ARAS Iasi held many seasonal activities that make management work very difficult (retention and motivational issues). Most of activities are held on the streets, in direct contact with beneficiaries, but there are also activities held at the office, like counseling and writing reports and evaluations.

⁶⁹⁰ Carl E. Larson, Frank M. J. LaFasto, 1989, *TeamWork. What Must Go Right/What Can Go Wrong*, Ed. Sage Publications, Inc, California, p. 43.

⁶⁹¹ J.R. Hackman 1987, *The Design of Work Teams*, in Leigh L. Thompson, 2004, *Making the Team: a Guide for Managers*, second edition, Ed. Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey, p. 18.

⁶⁹² Peter Frumkin, Alice Andre-Clark, 2000, *When Missions, Markets and Politics Collide: Values and Strategy in the Nonprofit Human Services*, in Ion Boboc, 2004, *Managementul organizatiilor non-guvernamentale*, Ed. Didactica si Pedagogica, R.A., Bucuresti, p. 47.

Most actions taken by the association are engaged in projects, but there are also some support type activities like: accounting, human resource management, counseling and referral. The director is the one who also meets human resources responsibilities, at the strategic level, while the project team manager meets them at the team and individual level. If the director has to have predictive and planning abilities, the project team manager has to have interpersonal, analytical and leadership skills for meeting all the teamwork challenges.

5.2. Challenges in building and developing functional project teams

Each project team has several development stages to get to high performance. The common stages of a team are: forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning. The success of the project team depends most on the team manager abilities to make all this stages easy to pass and understandable for each member of the team.

The forming stage is the most important, complex and critical in success of the team. First, the project team must have the required knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to the project. For that to be accomplished it is necessary a good selection of its member. The features that have to be taken in consideration in this stage are the purpose, the type, the composition and the size of the team. In ARAS Iasi teams are only project teams, creative and cross-functional with implementing the project's objectives purpose. At the beginning, teams are **manager-led** because it has to execute tasks as they are being defined by the project manager. After the first stage, of knowing the activities to be undertaken and after accumulating enough knowledge and experience of work, the project team becomes self-managed and has the authority to choose the methods that can achieve the goals.

Cross-functional teams have proven over time the most important advantage of summing talents. Association's projects aims are offering health education and social support. That is why the members of teams are social assistant, psychologist and medical assistant who were able to provide integrated and quality services (primary care, testing, counseling, referral) to a number of 130 beneficiaries from 980 had in the year of 2009.

Cross-functional teams have also a great disadvantage: due to professional differences it can occur disputes regarding problem solving or referral to the local public institutions. For example, the most common conflict is that counseling is offered by all team members and has nuances, depending on profession. The contradictions in which type of counseling is more appropriate and who will carry out the counseling session can often arise among team members.

Since the association's principal value is voluntary work, but the projects also ask for employees, ARAS Iasi is dealing also with **composition team** issues. Most of the time, ARAS Iasi works with a minimum number of employees and rest of it are volunteers. Project team composition within the European-funded projects is:

- team developed mostly of employees: when there is a budget line project for staff;
- team developed mostly of volunteers: when there is not a budget line project for staff.

In the first case, responsibilities are first divided - depending on the importance, safety and security in doing the task - between the employees and afterwards to the volunteers. Importance of the tasks is based on the type of influence they have on the key indicators of the project (directly or indirectly influences), the complexity of the task (counseling, education, information, referral), the content of the task (member's competence). Considering the fact that beneficiaries of these types of projects originate from vulnerable groups, volunteers are more involved in office and advocacy actions, because these presume less risk. Even though, volunteers are trained before and they have the chance to give up anytime if they do not feel attracted enough in doing what they were asked to do.

In the second case, in which the teams are made up mostly of volunteers, employees are often project manager, but they also can be implementers. If there is a volunteer with at least one year experience, he can be project manager. Employees from these type of project have the volunteer status, because besides the activities required by the job description they also do extra activities.

These extra-activity, often represent a tool for measuring employee commitment towards the organization and to the work.

This type of involvement, both volunteers and employees has its own benefits, but also arise some issue that ARAS Iasi has to deal with, mostly in *storming, norming and performing team stages*. Some of them were relieved bellow:

- volunteers: making them responsible in meeting the task on time, even if their actions are voluntary work, training them for being prepared to represent the association, clearly defining roles;

- employees: clearly defining assessment system (that its applied only on paid activities and that there will be no remuneration involved for volunteer work), offering recognition and permanent encouragement for volunteer work, dealing with inclination for exclusion and discrimination of the employee who does not involves in voluntary work.

Other problems in the project team may come up when there is a new project that involves employees recruitment and volunteers are not graduates of specialization required by the project. Although volunteers demonstrates involvement, commitment, competence and have great results, they cannot occupy positions in this project, because there are certain requirements - eligibility criteria - of the financing authority. In such moments team manager has to deal with disappointed, frustrated, unmotivated volunteers.

The manager will have to appeal to external recruitment, but considering the fact that the interview does not always provide sufficient information about a candidate, there is the possibility that he will not fit in organizational culture and have different values from those promoted by the association. This stimulates the emergence of conflicts and involves a much longer period of insertion of the new member. If this culture modeling of the new member is not obvious its cause frustration among team member and the manager has to take a decision on the weak "chain joint".

Another challenge that had to be held in the *forming and performing stage* of project teams in ARAS Iasi was hiring people with a part-time working program. This implied a different management, based on good communication among team members (informing the part-time member about what happened during his absence), a rigorous labor organization and more understanding people inside the team. If the communication system does not work properly - the informal one is very important here - there is the risk that part-time employee to feel excluded from the team, or at least uninformed.

5.3. Human resources motivations, members of project teams

ARAS Iasi is a charity organization whose aim is to help the society to prosper by offering the necessary support in education and health issues. This is the reason why it expects from organization's members to have humanitarian values and commitment to this purpose. These issues involve intrinsically motivated and self-determined project teams (staff and volunteers), people that can solve all sorts of problems that can occur in achieving objectives.

Motivational methods for employees differ from those used for volunteers. The team managers claim that employees from ARAS Iasi are primarily motivated by professional development in a less rigorous environment, which allows some beginner mistakes. They are also motivated by challenges and by the work itself, often waiting to be offered more responsibility and special recognition. That is the reason why motivational process focuses more on *intrinsic motivation* (the financial reward is also not too flexible), on trying to keep them motivated, rather than actually motivate them extrinsic. An important strength of the recognition system is staff development through participation in all kinds of trainings (mostly provided for free by other NGOs) both on the project and personal interest.

Regarding volunteer's motivation, according to data centralization of "entrance questionnaire", appeared that they are motivated: first, by a desire to do something useful in their spare time; second, to be part of a group; third, for personal development. ARAS Iasi has defined a clear path

for volunteer promotions and has also a recognition system which includes: designation volunteer of the month, offering a degree in the festivities, offering medals for activities that they engaged, nomination on different festivities: Volunteer Portrait or Volunteer Gala, offering the possibility to apply to wide variety of trainings and youth exchanges.

ARAS Iasi offers a carefully attention to all the needs of its members, because it believes that high degree of motivation leads to strong commitment towards the organization and its objectives, and by default to qualitative results. Although the NGO's turnover is high, this is due to seasonality activities and also to financially unstable environment (people look eventually for financial security, because needs also change).

6. Conclusions

Romanian NGOs become an important participant in decreasing the gaps existing between Romania and European Union. Therefore, they have to deal with a large amount of new expectations from the outside of organization and by default with new challenges. The project team management seems to be the most complex issue to deal with. Even if the project team members in NGO's have a common purpose and special motivations that differ from people in profit sector, they are also professionals coming from different areas, with different personalities and different vision in purpose achieving.

This paper illustrate, from a human resources perspective, the most common challenges that a project team manger from a non-governmental organization can meet in building a functional team for implementing the European-financed projects. The team management has to deal a large amount of issues so as to prevent potential conflicts. The forming stage represents the most complex work that team leader has to perform because involves an evaluation system, recruiting skills, training and coaching, managing the part-time and full-time job as part of the same project. Developing the team is also very important in achieving project's objectives, in motivating and creating committed team members.

Because of humanitarian values and intrinsic motivation, the members from a NGO tend to implicate personal in solving the tasks, they become committed to their work and to the organization. That is the reason why team managers have to be very close to the organization's members, to their needs, to their expectation and to respect their values, to recognize and appreciate their efforts.

7. Research limits and further research.

The research proposed has method limit. It was used a single case study based on two semi-structured interview guidelines and thirty volunteer's "entrance questionnaires". Another limitation could be the interview guidelines, that may have been subjective interpreted.

For further research it will be taken in consideration the team's member opinion, in dealing with human resources issues and then compare it with manager's opinion. Further researches could also take in consideration the team management style which may be a cause for challenges that appear during storming, norming or performing team stages.

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