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BEST PRACTICES FOR VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT WITHIN TRAIL ORGANIZATIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

BEST PRACTICES FOR VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT WITHIN TRAIL ORGANIZATIONS

By

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Throughout the United States, long distance hiking trails are subject not only to the whims of nature, but also the pressures of both human visitors and management conflicts. Resource conservation, volunteer management, and ecological concerns are only a few of the topics that occupy non-profit trail management organizations. With a work force made up mainly of volunteers, these groups adopt as their mission both the maintenance of many miles of trail, and the protection of the recreation opportunities those trails provide.

The goal of this study is to discover the extent to which a non-profit trail management organization has adopted and implemented suggested 'best practices' for managing volunteer workforces. Furthermore, the investigation of the organization's practices and management techniques can reveal whether or not these 'best practices' can be used to help the organization measure the effectiveness of its volunteer program.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Marsha Amsden and Ronald Amsden, for their support as I set out on the road less traveled. It is also dedicated to my wife, Megan Birch, for her ideas, perspectives, love and encouragement. I couldn't have done it without you all.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Throughout the United States, long distance hiking trails are subject not only to the whims of nature, but also the pressures of both human visitors and management conflicts (Appalachian Mountain Club, 1992). As a result, the oversight and maintenance of these trails has become an example of a resource issue that affects a broad range of interests. Resource conservation, volunteer management, and ecological concerns are only a few of the topics that occupy organizations such as the North Country Trail Association, the Green Mountain Club, and the Appalachian Trail Conference. With a work force made up mainly of volunteers, and often working in tandem with federal agencies such as the National Park Service or the U.S. Forest Service, these non-profit groups adopt as their mission both the maintenance of many miles of trail, and the protection of the recreation opportunities those trails provide.

Forty-four percent of American adults participate in some form of volunteering (Independent Sector, 2001; McCurley & Lynch, 1996). In 2000, volunteers performed an average of slightly more that 24 hours per month of service, with an estimated value of $239 billion (Independent Sector, 2001).

Non-profit trail organizations rely heavily on this workforce (Plumb, 1996). In 2001, the 31 groups which work together to maintain the Appalachian Trail under the oversight of the Appalachian Trail Conference enjoyed the services of over 5,000 volunteers, who contributed almost 187,000 hours . These volunteers participated in important outdoor activities such as trail oversight and

maintenance, shelter adoption, and corridor monitoring[1]. Additionally, volunteers served in office-based administrative capacities (Plumb, 1996).

As a result of the importance of this volunteer work, the volunteers are achieving increasing levels of responsibility (Grossman & Furano, 1999). Therefore, the values, experiences, and expectations of the volunteers who help these organizations are beginning to be incorporated into management strategies (Schroeder, 2000). Within the context of recreation and leisure research, much has been contributed through analysis of volunteer motivations, expectations, and psychological benefits (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Grese, Kaplan, Ryan, & Buxton, 2000; Jackson, 2003; Liao-Troth, 2001; Propst, Jackson, & McDonough, 2004; Schroeder, 2000) . What is missing from the recreation and leisure research, however, is an analysis from the realm of management – specifically, the adoption and implementation of practices which have been designed to increase the effectiveness of volunteer programs.

Academic research and practitioner literature addressing volunteer management (Barnett, 2002; Bradner, 1993; Campion Devney, 1992; Forsyth, 1999; Govekar & Govekar, 2002; Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003; Lee & Catagnus, 1999; Nienaber Clarke & McCool, 1996; Pharoah, 1997) have determined that the most successful volunteer programs operate around a planned, established set of policies and procedures, hereinafter referred to as 'best practices' (Brudney, 1999; Ellis, 1996; McCurley & Lynch, 1996; M. Wilson, 1978). These 'best practices' outlined below were classified as such because of their

[1] A corridor monitor is a volunteer who walks property boundaries to ensure no encroachment is taking place.

recurrence throughout volunteer management programs which were found by researchers to be successful.

1) *Secure support from higher levels:* It is important for organizations to have in place a structure that supports the oversight of the volunteer workforce (Ellis, 1996).

2) *Provide written policies to govern the program:* "The[se] policies will allow the manager of volunteers to develop a consistent pattern of volunteer involvement, and will provide assistance in dealing with problem situations" (McCurley & Lynch, 1996, p.5).

3) *Create job descriptions:* "The job description defines the role, relationships, responsibilities, obligations, content, power, and privileges of a volunteer position" (Heidrich, 1990, p.2). Job descriptions can also be used for recruiting purposes (Brudney, 1999).

4) *Provide support activities:* These activities should consist not only of orienting the volunteer to the organization's methods and structures, but should demonstrate the willingness on the part of the manager to provide logistical support to volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Ellis, 1996; McCurley & Lynch, 1996).

5) *Empowerment:* Empowerment is the process of invigorating volunteers by empowering them through teaching, training, and experience so that they can work independently, or manage other volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Ellis, 1996).

6) *Evaluation of work performed:* Evaluating volunteers consists of keeping records of the type and amount of work performed, observing whether or not work performance is in line with stated goals, providing praise for a job well done or remediation of a poor job (Brudney, 1999).

Study Purpose

The goal of this study is to discover the extent to which a non-profit trail management organization has adopted and implemented these 'best practices' for managing volunteer workforces. An investigation of this organization's practices and management techniques can achieve this goal, and in addition reveal whether or not these 'best practices' can be used to help the organization measure the effectiveness of its volunteer program.

This research will provide a path for change for those who are seeking to improve their organizations, or provide a roadmap for those just starting out. While the focus of this research is on trail management organizations, it will be of use to managers in other volunteer sectors as well.

Research Strategy

The best way to determine the role of best practices within a trail management organization is to analyze the complex nature of the relationships between volunteers and managers. Given the need to probe and gather detailed narratives from these individuals, a qualitative approach was chosen.

Current qualitative methodology suggests that the location and awareness of the researcher is a critical ingredient in any research framework. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) state "No social researcher starts from scratch in a state of social, intellectual, or political isolation." (p.12). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) further challenge positivist notions by "seeing research not as disembodied, programmed activity but rather as part of the way in which [the researcher] engage[s] with the world" (p.57).

As a result, this project will employ an interpretive research paradigm (Kemmis, 1991; Maguire, 1987; Ruonavaara, 2000; S. Smith, 1999). Within the interpretive paradigm, the relationship between the researcher and the researched focuses not on the traditional "objectivity and value-free science" but embraces the idea that "knowledge is a social construction" and "language contextualizes the meaning of data" (Ruonavaara, 2000, p.32). Furthermore, the interpretive paradigm approaches the methodological process of research by

calling for a "dialogical process between researcher and subjects to obtain meaningful data and insights into human behavior" (Ruonavaara, 2000, p.33). The language of this research paradigm is an "informal style using the personal voice, qualitative terms, and limited definitions" (Ruonavaara, 2000, p.33).

Role of Researcher

The researcher has served in both volunteer and paid capacities with two different trail management organizations. During the summer of 2003, the researcher was employed as a backcountry caretaker for the New England Club (NEC)[2]. This organization keeps as its mission the protection and maintenance of Vermont's New England Trail[3], a 265 mile footpath traversing the crest of the Green Mountains from Massachusetts to Canada. The researcher's primary responsibilities as a caretaker consisted of visitor education and trail maintenance at Stratton Pond, the most heavily used and largest body of water along the trail (Plumb, 1996). The researcher also maintained ten to twenty miles of trail, operated composting toilet systems, encouraged low-impact camping techniques (such as Leave No Trace), collected trail-use data, and served as a representative for the both NEC and other cooperating agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. At the end of each day, the researcher would complete a journey around the pond's perimeter visiting the many campers, answering questions, providing advice, and collecting use fees.

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[2] A pseudonym
[3] A pseudonym

Another important experience situating the researcher within the trail community consisted of involvement for two years as a member of the Southern Appalachian Trail Club's[4] Trail Patrol. The Trail Patrol is a group of volunteers who, as time permits, hike the trails of Shenandoah National Park, the George Washington National Forest, and the Appalachian Trail from Rockfish Gap in Virginia to Pine Grove Furnace State Park in Pennsylvania. Trail Patrol members assist hikers with first-aid issues, trail directions, trail maintenance, and Leave No Trace ethics.

Given this background, the researcher approaches this study as an informed observer with a strong interest in improving the benefits that trail organizations derive from their volunteer workforce.

Benefits of Best Practice Research

The results of this research will complement the existing theoretical literature by applying volunteer management concepts from other sectors to trail management organizations. Additionally, this research will provide insight into how trail organizations are managing their volunteers, and will also serve to close the gap between theory and practice. Narrowing this gap can provide volunteer managers and coordinators with pragmatic ways and justification for improving their volunteer management practices.

[4] A pseudonym

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The definition of a "volunteer" is somewhat controversial (Brudney, 1999). Although other definitions are valid, this thesis will adopt the definition that appears in *By the People: a History of Americans as Volunteers* (Ellis & Noyes, 1978): "To volunteer is to choose to act in recognition of a need, with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit, going beyond what is necessary to one's physical well-being" (p.10). This definition purposely encompasses all industries and sectors, and includes those who give their time to serve the interests of hiking trails.

The relevant research and literature regarding this topic can be divided into two areas for review. The first area includes the research surrounding the relationship between volunteering and public participation. The second area includes research surrounding 'best practices' for managing various types of workforces, and measurements of effectiveness. To further contextualize and clarify the relationship between trail management and 'best practices', and the development of the research questions, an example is presented which outlines the nature of volunteer management within the New England Club.

Volunteering and Public Participation

The literature surrounding volunteering and public participation has provided a multitude of definitions. Propst, Jackson, and McDonough (2004) suggest that researchers tend to focus on certain definitions based on their disciplinary training. For example, researchers who focus on public participation are grounded in "participatory democracy, civic engagement, social capital,

international development and other theoretical frameworks common in political science and sociology", while those who study volunteering "rely on theories from psychology" (Propst et al., 2004, p.405).

Definitions of volunteering and public participation vary in terms of the extent to which citizens actually seek out opportunities to donate their time and energy. While volunteering typically provides services that are "professionally initiated and defined", citizen participation tends to be more of a "voluntary activity that is individually initiated and defined" (Arai and Pedlar, 1997; Propst et al., 2004, p.405).

By "arraying specific behaviors along a spectrum to reflect the degree of citizen power over decision-making," Propst et al. (2004) devised a method for defining participation based on the behaviors of volunteers (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Spectrum of Participation Behaviors in Natural Resource Management, Planning, and Policy-making

Low Power			**High Power**
Participating in tasks directed by others (managed by the organization)	Providing unsolicited feedback (managed by the organization)	Providing unsolicited feedback (not managed by the organization)	Exercising decision-making authority (co-managed)
No direct decision-making authority			

*Source: Propst, D. B., Jackson, D., & McDonough, M. (2004). Public Participation, Volunteerism and Resource-Based Recreation Management in the U.S.: What Do Citizens Expect? *Society and Leisure, 26*(2), 389-415

The 'low power' end of the spectrum includes volunteer behaviors consisting of "passive involvement in activities directed by others"(McDonough & Wheeler, 1998; Propst et al., 2004). Additionally, the 'low power' end of the

spectrum includes behaviors that McDonough and Wheeler suggest are a "means to an end" (McDonough & Wheeler, 1998). For example, at the low power end, the goal of the organization that manages volunteers is simply provision of labor, thus participation is a means to an end.

The 'high power' end of the spectrum, on the other hand, displays behaviors which include "some level of shared authority in policy making, planning or management", where a volunteer assumes control of his/her own objectives and outcomes (McDonough & Wheeler, 1998; Propst et al., 2004, p.395). At this end of the spectrum, McDonough and Wheeler suggest that the goal is empowerment, so participation is no longer the means, but rather the end.

Volunteering often has an affective component. For example, one form of volunteering which is more than just the provision of labor, or means to an end, is known as serious leisure. Serious leisure is distinguished from other types of leisure by the need to participate in a unique subculture, acquire special skills and knowledge in the context of career development, and strongly identify with the chosen pursuit (Stebbins, 1992). Serious leisure incorporates behaviors which locate the participant on the right (high power) side of the spectrum. Unlike public participation, however, the goal of serious leisure is skill or career development, not necessarily power in decision making.

Arai and Pedlar discussed volunteering as a serious leisure pursuit in their qualitative analysis of participants in a Canadian initiative to promote healthy communities, finding significant correlations between serious leisure and volunteer participation. The participants benefited from feelings of empowerment

and enrichment, developed through a sense of purpose, control, and contribution (Arai & Pedlar, 1997). This form of serious leisure, in this case volunteering, had a positive effect on community life (Arai & Pedlar, 1997). For volunteer managers within trail organizations, Arai and Pedlar (1997) demonstrate that volunteers engaging in serious leisure will provide feedback and demand authority, and that when they are managed properly there can be substantial benefits.

Citizens who participate frequently with an organization expect some level of influence and do not always feel they are treated fairly. Smith and McDonough (2001) examined how the public participants' conceptualization of "having been treated fairly and/or received fair outcomes" affected their satisfaction and their support for resource managing authorities (p.23). Using focus groups, Smith and McDonough discovered that principles of representation and voice were not being met by natural resource management agencies in Michigan. Citizens who participate in natural resource decision-making processes did not feel involved, and, in some cases, they feet disrespected (Smith & McDonough, 2001).

Propst and Bentley (2000) investigated the differences between managers and citizens in how they defined and perceived public participation. While both mangers and citizens agreed that the benefits of having volunteers exceeded the cost of their management, they disagreed as to the nature of volunteer contributions (Propst & Bentley, 2000). Managers saw citizen participation in terms of power and input, while citizens saw their participation in terms of duty and community redress (Propst & Bentley, 2000).

The act of volunteering transcends individual recreation activities and manager/volunteer relationships to find a place in the fabric of society. One of the fundamental facets explaining the success of democracy in America throughout history is the willingness of citizens to volunteer and participate in a wide variety of organizations and groups. Cigler and Joslyn (2002) measured this participation and reveal an interesting relationship between attitudes of political tolerance and levels of membership in volunteer organizations. Specifically, if an individual is a member of a voluntary group, the resulting inclusion with other like-minded people can contribute to that individual exhibiting higher levels of political tolerance (Cigler & Joslyn, 2002). Furthermore, the more groups one is a member of, the more politically tolerant one will be (Cigler & Joslyn, 2002).

In summary, this literature reveals some acute differences among volunteers that managers within trail organizations need to acknowledge. Specifically, an understanding of the spectrum of volunteer behaviors is critical because the act of managing and empowering volunteers means working with and guiding individuals who may want to do more than just provide labor. For volunteers who seek a voice and some degree of control, differences exist between those who feel enriched and empowered, and those who feel that the system is treating them unfairly.

Second, it is important for volunteer managers in trail organizations to realize that many volunteers are most likely already users of the trail. This could mean that of the volunteers who decide to participate, those with familiarity and experience on the trail may be more likely to expect influence in decision making.

The successful volunteer manager, being aware of the literature, will find ways to treat volunteers fairly, show them how they are influencing decisions, and understand that for many, their activity is serious leisure.

Best Practices and the Effectiveness of Volunteer Management

Few studies have focused on effective strategies for volunteer management, such as 'best practices' in the trail management sector. Therefore, this section will discuss literature from studies conducted in other sectors of volunteer management.

A 'best practice' approach to volunteer management is important in part because it pinpoints personnel issues. Understanding both the abilities of volunteers and what makes them satisfied will help eliminate some of the pitfalls of crisis management. For example, as Pynes (1997) states, "Agencies need to anticipate their personnel requirements so that they are prepared to deal with changing situations"(p. 67). 'Best practices' can equip managers to understand the skills of the volunteer workforce and fit volunteers with positions that make the most of those skills.

Research Related to Best Practices

In order to measure the effectiveness of 'best practices', Brudney (1999) conducted a study which assessed their implementation throughout government-based volunteer programs and correlated that implementation to the perceived benefits of using volunteers. To accomplish this, he conducted survey of 500 government-based volunteer programs, discovering high levels of

implementation. Furthermore, it was determined that higher levels of implementation of 'best practices' increased perceived benefits (Brudney, 1999).

Complimenting Brudney's research in the government sector, other research investigated the parallels between personnel management in both the corporate and non-profit sectors. Wilson and Pimm (1996) focused their study on volunteer motivation, benefits, and management strategies currently in place in Great Britain. They concluded that the majority of the volunteer workforce is badly managed, in that it does not adhere to conventional business management methods:

> "The difficulty...is that the leverage the commercial company has over its employees is just not matched in groups using voluntary workers. Thus, they have to adopt a pragmatic approach taking that which is applicable from business and adjusting it appropriately for the circumstances which apply to unpaid personnel." (Wilson & Pimm, 1996, p.26)

A third study, conducted by Grossman and Furano, evaluated effective volunteer practices within educational mentoring programs (Grossman & Furano, 1999). The authors concluded that as volunteers are given greater responsibility, their effectiveness depends on an infrastructure built around selection, training, communication and support (Grossman & Furano, 1999). "No matter how well-intentioned volunteers are, unless there is an infrastructure in place to support and direct their efforts, they will remain at best ineffective, or, worse, become disenchanted and withdraw, potentially damaging recipients of services in the process" (Grossman & Furano, 1999).

An example of a volunteer assessment technique is the Volunteer Functions Inventory. The VFI is designed to measure volunteer motivations in six

distinct psychological areas: values, understanding, career, social, esteem, and protective (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992). Each area is assigned a score based upon the volunteer's responses to a survey. By assessing these scores, the "volunteer administrator can quickly identify and rank order the salient motivational concerns of the respondent" (Clary et al., 1992). Clary, Snyder, and Ridge (1992) expand their analysis to demonstrate how the VFI can be used to help managers optimize three areas of volunteer management: recruitment, placement, and retention.

In summary, these examples all share the conclusion that strategic volunteer management, in any form, results in higher levels of beneficial outcomes, which are indicators of organizational effectiveness in managing volunteers. All are situation-specific and address the extent of different best practices in a piecemeal fashion. Is there a more systematic and holistic approach to measuring effectiveness that can be applied to a variety of volunteer management situations and organizations?

Conceptual Approach for Measuring Effectiveness

One challenge inherent to the implementation of any volunteer management strategy is the determination of how well the volunteer program is working, and the impact that any change to the management framework will have on overall effectiveness. As the above examples demonstrate, different organizations have different needs and different measurement metrics, so approaches and methods for determining effectiveness are personalized to fit the needs of the organization.

This research attempts to develop a holistic measurement of effectiveness by exploring and adapting an existing evaluation framework. Specifically, Ramlall (2003) presents a framework for measuring human resources, which is organized into human resource activities (management clusters[5]) and their associated outcomes (Table 1).

[5] The term 'cluster' refers to a range of related ideas.

Table 1: Ramlall's Model of Human Resource Management Effectiveness

Management Cluster	**Outcome**
1. Strategic Planning	- Analysis, decisions, actions needed to create and sustain competitive advantage
2. Acquistion of Employees	- Effective contribution of new employees to business strategy implementation - Planning process, advertising, and recruitment sources support business strategy - Interviews effective in selecting right candidates
3. Training & Development	- Positive change in attitude of participants - Increased expertise in areas applicable to job - Opportunities to practice newly acquired skills on the job - Support from peers, supervisors, and others in using knowledge gained
4. Organizational Change & Development	- Higher levels of productivity, quality of products and services - Positive change in responsiveness in meeting customer needs - Culture reflects organization and supports business strategy - Fluid organization structures
5. Performance Management	- Each position and task supports strategic business objectives - Effective process for maximizing performance
6. Reward System	- Reward system motivates increased performance - Incentives provided to achieve individual and organizational behaviors aligned with business strategies and investments
7. Organization Behavior & Theory	- Employee behaviors reflect desired organizational culture and alignment with business strategy

*Source: Ramlall, S. J. (2003). Measuring Human Resource Management's Effectiveness in Improving Performance. *Human Resource Planning, 26*(1), 51-62.

But is a model for measuring human resource management in a business environment useful and appropriate for measuring volunteer management in a non-profit environment? Ramlall notes a strong correlation between management of employees and the overall performance of the organization. It is assumed that

this correlation can be extended to include the management of volunteers and the performance of the non-profit organization for which volunteers donate their time and energy.

Ramlall's framework can be applied by assigning each of the best practices - listed in chapter one - to a relevant Human Resource (HR) cluster, and assessing the associated outcomes. For example, the best practice involving the creation of job descriptions can most appropriately be linked to the HR cluster "acquisition of employees", because the outcomes are relevant to both volunteer and employee management. Furthermore, the measurements associated with successful acquisition of employees – short period of time to hire, increased pool of applicants, adequate number of qualified applicants – are appropriate when applied to the recruitment of volunteers. Hence, adequate volunteer job descriptions can result in a successful acquisition of an effective volunteer workforce.

To craft an even better fit, however, between Ramlall's model and the other 'best practices', the literature suggests that some modifications to the model may be necessary. As noted above, Ramlall's framework is organized into human resource activities (management clusters) and their associated outcomes. Each of Ramlall's seven management clusters and their outcomes can be modified to transition the model from a corporate, business standpoint to a non-profit, volunteer, trail management perspective. This can be accomplished by removing outcomes associated with hiring, customer service, and financial

remuneration and adapting terminology to better reflect the volunteer function. The result is the modification of Ramlall's model as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Ramlall's Effectiveness Model with Modified Outcomes that Reflect Volunteer Management Literature

Management Cluster	**Original Outcome**	**Modified Outcome**
1. Strategic Planning	a) Analysis, decisions, and actions needed to sustain competitive advantage	a) Analysis, decisions, and actions needed to create and sustain a functional volunteer program
2. Acquisition of Employees	a) Effective contribution of new employees to business strategy implementation, b) Planning process, advertising, and recruitment sources support business strategy, c) Interviews effective in selecting right candidates	a) "Effective contribution" of new volunteers, b) "Planning process, advertising, and recruitment sources" should fit the organization's management strategy
3. Training & Development	a) Positive change in attitude of participants, b) Increased expertise in areas applicable to job, c) Opportunities to practice newly acquired skills on the job, d) Support from peers, supervisors, and others in using knowledge gained	a) Positive change in attitude of participants, b) Opportunities to practice newly acquired skills on the job, c) Support from peers, supervisors, and others in using knowledge gained
4. Organizational Change and Development	a) Higher levels of productivity, quality of products and services, b) Positive change in responsiveness in meeting customer needs, c) Culture reflects organization and supports business strategy, d) Fluid organizational structures	a) Higher levels of productivity, b) Quality of work performed, c) Fluid organizational structures
5. Performance Management	a) Each position and task supports strategic business objectives, b) Effective process for maximizing performance	a) Each volunteer "position and task supports strategic objectives, b) Effective process for maximizing performance
6. Reward System	a) Reward system motivates increased performance, b) Incentives provided to achieve individual and organizational behaviors aligned with business strategies and investments	a) Reward system motivates increased performance
7. Organization Behavior and Theory	a) Employee behaviors reflect desired organizational culture and alignment with business strategy	a) Behaviors reflect desired organizational culture alignment with organizational strategy

Example: Volunteer Management and the New England Club

The New England Club (NEC), located in central New England, is a small, non-profit group whose mission is the protection and maintenance of a section of the New England Trail, a 265-mile footpath traversing the crest of the Green Mountains from Massachusetts to Canada. In addition, the Club oversees nearly 100 miles of the Appalachian Trail. While there is a paid staff of about 30 individuals, the bulk of the club's mission is carried out by a volunteer workforce.

During the summer of 2003 the researcher was employed as a backcountry caretaker for the NEC. The researcher's primary responsibilities consisted of visitor education and trail maintenance at Stratton Pond, the most heavily used and largest body of water along the trail (Plumb, 1996). On several occasions the researcher worked directly with volunteers who contributed to the work that needed to be done around the pond. Through informal conversations with these volunteers, and through an extensive conversation with Jane Smith[6], the coordinator of volunteers for the NEC, the researcher was able to inquire as to the level and scope of the club's strategies for volunteer management.

In the case of the New England Club, the implementation of 'best practices' has taken a somewhat different path than the theoretical approach revolving around the six major 'best practices' presented in Chapter One. There are several similarities, but several important differences as well.

Specifically, the NEC has an *informal* framework for managing volunteers – the one volunteer coordinator works in tandem with three field supervisors from

[6] Both Jane Smith and NEC are pseudonyms.

other areas of the club to determine and develop a strategy which continues to evolve as the season progresses. Nearly seventy percent of all volunteer effort focuses on trails and fieldwork, so as a result these managers play a large role in volunteer oversight. Among other things, the coordinator is responsible for recruitment, job descriptions, support, and demographic data collection. The three field supervisors are responsible for training, and logistical support (procuring tools, etc). Since volunteers are the lifeblood of the NEC, programs and initiatives receive substantial support from the president and board of directors.

On the other hand, the NEC has no framework in place for providing or receiving feedback and evaluation. There has been no attempt to measure volunteer retention. The New England Club measures the effectiveness of its volunteer program simply on the basis of hours worked.

Would the application of a standardized set of 'best practices' improve the NEC's volunteer program? Would having these 'best practices' in place help the NEC measure the effectiveness of their volunteer program? In order to find out more, and to draw deeper conclusions regarding the role of 'best practices', this research will involve a formal study of how an organization similar to the NEC manages its volunteer workforce, and how formalizing its management can help the organization keep track of the effectiveness of its volunteer mission.

Problem Statement

Non-profit, trail management organizations such as the Midwest Trail Society, the Appalachian Trail Conference, and the New England Club rely

heavily on their volunteer workforce (Plumb, 1996). However, formal implementation of theoretical 'best practices' for volunteer management that have been researched and tested in other sectors (such as governmental or healthcare) have yet to be considered in the context of these non-profit trail organizations . Additionally, models which have been designed to measure the effectiveness of volunteer programs using 'best practices' do not exist as a resource for trail managers.

Research Questions

The preceding literature review, when combined with the researcher's previous experiences with the New England Club and Southern Appalachian Trail Club, lead to the following research questions:

1) What is the extent to which the Midwest Trail Society, a non-profit trail management organization, has adopted and implemented 'best practices' for managing volunteers?

2) Is the suggested modification to Ramlall's model relevant to trail organizations in terms of their ability to assess the effectiveness of volunteer programs?

These questions will be addressed through an investigation of the volunteer management strategies of a non-profit trail management organization. This investigation will determine the extent of implementation of the theoretical 'best practices' outlined in chapter one. Furthermore, the modified version of Ramlall's model of management effectiveness (described in chapter two) will be evaluated to determine if the modifications are relevant to trail organizations. This

will be accomplished by evaluating the extent to which the 'best practices' help achieve the modified outcomes.

Managers and coordinators of volunteers within this non-profit trail organization can provide important input illuminating what is actually taking place in the field. It is necessary to focus on trail organizations as the primary element of this research because they are important examples of natural resource management agencies which, unlike their federal counterparts such as the National Park Service or USDA Forest Service, typically rely more heavily upon volunteers.

CHAPTER THREE: PROCEDURES

In her book Dimensions of Choice: A Qualitative Approach to Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Research, Henderson (1991) suggests that "a paradigm that focuses on interpretive views and the qualitative approach may be a useful means for addressing some of the questions left unanswered by past recreation, park, and leisure research".

"Quantitative research often lacks the contextual details necessary to interpret findings" (Dutcher, Finley, Luloff, & Johnson, 2004, p.322). Since the extent to which the six 'best practices' outlined in Chapter One may be interpreted differently by different individuals, a traditional quantitative methodology consisting of a survey, for example, may overlook these important distinctions. In other words, a qualitative approach is a good fit because "it allow[s] respondents to answer in their own words and to clarify their responses, and it provide[s] the possibility for novel responses not anticipated by the researcher or easily accommodated in a survey questionnaire" (Mascarenhas & Scarce, 2004, p.25). These types of responses can better illuminate the way trail organizations manage volunteers, and the relationships between their management strategies and theoretical 'best practices'. Based upon these concepts, it was decided to employ a qualitative methodology for this project consisting of in-depth interviews and event observation.

The research was conducted within a non-profit trail-management organization, located in the upper Midwest, during the spring of 2004. From

hereon, this organization will be referred to as the Midwest Trail Society (MTS)[7], and the trail which they maintain will be referred to as the Midwest Trail. The trail runs through seven states, covering roughly 4,000 miles. The MTS is organized with a national office of eight staff members, and regional chapters located throughout the seven states. These chapters are run by individuals (volunteers themselves) who are tasked with a variety of responsibilities including event coordination, fundraising, landowner relations, advertising, and volunteer management. These volunteer managers were the subjects of the interviews.

Research Question One

What is the extent to which the Midwest Trail Society, a non-profit trail management organization, has adopted and implemented 'best practices' for managing volunteers?

Sampling

Interview participants were chosen using a purposeful sampling technique. "This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1998; Patton, 1990). Initial discussions with the Director of Trail Management within the Midwest Trails Society provided an overview of the organization sufficient to allow for careful consideration of potential interview participants. In order to develop a more complete understanding of the regional nature of the various chapters within the Midwest Trails Society, it was decided to contact at least one individual from each of the

[7] A pseudonym.

seven states through which the Midwest Trail runs. Ten interviews were conducted out of a total of fourteen possible individuals.

Conducting Interviews

Individuals that were identified as being appropriate to address the study questions were contacted via e-mail by both the Director of Trail Management and the researcher to make them aware of the project. Additional communication asked potential participants if they wished to take part, and if so, established a date and time for a telephone interview.

The questions revolved around the participant's background with the organization, the volunteer management framework they were familiar with (if any), their philosophies regarding volunteers, and examples of volunteer events which they had overseen. Discussions were semi-structured, and although free to explore tangents and other angles which came about during the course of the discussion, they focused on a central set of questions "in order to increase the likelihood that all topics will be covered in each interview in more or less the same way" (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). These questions were designed using existing literature on volunteer management to operationalize the broader 'best practices' outlined in Chapter One, and are displayed in Table 3:

Table 3: Relation of Interview Questions to Best Practices

Best Practice	**Interview Question**[1]
1. Secure support from higher levels	Does the MTS offer any support for you in training, recruitment strategies, etc? Is there anything you wish you could do that you can't? Are there any resources you wish you had? Can you please describe your background with the organization and how you came to have the role you have today?
2. Provide written policies to govern the program	Is there a formal framework within your organization for the management of volunteers? If so, please describe how it works and who created it..
3. Create job descriptions	How do you advertise the need for volunteers? What is the scope of work done by the volunteers? How do you ensure that volunteers are placed in areas and with work that is appropriate to their skills and interests?
4. Provide support activities	How many volunteers do you encounter? Have you had any formal training in volunteer management? What do you do personally to support your volunteers?
5. Empowerment	Can you explain your philosophy for managing the volunteers that you work with? Do you reward volunteers? If so, how? Do you ever receive complaints from volunteers and if so, what is the nature of these complaints?
6. Evaluation of work performed	Do you evaluate the work done by volunteers? How do you measure the effectiveness of your volunteer program?

[1] For this table, each question is aligned to only one best practice. It should be noted that during the process of analysis, questions would often reveal connections to multiple best practices.

The telephone discussions, ranging from thirty to ninety minutes, were recorded and transcribed. The recordings were transcribed by the Michigan State University Office Services Department. The transcripts varied in length from 100 to 750 lines of text.

Participation in Volunteer Events

In order to observe examples of volunteer management, the researcher attended and participated in volunteer events organized by the Western Michigan Chapter of the Midwest Trails Society. These events were held on various Saturdays in April and May of 2004 and encompassed spring-time trail construction and maintenance of portions of the Midwest Trail. These events were advertised on the chapter's web site and participation was open to any and all interested individuals.

Observations from this participation were recorded as field notes. "The writing of field notes is virtually the only way for the researcher to record the observation of day-to-day events and behavior, overheard conversations, and informal interviews, which are the primary materials of participant observation" (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p.134). These field notes allowed the researcher to both corroborate observations made during analysis of the telephone interviews, and determine if the volunteer events were conducted in a manner consistent with what the managers were describing.

Analysis of Data

Henderson states that "during the discovery and interpretation process, the researcher...is encouraged to keep track of possible themes, hunches, and ideas" (Henderson, 1991). To accomplish this, categorical aggregation was applied to transcripts of interviews and field notes from participation in volunteer events. This analysis "involves reading each passage of a transcribed interview and identifying the main themes from the text with a word or short phrase" (Mascarenhas & Scarce, 2004, p.25). In this case, the categorical aggregation was achieved by the assignment of a code to facilitate analysis and review of data. This coding allowed the researcher to determine whether or not responses and observations contained any elements which could relate to the theoretical 'best practices'. Responses dealing specifically with a best practice were assigned a BP code (BP1 to BP7), while other themes were assigned different codes depending on the nature of the response (Appendix A).

Responses could also be assigned a combination of codes. For example, after an interview participant stated "I can't give anybody orders here" in response to a question regarding volunteer management strategies, the response was coded "BP4", as it can be related to the support function of a manager. Additionally, a code of "Philosophy" was assigned, as the response indicates some measure of the manager's personal philosophy regarding volunteer management.

Each interview transcript received two reviews. The first review was performed independently by the researcher, with the second being an evaluation

of the first by the researcher's major professor. Coding changes or discrepancies identified in the second review were discussed until agreement was reached before incorporating the data into the final analysis. This analysis resulted in each 'best practice' being labeled as "Implemented", or "Not Implemented".

Spradley (1980) describes the challenge of this type of qualitative analysis. "You must make sense out of the cultural patterns you observe, decoding the messages in cultural behavior, artifacts, and knowledge" (Spradley, 1980, p.39). In order to carry out this thematic analysis, an ethnographic approach was employed to identify major concepts. These major themes were identified by their tendency to emerge from discussion responses, as evidenced by the coding process. The use of computer software for analysis was avoided, as the object of the interviews was to observe underlying themes and ideas regarding volunteer management, rather than draw conclusions regarding the surface meaning of the words themselves (Dutcher et al., 2004).

Reliability and Validity

"Reliability...in qualitative studies may be considered a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the setting" (Henderson, 1991, p.137). In order to enhance the reliability of this study, two measures were employed. First, a documented research plan with possible changes were documented and presented to the major professor and members of the thesis committee. Second, the major professor served as an "auditor or second opinion in data interpretation" (Henderson, 1991, p.137).

In terms of data validity, Henderson suggests that "the validity of the data hinges on achieving that delicate balance of distance and closeness that characterizes effective interaction between the researcher and...the subject" (Henderson, 1991, p.58). The researcher's familiarity and experience with the operation of trail management organizations created an atmosphere for discussion which helped facilitate the collection of valid data.

Research Question Two

Is the suggested modification to Ramlall's model relevant to trail organizations in terms of their ability to assess the effectiveness of volunteer programs?

The information gathered from the interview questions was also used to determine if the modification to Ramlall's model (suggested in the literature review) makes sense. Specifically, this was accomplished by evaluating the extent to which the 'best practices' help achieve the modified outcomes in the context of the MTS.

The research question was addressed by employing a typological analysis to establish the relationship of each 'best practice' from the volunteer management literature to a management cluster within the new model. At this point, the appropriateness of each 'best practice' as a measurement of effectiveness could be determined. If the 'best practice' could be assigned to a management cluster, it was deemed a useful measurement of effectiveness.

An example of this process is useful. 'Best practice' three, referring to the creation of job descriptions, was judged to be a useful measurement of effectiveness because it can be fit into the modified cluster labeled "acquisition of

volunteers". This conclusion was drawn because job descriptions are important indicators of whether or not the process of planning, advertising, and recruiting is in line with the organization's management strategy. Although complete results are detailed in Chapters Four and Five, Table 4 displays a sample assignment of a 'best practice' to the most relevant management cluster:

Table 4: Sample Result: Best Practices as Measurements of Effectiveness

Management Cluster	**Modified Outcome**	**Measurement (Best Practice)**
2) Acquistion of Volunteers	a) "Effective contribution" of new volunteers, b) "planning process, advertising, and recruitment sources" should fit the organization's management strategy	3) Create job descriptions

Typologies are "used quite broadly to refer to any number of possible categorical judgments which might include patterns, themes, or theories" (Henderson, 1991, p.146). In this case, the categorical judgments relating a 'best practice' to a management cluster resulted from "convergence and recurring regularities" (Henderson, 1991, p.146) between the data and the outcomes identified in the revised model. In other words, if it was revealed during the interviews that the creation of job descriptions helped volunteers make an "effective contribution" to the organization's management strategy, then the 'best practice' of job descriptions was considered an indicator of the modified outcome.

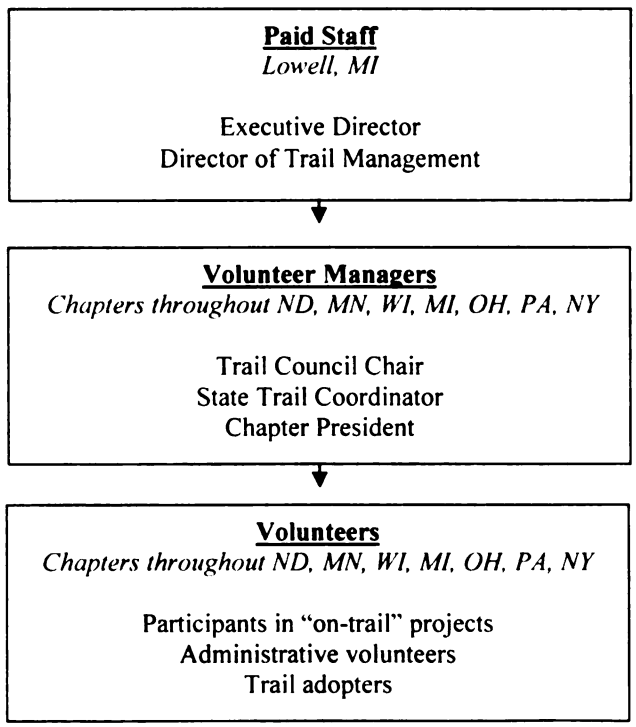
Therefore, the 'best practice' of job descriptions fits the model as an appropriate measure of effectiveness.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, each research question will be restated and the results of the data analysis will be presented and discussed. The data for this evaluation were gathered using both interviews with the volunteer managers throughout the seven states where the Midwest Trail is located, and observations gathered while participating in volunteer events along the Midwest Trail in western Michigan.

For the purposes of clarity, a visual representation of the decision-making hierarchy of the organization is useful. The organizational structure of the MTS is presented in Figure 2. Throughout this chapter, the various levels of the organization will be referred to as Paid Staff, Volunteer Managers, or Volunteers.

Figure 2: Organizational Structure of the Midwest Trail Society



Background of Participants

A closer look at the backgrounds of the individuals who participated in this research reveals a wide variety of experiences and history. The Paid Staff, not surprisingly, had more previous educational and work experience with environmental education, management, and land use than the Volunteer Managers. Specifically, Paid Staff reported prior experience in land use planning, land acquisition, volunteer and partnership support, real estate appraisal, and strategic planning. The opportunity to apply this experience in a professional setting led them to work for the MTS.

Volunteer Managers, on the other hand, reported previous experience in a much broader segment of the workforce, including the military, tourism, and corporate business environments. Many of them reported finding themselves in their current position as Volunteer Managers somewhat by accident, beginning with a basic love for hiking and the outdoors, and evolving into a gradual acceptance of greater levels of responsibility. While not quantitatively measured, observation and discussion revealed that most Volunteer Managers were over forty years of age and possessed a college education.

Research Question One

What is the extent to which the Midwest Trail Society, a non-profit trail management organization, has adopted and implemented 'best practices' for managing volunteers?

The first question posed by this research asks the extent to which the Midwest Trail Society has adopted and implemented 'best practices' for managing volunteers. Each of the tested 'best practices' will be presented along

with a definition and a discussion of its implementation within the Midwest Trails Society.

Best Practice One: Secure support from higher levels

It is important for organizations to have in place a structure that supports the oversight of the volunteer workforce (Ellis, 1996). This structure will differ depending on the organization, with some organizations placing the role of volunteer management upon a single individual, with others relying on several individuals that hold different responsibilities.

Implementation

In the case of the Midwest Trail Society, Volunteer Managers at the chapter level are responsible for designing, promoting, and carrying out volunteer events, with the Paid Staff in Lowell, MI available to provide support and guidance when necessary. The interviews indicated that Volunteer Managers had little trouble receiving assistance:

> "I've never had a problem getting help when I've called MTS headquarters down to Lowell."
>
> "Yes we've had guidelines and support, brochures and that kind of stuff."

While many of the Volunteer Managers at the chapter level felt that the Paid Staff at the MTS office was helpful in terms of answering questions, and providing recruitment strategies, they could not be very specific regarding that support. This can be attributed to the fact that many Volunteer Managers have substantial experience, and therefore do not require extensive assistance from

the Paid Staff in Lowell. For example, one interview with a member of the Paid Staff revealed the following:

> "[The chapters include] people with a great deal of experience and so that, you know, I'm never going to get a question from [those chapters] on how to do what they do on a regular basis as a chapter."

Furthermore, the Paid Staff provides materials which pre-empt questions:

> "We don't get any questions because we have a packet that we send out that comes through the American Hiking Society that has, this is an excellent resource."

In addition to receiving support from the Paid Staff of the MTS, the interviews revealed that the Volunteer Managers also receive support from managing partners such as the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service. This support is mostly driven by the measurement of volunteer hours, which were recorded by the Volunteer Managers and reported to both the MTS and the government agencies, and used to justify funding. Furthermore, representatives of these agencies provide support by attending volunteer events, providing safety training, answering questions, and ensuring that safety protocols were followed.

It should be noted, however, that there can be occasional discord regarding the nature of support from the Paid Staff at the MTS. This discord comes from the areas where the Midwest Trail overlaps with another trail[9]. In these cases the Volunteer Managers sometimes expressed contention and a

[9] Examples are the Buckeye Trail in Ohio and the Finger Lakes Trail in New York.

greater allegiance to the other trail, potentially adding to the confusion regarding MTS support.

> "...the relationship is at times contentious and we have people who feel that the NCTA sometimes is pushy. For instance, you know, the Buckeye Trail was there and the North County Trail came down and wanted to put their trail on the Buckeye Trail, on part of the Buckeye Trail tread and that was fine, everybody encouraged them to do that. And then since then we've had several representatives come down and say, you know, you ought to be doing this, you ought to be doing that."

Discussion

The Volunteer Managers were in universal agreement that the MTS provides support in terms of event materials, answering questions, and other forms of general support. It can therefore be concluded that the MTS has implemented the 'best practice' of assuring support from the higher levels of the organization. Since the data show a structure of governance within the MTS that flows from a board of directors, down to Paid Staff and Volunteer Managers, it is evident that this 'best practice' was implemented intentionally.

Best Practice Two: Provide written policies to govern the program

"The[se] policies will allow the volunteer program manager to develop a consistent pattern of volunteer involvement, and will provide assistance in dealing with problem situations" (McCurley & Lynch, 1996). Additionally, these written policies can help managers determine what sort of volunteer activities are appropriate and useful.

Implementation

Interviews revealed that while the Paid Staff of the MTS does indeed have in place written policies for the Volunteer Managers at the chapter level, the

Volunteer Managers were not always sure what those policies entailed. For example, note the detail with which the Director of Trail Management described the formal, written guidelines, which extend to volunteer management:

> "We have...what we call the president's handbook and that is pretty much a soup to nuts collection of the materials one would need to properly administer a chapter. It includes everything from their initial charter and their bylaws which are all generated around a general framework. We have a pretty tight general framework, but the chapters are given the leeway to do modifications to that within reason. But, initial charter bylaws a set of policies that govern how the chapter can act on behalf of MTS. So, when we talk about our chapters being the eyes and ears, they are also the mouthpiece for MTS. And because they are the mouthpiece and because they have a very diverse group of people, we find it very advisable and a good practice to provide them with a set of policies that govern how they can represent MTS. So, we've got stuff in there like a policy on how to go about signing a letter that is in support of some action in a state or region."

This is in contrast to the responses given by the Volunteer Managers when asked if they were aware of written policies distributed by the Paid Staff:

> "I don't know anything available for management. Recruitment, I'm not really sure if we have any recruitment strategies. We do have some pamphlets and fliers that we can hand out to people."

> "There is policy manual and it does have some information on there. I can't remember exactly what, it has been a couple years since I've really went through it."

> "Not that I'm aware of. I mean I've never really picked up on it."

> "Ah no, the short answer is no. There is no, there is no formal program."

It should be noted, however, that while there is confusion regarding the nature of the written policies regarding chapter management, the managers were

well aware of the policies for other standards, such as building trail. The following quote, from a Volunteer Manager, represents the interaction between the Paid Staff and Volunteer Managers in that regard:

> "we are going to have a training weekend done at Moraine. What that will do is review procedures with regards to the proper slope of a trail, utilization of tools and those other techniques and we are actually going to go out and try and fix a couple sections of the trail. You know, as a learning tool for the individuals. So everybody can get hands-on type stuff."

These results suggest that there is a variation in the amount of interest in the policy process. While the Director of Trail Management is concerned with broader written policies involving running a chapter, the Volunteer Managers are more interested in and aware of policy regarding activities that directly affect the trail.

Additionally, when questions or problems arise, managers of volunteers tend to employ their own experience or consult with others in the organization rather than reflect on anything handed down from the MTS national office:

> "I learned a lot of the techniques from the Student Conservation Association's book and there is a lot, there is a big section there on leadership and how to do it. And also, from the National Outdoor Leadership School, their expedition behavior, that type of thing, I mean I've been doing this for a lot of years, backpacking, mountain climbing and all that stuff. I've got some experience with regards to the, you know, dealing with groups, be they of like mind or not and that type of thing and certain situations work and certain don't."

As noted earlier, nearly all of the managers interviewed related having no formal training in volunteer management. For the most part, these managers relied on prior experience in areas such as the military, another organization like

the Boy Scouts of America, or other past employment when faced with handling problems or making difficult decisions.

Discussion

The Midwest Trail Society has purposely put in place very clear written policies for chapter management, and so it can be concluded that they have indeed implemented the 'best practice' of providing written policies. However, there is uneven degree of awareness of these guidelines among Volunteer Managers.

Best Practice Three: Create job descriptions

"The job description defines the role, relationships, responsibilities, obligations, content, power, and privileges of a volunteer position" (Heidrich, 1990). Job descriptions can also be used for recruiting purposes (Brudney, 1999).

Implementation

Analysis of the data revealed that recruiting is a challenge for the MTS. In the words of one Volunteer Manager:

> "It is something that I think we don't do a good enough job, frankly, of attracting willing workers. That's one of the things we'd like to improve. I don't think the MTS does much better."

This problem can be traced to extent to which the MTS provides job descriptions to help potential volunteers understand the nature and scope of the work required. At the chapter level, evidence of comprehensive job descriptions was inconsistent. A job description is comprehensive when it specifically

describes the nature of the position, the scope of work required, and encourages the volunteer to get in touch with a chapter representative to find out more. Table 5 provides examples of two types of job descriptions found in one chapter's informational pamphlet:

Table 5: Sample Job Descriptions

Comprehensive	**Incomplete**
Work Hikes: light brush cutting, trail tread repairs, installing markers and signs	Trail Steward: "adopt" your very own trail section to love and maintain!

This inconsistency was discovered throughout the chapters. Interviews with Volunteer Managers who coordinated volunteer events and activities revealed that in most cases, when people expressed an interest in participating, the leader of the event would simply "lay it out for them" and let people decide for themselves which tasks to participate in.

It should be noted, however, that this practice does not necessarily produce poor results in terms of accomplished work. Volunteer Managers felt that oftentimes, people were more interested in a day outside and less interested in what was required of them. Therefore, they could afford to provide informal job descriptions.

> "Whoever shows up at a work party, they give a safety lecture at the beginning and a person that's never been there before, they usually tag him on to somebody that's more experienced and say, you know, stay with him today and he'll tell you what to do. Learn by doing."

Furthermore, participant observation revealed that people who arrived at volunteer events did not seem to be discouraged by the ambiguity surrounding what was to be done. It was observed that people gladly participated in any task which was asked as long as it was in line with their physical capabilities.

Discussion

The various chapters of Midwest Trail Society do not have in place a consistent framework for providing comprehensive job descriptions. This lack of implementation does not seem to be intentional, however. The Director of Trail Management described why the MTS has avoided job descriptions:

> "The number of job descriptions has been purposely kept to a minimum and that reason being, most of the people that volunteer with North Country Trail Association do a multiplicity of tasks. So while you may be the state board liaison, you may also be the chief stamp licker."

Ultimately, these findings indicate that Ramlall's model could in fact be modified further to incorporate this difference between paid and unpaid workers.

Best Practice Four: Provide support activities

These activities should consist not only of orienting the volunteer to the organization's methods and structures, but should demonstrate the willingness on the part of the manager to provide logistical support to volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Ellis, 1996; McCurley & Lynch, 1996). While 'best practice' number one refers to support from upper management (Paid Staff) to Volunteer Managers,

this 'best practice' refers to support provided by Volunteer Managers to actual Volunteers.

Implementation

Both interviews and participation in events revealed that Volunteer Managers within the chapters of the MTS provide substantial support for their volunteer workforce. Examples of this support range from answering e-mails and telephone calls, providing directions, instructing volunteers in proper tool usage, describing trail maintenance standards, or providing safety instruction. One volunteer manager described the wide variety of support activities provided to volunteers:

> "And we go over what to expect and what kind of clothes to wear, what kind of gear you are going to have to bring, what kind of gear is going to be provided as group gear. How the transportation, you know, how you are going to get, you know, from the Twin Cities up to you know, northeastern Minnesota basically and you know, what the work is going to be like. You know, what tools you are going to use, how to use those tools safely, etc., etc. Then we also have, you know, because of the forest service and their requirements using like, you know, box saws and chainsaws."

The nature of support provided by the Volunteer Managers benefits not just the volunteers who are interested in putting in a day's work. As the following quote reveals, Volunteer Managers also perform a function which ultimately benefits the organization by expanding the number of individuals who receive information about the trail and could become possible workers in the future.

> "You know, I just had someone email me the other day about biking [on the] trail, I said well unfortunately you can't, but um, you know, send me

> your address and I'll send you a hike schedule for the summer and you know, if you are ever interested in working on the trail and I took his name and put it in the list. So I can do that kind of stuff, you know, get out to people and I mean every one that's come in or, you know, inquired about it, I have just kind of kept their information and kind of kept them in the loop as to what's going on hoping that at some point, they'll feel inspired to take that next step and at work.

Discussion

Interviews with the Volunteer Managers throughout the various chapters of the MTS revealed a wide variety of purposefully designed support for volunteer workers. Furthermore, participant observation illuminated the many ways in which Volunteer Managers ensure that volunteers have a positive experience. Therefore, it was concluded that the Volunteer Managers throughout the MTS have implemented the 'best practice' of providing support activities to volunteers.

Best Practice Five: Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of invigorating volunteers by empowering them with teaching, training, and experience so that they can work independently, or manage other volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Ellis, 1996). Thus, empowerment is consistent with the high power end of the spectrum of public participation behaviors as discussed in chapter two (see Figure 1).

Implementation

The idea that volunteers are essential to the development and maintenance of the Midwest Trail, and need to be developed through training and teaching was a strong and clear theme throughout the interviews with Volunteer Managers. It was evident throughout the data that the managers take this task very seriously:

> "I think that the volunteers are the, you know, the number one commodity that any of these organizations have and that the volunteers really need to be nurtured and you know, kind of brought along. You got to kind of gauge people and see, you know, what their willingness to be involved is and, you know, you don't want to overwhelm people and if you ask too much at the wrong time, you'll scare them off."

The interviews also revealed that the training and teaching of volunteers needs to be done carefully. One manager illuminated the risks of poor management by relating the story of a volunteer leader who is no longer with the organization:

> "So you've got to be really attentive to the needs of the volunteers. You've really got to nurture them. I know one of the gentlemen that was also a cofounder with the Minnesota Wilderness Trails Alliance with me, when he brought his organization in and he was one of these people that he thought he was kind of a dictator and he was going to tell everybody, you know, how it went. And I think that he probably, you know, burned out or chewed up and spit out probably as many really good volunteers in his organization as probably at one time equaled the membership of his organization."

Another theme throughout the data had to do with the idea that empowering volunteers has not only to do with making them better or more experienced workers, but making them feel that their work was worthwhile:

> "I don't think anybody manages volunteers. Volunteers are easy to interest and very difficult to keep because if they are not presented with something that they find worth doing, they don't last. If you ask them to build bad trail, they won't come back. They like to feel at the end of the day or at the end of the week or the end of the year that what they have done has a positive impact on something and it has to be a positive impact, obviously in their mind. People encourage volunteers, they sometimes guide them a little, they give them advice, but volunteers go where volunteers go."

This comment is consistent with Smith and McDonough's (2001) finding that participants desire to see how their input is used to make decisions or affect change.

Discussion

Throughout the MTS, Volunteer Managers are aware of the importance of nurturing volunteers, and they steps they take to ensure empowerment were clear and evident. Furthermore, participant observation in trail events revealed that volunteers do indeed become better workers as a result of this empowerment. Therefore, the MTS has implemented the 'best practice' of empowering volunteers.

Best Practice Six: Evaluation

Evaluating volunteers consists of keeping records, observing performance, providing praise for a job well done or remediation of a poor job (Brudney, 1999).

Implementation

In terms of observing performance, the chapters of the MTS are involved in the process of evaluation and feedback in mostly informal ways. Volunteer Managers mentioned that since there is no formal evaluation sheet for measuring the quality of the work, most of the evaluation only takes place when problems arise. A lack of time and financial resources were noted as being primary reasons for the lack of formal evaluation procedures.

In terms of keeping records, the MTS places substantial importance on the collection of volunteer hours. These records are used to justify funding from the

managing partners such as the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service. In addition, these hours are used to reward volunteers. Managers made reference to t-shirts which would be distributed after 500 or 1,000 hours of volunteer trail work, in addition to inscribing volunteer's names on a plaque after achieving certain service thresholds.

> "There is absolutely no question that the people on the trail crew cherish [the rewards], you know, at first they get their blue shirt and then they get their 500 hours and we had to put in a thousand hour thing now because we got people that have gone way past 500 hours. That's a lot of volunteer hours."

Much of the praise given to those volunteers who do not qualify for a shirt or plaque inscription is informal in nature. Managers described providing simple "thanks" via phone call or e-mail. In addition, many chapters held barbeques or picnics at the end of the hiking season in order to reward their volunteer workforce. Consistent with the findings of Propst and Bentley (2000), some volunteers do not even expect to be rewarded and for most, inexpensive and informal but sincere gestures of appreciation are often all that are needed.

The upper levels of the MTS differ from the chapters in that they have in place more formal means of recognition that were developed to rewarding outstanding service. As noted in the following quote, not all of these awards go to volunteers:

> "We give out an award for, for instance, the Vanguard Award. That goes to a politician who has stood up for the trail and done so over a long period of time, not just the one year, but probably has a track record of being an advocate for the trail. We have the Sweep Award [which] goes to recognize volunteers who are the behind the scenes kind of people

> that don't get the glamour, don't get the recognition, it may be the lady that cooks for every trail outing. She doesn't get out there blazing a trail, she is not talking to landowners and she's not doing public presentations, but she makes the chili. And we have Trail Maintainer of the Year Award and a number of others. There are about eight awards. They are all designed to highlight or focus on a national level the significance of all the aspects of what our volunteers do."

It should be noted that any organization needs to exercise care when designing a reward system for volunteers. The Director of Trail Management for the MTS explained why this is a concern:

> "Well, what we have to be very careful of is that ah, rewards or awards are actually not rewards, you cannot reward a volunteer without getting in trouble with the IRS. We can't give them anything that is monetary compensation or is of significant monetary value, then what you are doing is you are paying them. You are either paying them cash or you are paying them in kind. And we don't want to do that. So, because that kind of negates the whole volunteer spirit, if people are doing things simply for, oh I'm going to get another 50 coupons to McDonalds."

Discussion

The thorough nature of the reward system at the various levels of the MTS indicates that both Paid Staff and Volunteer Managers are involved in the process of evaluation. It can be concluded that the MTS has implemented the 'best practice' of evaluation.

Research Question Two

Is the suggested modification to Ramlall's model relevant to trail organizations in terms of their ability to assess the effectiveness of volunteer programs?

As noted in the literature review, each of Ramlall's seven management clusters and their outcomes can be modified to transition the model from a

corporate, business standpoint to a non-profit, volunteer, trail management perspective. This modification centers around the removal of outcomes associated with hiring, customer service, and financial remuneration and adapting terminology to better reflect the volunteer function (Table 2).

The synergy between the goals of the MTS, and the outcomes of the adapted model, initially revealed that the modifications were appropriate. Analysis of the data gathered through interviews and participant observation demonstrated that the MTS has purposefully implemented management strategies specifically designed to maximize the impact of its volunteer workforce, and that those strategies achieved outcomes similar to those in the modified model (Table 2). Had the data shown that the management strategies of the MTS focused on non-volunteer areas, such as employee relations, government regulations, or customer service, the modifications to Ramlall's model would not have been appropriate.

Research question two was answered by establishing the relationship between each 'best practice' from the volunteer management literature and a management cluster within the modified model, in order to determine the relevance of the modification. If the 'best practice' could be assigned to a management cluster, it demonstrated that the 'best practice' helped achieve the modified outcomes. If this relationship could not be determined, then the modifications would have been deemed irrelevant.

Best Practice One: Secure support from higher levels

The 'best practice' of securing support from higher levels helped achieve the outcomes associated with the *Strategic Planning* (#1) and *Organizational Behavior and Theory* (#7) clusters in the adapted model (Table 2). Specifically, providing support from higher levels of the organization is in tune with a strategic planning outcome that necessitates "analys[e]s, decisions, and actions needed to create and sustain" a functional volunteer program (Ramlall, 2003, p.61).

In terms of the MTS, the data revealed that support from the Paid Staff in Lowell helps Volunteer Managers ensure that their programs will be consistent with established organizational cultures and strategies. A good example of how this support enhances the strategic planning initiatives of the organization involves the development of a workshop to assist Volunteer Managers with land issues:

> "we are tailoring a workshop. It is going to be called, Land and Trails Workshop. In that workshop, the first in a series, it is going to take place in New York, then move down to Pennsylvania, then come to western Michigan and we'll go around the seven states, like a road show. It will be kind of onsite two-day training and when they walk out of there, they will be fully trained on the various aspects of land negotiations and conservation easements and all of that kind of fun real estate stuff and legal stuff and they will also walk out of there with a handbook at the end of the training and a badge."

Best Practice Two: Provide written policies to govern the program

The 'best practice' of having formal, written procedures to govern the operation of a volunteer program helped achieve the outcomes associated with the *Strategic Planning* (#1) and *Performance Management* (#5) clusters within

the adapted model (Table 2). Written policies and procedures are one example of the "integration in all areas of the organization" that is a trademark of successful strategic planning (Ramlall, 2003, p.61). Additionally, written policies and procedures available to a manager can aid performance management by facilitating the development of processes which maximizing performance (Ramlall, 2003).

The interviews further suggest that written procedures will enhance planning and management within the organization, because they can create consistency among chapters in regards to volunteer management policy. For example, the MTS provides Volunteer Managers with a publication to ensure consistent fundraising practices, regardless of the experience of the volunteer:

> "We have additional resources that are available through the Lowell headquarters and the thing that comes to mind right now was a publication that we circulated and put out that was called, you know, Easy Money. And this was 101 ways, so-to-speak, of how to raise funds and how to organize people to raise funds at the chapter level. And it is generic in that it is something that could be given to the lowliest of brand new volunteers. It could also be given to one of our more sophisticated presidents or treasurers and at the same time, is not exclusive to a chapter, but rather could be used by a state council to do pretty much the same thing."

If every chapter is familiar and comfortable with the formal procedures, the resulting consistency can foster long-term strategic planning and ensure that the work being carried out supports the mission of the MTS.

Best Practice Three: Create job descriptions

The 'best practice' of creating comprehensive job descriptions was an important element in achieving the outcomes associated with the *Acquisition of Employees* (#2) cluster (Table 2). Job descriptions which clearly lay out the responsibilities of the volunteer position will ensure not only the volunteer's happiness, but will also contribute to reduced volunteer turnover, a larger pool of volunteers, and higher levels of performance from those volunteers (Ramlall, 2003).

In the case of the MTS, however, it may not be worthwhile to implement job descriptions beyond those already in place for short-term projects and work trips. Many managers indicated that volunteers "just want to spend a day on the trail" and "don't really care what they do" and are already familiar with the type of work that is performed during a project or work outing. When new volunteers arrive who are unfamiliar with the nature of the work, the managers felt any confusion could be overcome by spending time with the volunteer or closely observing their work. Participant observation revealed that the volunteers shared this sentiment, as first-time volunteers were observed to be willing to tackle any necessary task, as long as it was consistent with their physical abilities.

Best Practice Four: Provide support activities

The 'best practice' of providing logistical support to volunteers achieves the outcomes associated with the *Training and Development* (#3), *Organizational Change and Development* (#4), and *Organizational Behavior and Theory* (#7) clusters in the modified model (Table 2).

Providing support to volunteers is a perfect example of a Training and Development approach involving "support from peers, supervisors and others", which may affect the attitude of participants (Ramlall, 2003, p.61). In terms of Organizational Change and Development, the support provided by managers can ensure the enhanced productivity and quality that the organization seeks (Ramlall, 2003). Finally, support from manager to volunteer can help the organization achieve consistency in terms of culture and strategy, which is the primary outcome of the Organizational Behavior and Theory cluster (Ramlall, 2003).

In terms of the MTS, this 'best practice' is a useful tool because the not only are chapter managers the primary means of keeping the volunteer program functioning, but their support enhances worker productivity along the trail. In addition, the support of managers maintains the organization: as one manager stated, "it is surprising how much you can accomplish that way with retaining membership and getting people interested."

Best Practice Five: Empowerment

The 'best practice' of empowering volunteers through teaching and training achieves the outcomes associated with the *Training and Development* (#3) cluster (Table 2) (Ramlall, 2003). The process of nurturing volunteers will contribute to a "positive change in attitude", "increased expertise", and enhanced "opportunities to practice newly acquired skills on the job" (Ramlall, 2003, p.61).

In the case of the MTS, this 'best practice' is essential, since, as several managers stated, "without volunteers there is no trail". Assuring that volunteers

are empowered through education and training improves not only the performance of the individual, but the processes of trail maintenance and the health of the organization as well (Ramlall, 2003).

On the other hand, Volunteer Managers were concerned with a significant pitfall inherent to empowering volunteers:

> "It's called the 80/20 rule. 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. In any organization you tend to find that a small number of people, the cadre does most of the work, the planning and the execution."

In addition to the care that must be taken to ensure that a select few are not being saddled with a disproportionate share of the work, managers need to be aware of changing volunteer expectations that result from empowerment. Psychological contracts, which are "informal, unwritten, mutually independent sets of expectations" (Propst et al., 2004, p.397) between volunteers and organizations, are often violated as managers are not always aware of volunteer expectations (Propst & Bentley, 2000).

Best Practice Six: Evaluation

The 'best practice' of implementing a system of observation, evaluation, and praise was determined to achieve the outcomes within the *Reward System* (#6) and *Performance Management* (#5) clusters (Table 2). Having in place a reward system for volunteers is the primary method for "motivat[ing] increased performance" (Ramlall, 2003, p.61). Furthermore, observation and evaluation can be an "effective process for maximizing performance" (Ramlall, 2003, p.61). It should be noted that in this context, evaluation refers to the evaluation of the

work performed by the volunteer and not a global evaluation of the overall volunteer program, which would use a different metric such as the number of hours worked or the miles of trail built by volunteers.

For the MTS, the reasons for having a system in place to reward volunteers is obvious, since, as one manager stated, "none of it would be possible without the volunteers." It is important to note, however, that care must be taken during the evaluation process because the feedback sometimes "carries connotations of 'being judged' and seems to question the volunteer's 'gift' or donation of time" (Brudney, 1999, p.239). The managers are aware of this, however - as one noted, "obviously, you don't go out and beat 'em over the head. You are not going to have too many people if you do that." Additionally, there is some question regarding how much reward volunteers are actually looking for in cases where the volunteers consider their work to be a civic duty (Propst, et al., 2004).

Summary of Results

The first research question was answered by using semi-structured, qualitative interviews and analysis to investigate the volunteer management strategies of the Midwest Trail Society, a non-profit trail management organization. Participants included paid staff at the upper levels of the organization, along with chapter-level volunteer managers from each of the seven states through which the Midwest Trail runs. Their input illuminated philosophies, ideas, and concerns regarding the volunteers with whom they work.

Based upon analysis of interviews and participant observations, each of the six 'best practices' identified in the literature were categorized as either 'implemented', or 'not implemented':

Table 6: Summary of Implementation of Best Practices

Implemented	**Not Implemented**
1) Support from higher levels	3) Job descriptions
2) Written policies	
4) Support from manager to volunteer	
5) Empowerment	
6) Evaluation and reward	

Although a 'best practice' may have been categorized as 'implemented', it should not be concluded that there is no room for improvement. For example, although the MTS has purposely put in place very clear written policies for chapter management, the uneven degree of awareness of these guidelines among Volunteer Managers suggests that perhaps organizational communication could be approached differently.

To answer the second research question, relationships were established between each 'best practice' from the volunteer management literature and a management cluster within the modified model, in order to determine the relevance of the modification (Table 7). If the 'best practice' could be assigned to a management cluster, it demonstrated that the 'best practice' helped achieve the modified outcomes. If this relationship could not be determined, then the

modifications would have been deemed irrelevant. It was concluded that since all six 'best practices' helped achieve the outcomes of each modified cluster, the modification to Ramlall's model was appropriate.

Table 7: Relationship of Best Practices to Management Clusters

Management Cluster	**Modified Outcome**	**Msrmt. (Best Practice)**
1. Strategic Planning	a) Analysis, decisions, and actions needed to create and sustain a functional volunteer program	1) Secure support from higher levels 2) Provide written policies to govern the program
2. Acquistion of Employees	a) "Effective contribution" of new volunteers, b) "planning process, advertising, and recruitment sources" should fit the organization's management strategy	3) Create job descriptions
3. Training & Development	a) increased expertise in areas applicable to job, b) opportunities to practice newly acquired skills on the job, c) support from peers, supervisors, and others in using knowledge gained	4) Provide support activities 5) Empowerment
4. Organizational Change & Development	a) higher levels of productivity, b) quality of work performed, c) fluid organizational structures	4) Provide support activities
5. Performance Management	a) Each volunteer "position and task supports strategic objectives, b) effective process for maximizing performance	2) Provide written policies to govern the program
6. Reward System	a) reward system motivates increased performance	6) Evaluation of work performed
7. Organization Behavior & Theory	a) behaviors reflect desired organizational culture and alignment with organizational strategy	1) Secure support from higher levels 4) Provide support activities 6) Evaluation of work performed

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

'Best practices' do indeed have a substantial role in volunteer management. First of all, their implementation can help organizations manage volunteer workforces. The Midwest Trail Society, through the work of dedicated individuals at the chapter and national level, has adopted and implemented five of the six 'best practices' for managing volunteers as recommended in the literature. It was clear through interviews with enthusiastic managers and observation of smoothly-run volunteer events that the use of these 'best practices' is helping the MTS achieve its mission – the maintenance and protection of the Midwest Trail.

There are areas that require improvement; the most obvious being the communication between the volunteer managers at the chapter level and the paid staff at headquarters. An example of this lack of communication is the President's Handbook, a document outlining MTS policy. Several managers were not aware of its existence.

Additionally, the role of 'best practices' can be broadened to include their use as tools to achieve effectiveness outcomes. This research has shown that an existing model designed to measure the effectiveness of human resource management in a business context can be modified to measure the effectiveness of volunteer management in a non-profit context. The fact that this modified model aligned so well with the MTS effectiveness strategies indicates that it may

also be appropriate for other non-profit organizations that rely on substantial volunteer components.

Study Limitations

The sampling method is one potential limitation of this research. Interview participants were chosen using a purposeful sampling technique, based upon discussions with the Director of Trail Management within the Midwest Trails Society. These discussions provided an overview of the MTS which was sufficient to allow for careful consideration of potential interview participants. In order to ensure that these discussions did not steer the interviewer towards subjects who held a favorable view of the organization, those who were known to have dissenting opinions and occasional disagreements with the national office were actively sought. Even so, there is no way to ensure that interview subjects hold no biases either against or for the Midwest Trail Society. Critiques of sampling methods are common in qualitative research, despite Henderson's assertion that "while the sampling procedures for the qualitative approach do not follow the rules that are prescribed in statistical studies, they are no less rigorous and much more labor intense" (Henderson, 1991, p.134).

A second limitation is the empirical history of Ramlalls' model, presented in his journal article, "Measuring Human Resource Management's Effectiveness in Improving Performance". Although this model is grounded in substantial theory surrounding "the relationship between [Human Resources] and organizational performance" (Ramlall, 2003, p.54), its recent publication means

that it has not had an opportunity to withstand empirical testing in a variety of contexts.

A third limitation of this research involves the generalizability of the results to other non-profit sectors beyond the scope of trail management organizations. While the nature of the 'best practices' tested in this research are applicable to many different situations, it may be difficult to apply the conclusions to other non-profits who, for instance, may not rely as heavily on a volunteer workforce. In that case, changes to the modified model for measuring effectiveness may be necessary. In addition, it is possible that a larger sample, which includes different types of volunteer organizations, would yield different results.

A fourth limitation involves the methods of conducting interviews and participant observation. Henderson warns of possible misinterpretation, difficulty of replication, and researcher bias as potential pitfalls to these qualitative measures (Henderson, 1991). The researcher's lack of experience with qualitative methods may have contributed to some or all of these pitfalls.

Recommendations for Management and Planning

Many non-profit organizations, such as those involved with trail management, would not exist without the work of volunteers. Therefore, having some sort of carefully considered framework in place to see that their work is efficiently and effectively managed is crucial.

This research project has revealed that the Midwest Trail Society has already implemented five of the 'best practices' which are consistent with those recommended by experts in personnel management. The data revealed that

while the MTS had not implemented the 'best practice' involving job descriptions, they had reasons for not doing so. This indicates that managers of volunteers should hand-craft any implementation of 'best practices' to fit their specific situation. They can accomplish this through formalization and periodic evaluation of policy within a larger framework designed to measure the effectiveness of the volunteer program. For example, the MTS is continually evaluating the status of its volunteer workforce, using software tools such as Donor Soft to catalogue activity and measure trends, giving it the power to adjust volunteer management strategies accordingly.

An additional lesson that can be learned from the Midwest Trail Society is that communication regarding policy is important. In the case of the MTS, the Director of Trail Management was very proud of the President's Handbook, and the policies within, but many of the volunteer managers were unfamiliar with its contents. In this case, running a training session or refresher course would serve to align everyone in the organization with important policy documents.

This research does not intend to present these six theoretical 'best practices' as all-inclusive. For example, organizations could consider alternative 'best practices' such as the solicitation of feedback from volunteers, or the construction of a formal budget to manage the volunteer program (Brudney, 1999). Furthermore, the act of ensuring communication between different levels of the organization could be a 'best practice', along with understanding the motivations of the volunteers themselves. Managers who are tasked with caring for a volunteer workforce should be encouraged to seek out new ideas, test new

concepts, and develop their own 'best practices'. Each organization is faced with its own specific situation and its own set of challenges, and only through continued experimentation and research can the concept of 'best practices' be applied to as many different situations as possible.

Recommendations for Additional Research

The best way to ensure a thorough understanding of the role of 'best practices' is to investigate them in different contexts. While this work focuses on the context surrounding non-profit trail management organizations, other recreation and natural resource management contexts should be explored as well. This research may also reveal additional best practices that can be added to a framework for effective volunteer management.

Continued qualitative research is important to fully develop a rich understanding of volunteer workforces. While quantitative research can enhance the discourse surrounding volunteer management, it can also be biased along lines of race, class, and gender. In addition, a positivist focus encourages a disturbing tendency to "equate frequency and extensiveness with importance" (Krueger, 1994, p.76).

Additionally, Ramlall's model holds much potential for assessing the effectiveness of volunteer organizations throughout non-profit, profit, corporate, and government sectors. More testing is required with a broader range of organizations.

This research has uncovered a great deal regarding the perspectives and strategies of management. A logical next step would be to combine the data

gathered from managers with data gathered from the volunteers who are on the other side of these management frameworks. This would allow researchers to examine 'best practices' from a "cradle to grave" perspective.

Finally, additional research should focus on small, non-profit trail management organizations. These groups accomplish much with very little, and the stories, backgrounds, and histories of their members are fascinating. The recreation and natural resources professions have much to learn from these dynamic organizations.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF TRANSCRIPT NOTATIONS

Transcript Notation	*Theme*
BP1	Organizational support from higher levels or managing partners
BP2	Written policies, procedures
BP3	Job descriptions, what needs to be done
BP4	Support from manager to volunteer
BP5	Empowerment, using experienced volunteers, teaching/training volunteers
BP6	Evaluation, praising a job well done or discouraging a poor job
Importance	Importance of volunteers to mission
Mgmt Position	Details regarding the role of respondent
Involvement	Involvement with the trail and its management (managers and volunteers)
Usage	How the trail is used
Communication	Communication between manager and volunteer, manager and other managers, etc
Philosophy	Philosophy/viewpoint regarding volunteer management
Recruit	Recruitment of volunteers
Feeling	Feelings of volunteers and managers
Numbers	Number of volunteers
Reward	Rewards for a job well done
Needs	Things the manager wishes he or she had to do a better job.
Work	Type of work that volunteers do
Metric	Ways of measuring how the volunteer program is working

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF CODED TRANSCRIPT

Note: This an excerpt of a coded transcript. The coded statements are pulled from the text and italicized, with the relevant coding in bold.

I: Right. Do you consent to be recorded for this study?

R: Sure.

I: Thank you very much. Well first of all, I'm wondering if you have any questions about what I'm doing or some of the research, what the point of it is?

R: No, I find the, I find the concept fascinating, go ahead.

I: Oh great. Well first of all, I guess my first question is if you could describe your background with the organization, with the Ohio chapter and the *** Association and how you came to have the leadership role that you have today.

R: I've been a member of *** Association for about 15 years, active for the last, since I retired, the last five. I was like most of our membership prior to that just membership in name and

{did a little hiking on the trails and that was it} **Code: Usage**

I got involved after I retired, I was looking for something to occupy my excess energy and I got involved with Buckeye Trail. I had not accepted any leadership position with them, except that

{I was a section supervisor for one of the sections that had maintenance responsibilities} **Code: Mgmt Position**

. And I was not very happy with

*{the interaction between *** Trail affiliate and the *** Association and the National Parks Service.}* **Code: BP1, communication**

So, I said that I would assume that responsibility with the hope that I could move that out to some degree, because

{it was somewhat contentious.} **Code: BP1, communication**

So, I then, I had somehow or other I ended up on the *** Trail board out of that. Because originally it was just somewhat less than that, but anyway I ended up on

the *** Trail board. And I have spent the last three years on that tempting to do just what I said. I'm now withdrawing from *** Trail board.

{I'm not running again.} **Code: BP1, communication**

And I'm running for the *** Trail board. I'm honestly of the belief, although not shared by everyone, that

{being on both boards is a conflict of interests.} **Code: Philosophy**

There is times when

{the two organizations rightly are divergent} **Code: BP1, communication**

and if you were on both boards, I found it difficult at times. I sit on all of the *** Trail board meetings, although I'm not a board member and that has been interesting. Anyway, that's how I got there.

I: Okay, great. Based on the history that you just described to me, can you explain sort of broadly, I guess, your philosophy for managing the volunteers that you work with?

{R: I don't think anybody manages volunteers.} **Code: Philosophy**

You, volunteers I should be giving you ... volunteerism. Volunteers are easy,

{relatively easy to interest and very difficult to keep} **Code: Philosophy, BP5, BP3, recruit, BP4**

because if they are not presented with something that they find worth doing, they don't last. I mean in other words, if you ask them to, I'll use a very specific example. If you ask them to build bad trail, they won't come back. They like to feel at the end of the day or at the end of the week or the end of the year that what they have done has a positive impact on something and it has to be a positive impact, obviously in their mind. So, volunteerism, I don't think anybody manages volunteers.

{The people encourage volunteers, they sometimes guide them a little, they give them advice, but volunteers go where volunteers go.} **Code: Philosophy, BP5, BP4**

I: Right, right.

R: You don't necessarily always, a hundred percent like where they are going, but

{as long as it is more or less the right direction, you encourage it} **Code: Philosophy, BP5, BP4**

I told somebody the other day, I think it was ***, that I spent 24 years in the Army, end up the rank, Colonel, and 22 years in the private corporation as vice-president. And the hardest thing for me when I became active with a volunteer organization was, I continue to remind myself that

{I can't give anybody orders here.} **Code: Phil, BP4**

I: That makes sense.

R: So, I still smack myself upside of the head once and a while, but I much prefer this frankly. It is a lot more fun because

{you win by persuasion or and if there is any coercion at all, the people just walk away} **Code: Phil, BP4**

and they should and so do I. In fact, if I don't like what they are doing, I just don't do it.

I: Okay. In terms of the--- Hello.

R: I'm sorry.

I: Oh okay, I thought maybe I had lost you.

R: No, no, no, I'm here.

I: Okay. In terms of the work done by volunteers, can you explain a little bit about the scope of the work. What do they do specifically on the trail?

R: Well, on the trail we have what we call

{work parties}. **Code: Involvement, usage**

And there is a group called, the trail crew which is probably about a total of about 50, 50 or so people within the 1200 in the Buckeye Trail Association. And those people, select groups of that 50 show up for these work parties, sometimes as many as 35 or 40 of em, sometimes as few as 10 or 15. And basically work parties are intended to build new trail or improve a really bad existing trail. But again,

{the trail crew prides itself on building basically almost, they know the new trail.} **Code: Inv, usage**

That's one group. The other group is

the group that maintains trail **Code: Inv, usage**

and we have the entire *** Trail for 800 miles divided into little segments and there are people who maintain those segments and they are responsible for seeing that they, you know, if there is a tree across the trail that it is removed, that the blades stay fresh, that the drains, if there is the water, you know, water bars or stuff like that, those are kept open. Their concern is the bare existence(?). We

{consider them adopters, those people just, they have that little piece of trail and they are very proud of it} **Code: Inv, usage, feeling**

a lot of em. A lot of em walk it, several completely encourage to walk it at least four times a year, but some of them walk it almost weekly. Depending on where they live and, you know, and some of them have pieces of trail that are on road and basically all they do is blade, keep the blades fresh.

I: How important do you feel that this work is to accomplishing, you know, the overall mission, the work that the volunteers do?

{R: I think it is the whole thing.} **Code: Phil, importance**

I: It is the whole thing, okay.

R: Nothing else. There are other volunteers that don't do trail work, remember. There is the people that, there is the lady that rides the trail blazer, there is guys that do cartography, there is guys that kind of,

{administrative stuff, stuck in the background that doesn't like to get recognized.} **Code: BP4, BP5, BP6, involvement**

We've got one lady who does nothing but pick up the mail and then deliver it around. You know, but those are equally important jobs, the guy that runs the website.

I: Right, right.

R: The guy that runs the store, you know, these are all volunteers and they are all, some of them are on the trail crews, some of them are not. Some of them are maintainers, some are not.

I: About how many volunteers do you work with?

R: *** Trail probably has, I would say

{a hundred people that I see that are active.} **Code: Numbers**

There is probably a few more than that if you count all the maintainers. I bet I don't see them.

I: Okay. Does that include the support staff that you just described?

R: Yes.

I: Alright.

R: You know out of 1200 people

{there is probably 100, maybe 120 that are truly active, ten percent. I think that's about par for the course from this organization.} **Code: Numbers**

I: Okay. Have you had any formal training in working with volunteers?

{R: No.} **Code: BP4**

I: No.

R: No, like I said my training was somewhat more autocratic.

I: Okay, so you feel that most of your experience came from your time in the workplace?

R: Ah, you mean working with volunteers?

I: Yes.

R: No. I'd say that au contraire. My experience has been in the military and as the vice president was a manager, was you know, somewhat more direct.

I: Oh I see and so that ties back to what you were saying before that

R: Management principles that I learned in the military and in the corporate world probably apply, but not the working with the people.

I: Okay. How do you go about seeing the volunteers when they come to you and when they say, gees I'm interested in working on the trail and sort of upping the ante a little bit with their participation. How do you insure that the volunteers are placed in areas and are given work that is appropriate to their skills and their interests?

R: Well, I don't do that myself.

I: Okay.

R: But, I'd be the second tier and the first, the guy they contact first is a guy named *** which is one of the, he is assistant state trail coordinator. And he

{finds people and directs them according to their desires.} **Code: BP3, BP4, recruit**

We run on to people that say, gee I'd like to build trail, well you know, sometimes we are out building trails and they come stumbling down the trails and say, gee I'd like to do that. We tell them, hey here is the phone number, call us, we'll tell you the next time we are going to go out. And a very small percentage come in that way, but a lot of people will retire and look around for something.

{It is something that I think we don't do a good enough job, frankly, of attracting willing workers.} **Code: BP3, BP4, communication, phil, recruit**

That's one of the things we'd like to improve. I don't think NCTA does much better.

I: Right, right, which kind of, I guess, leads into the next question a little bit. You mentioned wanting to improve the way that you set these volunteers up. Is there a formal framework within your organization that you use for the sort of assignments that you do complete or do you just kind of do what, did you guys create this yourself or did the NCTA provide you with a framework for assigning volunteers jobs?

R: *** Trail Association is older than *** Association. Ah no, the short answer is no.

{There is no, there is no formal program.} **Code: BP2, BP3**

Whoever shows up at a work party, they give a safety lecture at the beginning and a person that's never been there before, they usually tag him on to somebody that's more experienced and say, you know, stay with him today and he'll tell you what to do. Learn by doing.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT STATEMENT

Consent to Participate In An Experimental Study
Title: *The Role of Best Practices within Trail Management Organizations*

Description

The objectives of this study are to measure the adoption and implementation of 'best practices' among non-profit trail management organizations, and determine if these best practices help the organizations achieve their goals. We would like to engage you in a discussion in which you describe your relationship as a manager or volunteer. This discussion will involve a few brief questions.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no risks to you from participating in this discussion.

Volunteers and trail-management organizations may benefit from a better understanding of the volunteer/manager relationship. Hopefully, the analysis may provide suggestions on how organizations can better manage their volunteers.

Time Commitment, Cost and Payments:

Our discussion will take about 15 to 30 minutes to finish. There are no other costs for helping us with this study. We are not offering any payment for your participation.

Confidentiality:

Although we may record our discussion, we will not put your name on the tape or transcript. The only information that will be on the tape will be a code number, which will be stored in a separate location from the interview material. Therefore, we do not believe that you can be identified. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

Right to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary, i.e. you may choose not to participate at all. Furthermore, you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions. If you begin, you may discontinue your participation at any time.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about the study, contact Ben Amsden at 128 Whitehills Drive #3, East Lansing, MI 48823, ph (517)333-1770, e-mail amsden02@yahoo.com. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please feel free to contact - anonymously, if you wish - Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Michigan State University's Chair of University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email: <ucrihs@msu.edu>, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Statement of Consent:

I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

_____

Signature..... Date

I also consent to be recorded for this study:

_____

Signature..... Date

_____

Signature of Investigator:..... Date

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