Chapter 3

Organisational (Mis)Behaviour of Volunteers: Profiles and Perspectives

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The contributions of volunteers to the goals of many organisations are crucial to their success. It is becoming increasingly important to ensure that conduct and behaviours of volunteers mirror the values of the organisation and are in line with the goals sought. Deploying and managing volunteers has complexities of its own, the notions of intent and commitment at times work against appropriate people practices. It is therefore important to develop a level of understanding of the behaviours displayed by volunteers that may range from the inappropriate to exceptional, and at times be construed as 'misbehaviour'. This chapter will consider the behaviour of volunteers and offer different perspectives on what could be seen as 'misbehaviour' depending on the context.

Introduction

Volunteers are just the same as people in any other setting, and do not always behave in the manner desired and expected by the organisation, managers or other volunteers. There is always a tension in the management of volunteers about whether (or not) volunteers can and should be managed as if they were employees, and there is agreement that there is no 'one best way' of managing volunteers (Meijs & Ten Hoorn, 2008; Rochester, Ellis Paine & Howlett, 2010; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013). This chapter will explore the types of (mis)behaviour identified by volunteers and managers as being present in volunteer settings. It will consider some of the interpretations of this behaviour, and discuss some of the influences that may assist in seeking to ameliorate the impact.

Motivation to volunteer is one of the most researched topics in the field. Studies have shown that individual reasons for taking up volunteer activity extend from a normative sense of obligation to others – 'it's what you do', to altruistic notions of service and to more self-oriented motivations associated with pleasure, leisure, employability and skills