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Volunteer Initiatives and its larger Contexts: The case of New York Cares

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New York Cares is a volunteer organization that boasts of a unique approach to volunteering. It was established in the 1980s in order to contribute to combating the social problems hounding American society. This volunteer organization capitalizes on its claim to broadness that enables it to welcome participants and volunteers from any class, political affiliation, religious beliefs, or persuasion. It is founded on the idea of uniting for making New York communities a better, more liveable place – arguably one of the more prominent calls of volunteer organizations striving to make a change.

New York Cares provides countless activities all year long which serve as springboards for its volunteers to get into action and solidify their commitment. Activities such as providing services all over the city, volunteering in corporations, lending a hand in disaster preparedness and response, and conducting youth activities are just some of the undertakings of New York Cares. As a non-government organization focused on servicing the community, New York Cares can be treated as doing an alternative, if not marginal type of public administration. It is working differently from the government, although this does not mean that it cannot have the latter's support or that it opposes it. Sometimes, volunteer or non-government organizations also conduct activities in partnership with government bodies. In addition to that, the government bodies also tap volunteer or non-government organizations in implementing its policies. The only difference is that volunteer organizations do not have the same capacity as the

government in terms of resources. This is exactly why they depend on volunteers and not employees. However, they try not to let this be an impediment in the course of their work. In the case of New York Cares, its thousands of volunteers speak of the pull its programs and plans of action were able to make.

In terms of structure, New York Cares is based on a centralized system that monitors its mostly decentralized activities. There can be classified a central office where most planning occur but this does not mean that people on the ground are helpless and powerless in terms of making decisions or implementing actions. All members of the organizations are still afforded to pitch in their thoughts and suggestions for the development of the organization. All members opinions are matter; getting the ability to vote is also another way to give the members the chance to express their opinions. For specific activities such as the ones for the youth, disaster management among others, the overall program was considered but the specific details of the activities are for the organizational members to develop. Hence, in this setup, the organizational culture is one that fosters a certain level of democracy in order to enable it to attain fuller development. With everyone encouraged to share their opinions and comments for the sake of benefiting the organization in terms of policies and their implementation, the organization can anticipate future progress.

New York Cares handles projects in diverse and distinct fields. The organization uses community partners (also community agencies) to organize the projects and mobilize volunteers to complete the projects. Each month, New York Cares plans and manages over 1500 volunteers allotted to

different projects. Each of the organization's projects has a team leader responsible to direct control and organizes the team to complete the assigned project. All New York Cares team leaders report to the program managers in charge of regional projects around New York. Project managers work in liaison with different agencies to achieve stipulated objectives (Team Leader Position Description, 2014). Volunteers work between six months to a year on extremely flexible schedules that accommodate innumerable adjustments. A volunteer can apply for a team leader's position after attending three consecutive meetings and successfully passing the recruitment process. The recruitment process entails a written application, an interview with a staff member, a routine background check, and training on team leadership (Team Leader Position Description, 2014).

A key development in the realm of theory occurred in the venues of industrial and organizational psychology. These developments had obvious impacts on the workings of New York Cares. In this context, leadership in this type of organization entails specific characteristics. These will ensure that the organization can function well while not bypassing its vital tasks. A leader for New York Cares must be able to answer to the demands of the organization. Heeding the concerns of the members and assimilating everyone's opinions is a must. This will guarantee that no internal discord will occur in the organization. Another trait that must be present is the diligence of the leader. Arduous tasks await leaders and their members and so there must be close attention to details in order not to ignore the seemingly paltry ones.

In 2004, New York Cares appointed Gary Bagley as the organization's Senior

Director of Programs and Associate Executive Director. After serving four years in the post, Gary Bagley rose to the organization's helm in 2008 to the Executive Director's post. Gary is a participative leader in charge of directing all aspects of the organization that includes programming, strategizing, fundraising, board relations, finance operations, as well as public relations (Gary, 2014). In the last fiscal year, Gary managed to triple the New York Cares volunteers to 150000, complete over 18000 projects and serve over 1300 non-profit making organizations. Gary holds a M. P. A from the Baruch College and with vast experience in non-profit making management; he lecture Adjunct in the city of New York. Most of New York Cares project managers are autocratic leaders who command a large following among the volunteers.

In terms of the interaction of the four frames which are as follows: structural, human resource, political and symbolic, we can see how the organization must be adaptive to changing circumstances. Structural frames, which implicate the structure of the organization, must maximize its human resources in bringing about its goals. Next, the political frame must be guided by the symbolic frame in that the messages imparted by the group concur with its political vision and missions. The structural frame also speaks of the kind of politics inherent within the organization. Symbolic frame is also implicated in the human resource frame in that the former mainly decides on how the latter select potential members of the team.

In addition to this, we will examine how these frames are enlivened in the workings of the organization. The structural frame is evident in the organizational models that New York Cares follows; that is, with the

coordinating systems and methods between the leaders, officers and the rest of the members. This frame is contributory to the overall efficiency of work inside New York Cares. The human resource concerns with the performance of the employees and how they are maximized for the benefit of New York Cares. This is where matters such as motivation and reinforcement of employees come in. The political frame point to the political dynamics present in every organization. This relates to the way the higher-ups and the members work together. The two extreme samples of this can be totally hierarchic or more flexible, and everything in between. Lastly, the symbolic frame points to the interaction among all of the members of New York Cares and how do they collaborate in buttressing the advocacies of the organization.

Given the democratic atmosphere in the organization, the members have the privilege of raising their opinions when it comes to crucial matters affecting the organization. In turn, the organization can issue a reprimand or advice for members that are deemed to be erring or faltering in their respective functions. This is the dynamic relationship underlying the responsibilities and duties of the individual members and the organization. On the one hand, the members of the organization are free to raise their concerns and ideas about the way the organization is being handled, but the organization also has the responsibility to check the functioning of its members. Ideally, this setup will give birth to a dynamism that works in favour of the organization's improvements. Techniques of doing things and the types of activities being done will constantly evolve and adapt to changing circumstances. Lastly, the democratic atmosphere permeating the organization allows this health and

productive exchange of ideas and positions among its members.

Arguably one of the best strengths of New York Cares must concern with its being a non-profit organization which as such frees it from the countless constraints of profit or private organizations whose expansion is tied to its goal to gain profit. Either tending to be purely advocacy with meager financial returns on the side, if not at all, or community services, New York Cares can just focus on what it intends on doing. The same can be its weakness. It needs to effort more in looking for funds in order to push through with its projects. In terms of opportunities, New York cares continues to expand and gather more members. This is a cause for opportunity as it can delve into more projects while also sustaining its previous ones more effectively. Lastly, a crucial target in the offing is the maintenance of its membership as non-profit and independent organizations greatly depend on its volunteers. This is important given their limited budget, a little restraint New York Cares also needs to bear in mind constantly.

We can see that the above analysis corresponds to the notions disseminated in the fields of Industrial and Organizational psychology. The early stages of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, as revealed by related literature and other documents, is pictured to have begun in the last 19th century. Hugo Munsterberg is often pointed as one of the earliest scholars to look into the potential of developing this study during his time. His book, “ Psychology and Industrial Efficiency” is usually accorded as the first book to earnestly apply psychological principles in the discussion of business and organizational problems (Munsterberg: 24). In the European scene, many efforts have followed through since the initiation of Munsterberg and with the

backing of the government that is perhaps also concerned with the improvement of efficiency of the industries and the satisfaction of the workers, the headstart for Industrial and Organizational psychology showed a lot of promise. One of the main manifestations of this rose-colored beginning is the rabid formation of numerous psychology communities and organizations comprised by renowned practitioners and scholars in the field. In contrary, the psychologists in the United States of America are having bleaker times as they did not enjoy the government support which their European counterparts had. Mostly, they had to make-do with launching independent efforts (Jeane 1988: 155). The case of New York cares clearly shows this. This resulted to a more scarce publication turnout which evidently had impacts on the dissemination of their findings and stirring the general public about deemed significant advances in a field of study that might change their daily lives in the near future.

Developments such as the foundation of new branches tying psychology to the natural sciences such as eugenics and psychotechnics have crucial roles played in the growth of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. For instance, psychotechnics, initially developed by Lewis William Stern, the person behind the Intelligence Quotient (IQ), claims that the findings of mental tests can ascertain individual differences which in turn can be utilized to achieve greater efficiency by reducing fatigue and other human factors (Yukl: 112). This seems to be attuning with the developments in Europe where the scientific analysis of work considers physiology, nutrition and fatigue is cardinal above all. In similar, relevant progress in the harder sciences, the principles in Thermodynamics are also being transported for

further enlightenment in Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Ideas like entropy advances findings such as the expansion of energy to include the energy invested in the production through mechanical work. Also, the idea that fatigues leads to contraction of the growth of muscle times and hence, less work, is but a single example of how physical concepts are adapted into psychology. In turn, these findings were used in order to mobilize workers and volunteers better and obtain more productivity out of them.

With the trend of immigration, increasing urban population and reforms in education and other key social institutions, usually ascribed to the slow awakening of a globalizing world, came the term Scientific Management which refers to a rational approach in shedding light to business activities and industrial objectives. The formulations in the field of ergonomics, or the discipline of human factors, also manifest the increasing premium given to the individual worker and how they can be maximized for organizational growth and production. This is also at work in New York Cares where human factors are given the topmost priority. Also, the resurgence of the functionalist school of thought in Psychology, as an off-shoot of Darwinism in the end of 19th century, asserts that the individual is constantly adapting to her environment and that these modes of adaptation are limited and can be influenced by the available resources in her surroundings (Fleishman, 93).

Next, we will talk about some insights and points that can be made in relation to New York Cares in particular and volunteer organizations in general. Despite a supposed rift with the government whose supposed “ lacks” they suppose to make up for, volunteer organizations like New York Cares have done better in collaborating with projects and ventures of the

government usually through their agencies so as to make a stronger impact to the lives of more people during disasters (Jackson 2011, 316). In their website, New York Cares avows their commitment to help in time of disasters and natural catastrophes. Independent relief efforts were facilitated which differed themselves from the slowing process of bureaucracy in the relief launched by the local and national government. In that sense, they quicken the process of sending relief since they are not under the rigor of bureaucracy. One of the disadvantages of the volunteer organizations which the government definitely does not have is the financial aspect of doing humanitarian projects. Since organizations like New York Cares are commonly launched by sectors of the society or individuals with shared visions, they do not have much financial muscles that are evidently needed in extending works to the indigent.

Volunteer organizations are normally guided by set of principles and practice that emanate from their mission and vision and specific objectives in defined periods of time. Most of these organizations limit their scope of venture in terms of their areas of concern, i. e. on the environment, children and women's welfare, crime and drugs among others. With these delimitations, it would appear easier for these organizations to tap other agencies, not just from the government, to work with and fulfil their objectives and actualize their services. Therefore, during times of disaster, organizations can mobilize more people to join in the endeavors addressing the situation (Black 1989, 187). In the case of the blizzard in Washington, this was more manifested once the amount of snow outdoors has subsided and people were allowed more or less to return gradually to their previous routines. The role of the

Organizations during disasters became more glaring once the visible effects of the disasters have attenuated. In the case of New York cares, they are not limited to just one advocacy. Aside from its focus on responding to natural disasters, they also help in building skills for the youth and providing other services to community members.

The weaknesses of various organizations can only be made pointed if they fail to surmount the limitations posed to them by external factors. For instance, since the Hurricane Katrina, there seems to be a much improved coordination within and without the various organizations like Red Cross that resulted to more optimized performance in responding to disaster and calamity needs.. Before, there was a glaring difficulty in squaring with the aims of the government and member of its bureaucratic system who are often coming up in these projects as part of their political façade. In that sense, they have their own interests which are put at the fore when they respond to disasters and do humanitarian missions. For volunteer organizations like New York Cares to more ably expand and develop their potentials, there must be unity rather than divisions, collaboration rather than competition. This can get them a long way as they collectively surmount the challenges posed by limited resources.

New York Care has achieved a notable milestone since it started. However, the number of homeless New Yorkers is increasing by day. Thus, New York Cares organization could work in investing some amount of its income in much valuable ways such as, creating new projects tha could give the homeless the opportunity to have a better future and be an active member of the society rather than being just an individual who needs a helping hand.

Lastly, great minds are distinctive group of the society who need special attention and motivation. New York Cares Organization could adopt those unique volunteers and attract them to work as main members of the organization. Those who inovate great ideas and done a successful achievements in a short time should be included as special members under the organization staff. This will be a new movement to invest in the organizational income in a smart way, by keeping talented people who were already under training and filling a future position in the company.

After all, New York Cares is one of many other volunteering organizations that is tying to give a helping hand and to make a positive change in the sociaty. We find that New York Cares organization is one of the most succsesfulvolunteering instutions in the United States.

In summary, New York Cares prides itself in being one of the most successful volunteer organizations. The services that the organization has been providing to the people of New York have been instrumental in making the city a better place to live. Its collaborative efforts with the government and other non-governmental agencies, as well as the support it has been receiving from individuals have been some of the key factors that have contributed to the success of New York Cares. One issue that will ensure that the organization continues to thrive is how it chooses to recruit, train, and manage it volunteers. The organization has been doing a good job in ensuring that it has the best volunteer teams. Another major challenge has been hoe to motivate its volunteers because they are not paid. The volunteers have been very instrumental in ensuring the success of the organization because most of them have stuck with it despite the fact that

they receive no monetary compensation. Critics say that the organization should endeavour to deal with the ever increasing number of homeless New Yorkers. However, it should be noted that the government should not neglect its role and expect non-governmental and volunteer organizations to play their roles. The government should coordinate its operations with volunteer organizations and grant them the cooperation they deserve so that their work can be made much easier. Governmental policies should also favour the operations of volunteer organizations such as New York Cares.

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