

**Thesis booklet**

**University of Sopron**

**István Széchenyi Economics and Management  
Doctoral School**

**Maßnahmen des Personalmanagements von Non-  
Profit-  
Organisationen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung  
der Motive und  
Haftungsrisiken Ehrenamtlicher**

Eine empirische Untersuchung in den Ländern  
Deutschland und Österreich

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## **1. Research concept**

Registered associations make up the largest proportion of NPOs in Germany and Austria. Their number is growing steadily, while the number of those who are willing to do voluntary work is decreasing comparatively. What's more, there are risks of civil liability for volunteers in Germany and Austria while carrying out their activities.

This fact leads to the question, which organizational, economic and legal measures NPOs or respective registered associations may take to encourage willingness to take up a voluntary position in their organization. In order to be able to provide suitable answers to this question, the predominant motives of the volunteers in assuming and continuing positions with responsibility, specifically positions on the board, must be identified. Furthermore, it is necessary to find out what knowledge the volunteers have about risks of civil liability and how this knowledge influences their willingness for a voluntary position.

From earlier secondary research on the status of research, a gap has been identified that there are neither scientific debates nor studies regarding the effects of knowledge

about possible liability risks on the willingness to continue or take up voluntary positions.

This situation has given rise to the following questions for the present research:

### **High-level overall research question**

What organisational, economic and legal measures can individual NPOs take to promote willingness to volunteer/formal voluntary work in their company?

**Research question 1:** What motives prevail while accepting to volunteer/formal voluntary work?

#### **Research question 2:**

To what extent do volunteers/formal voluntary workers know their liability risks?

**Research question 3:** What influence do existing liability risks have on the willingness to volunteer/formal voluntary work?

## **2. Objective of the dissertation**

The objective to be achieved with this dissertation is the elicitation of empirically proven findings, as to which organisational, economic and legal measures within the framework of the **personnel policy** of NPOs or respective

registered associations are suitable to promote the willingness for voluntary work in the organization. In order to be able to give suitable answers to this question, insights on the following topics should be generated:

a.) Identification of the motives of volunteers, which are decisive when accepting and continuing offices with responsibility, especially for board positions.

b.) Knowledge of the volunteers on the liability risks under civil law.

c.) Influence of the knowledge on willingness to volunteer and to assume liability risks.

**Hypotheses** are not explicitly formulated in advance so as to keep the research open-ended. Rather, the objective is to use the research results to generate hypotheses that can be verified in subsequent research.

### **3. Approach to empirical investigation**

In the context of empirical research, the method of qualitative **primary research** is used. By means of **in-depth interviews** with six former and active board members of registered associations from Austria and Germany, insights into possibly even latent structures of

meaning should be gained. The in-depth interviews are based on a guideline, the use of which should serve as a reminder so that no essential question is left out. The guideline is checked for its suitability in a pre-test. The persons to be interviewed are selected on the basis of **theoretical sampling**, since only relevant persons are to be interviewed and the interviews are terminated upon reaching a saturation level.

The evaluation of the in-depth interviews is carried out using a **summarising qualitative content analysis according to Mayring** in QCAmap.

Subsequently, to keep the triangulation, an independent **coding** is carried out for the main categories resulting from the content analysis.

The concepts resulting from content analysis and coding for the six interviewees are examined for supra-individual commonalities and form the basis for an **empirically founded typification**.

#### **4. Research results**

Using the findings from the in-depth interviews, the theory out of various studies on voluntary work in Germany and

Austria could be verified. In addition, the summarising qualitative content analysis regarding research question no. 1 led to the main categories of **Reasons for volunteering**, **reasons against volunteering** and **understanding voluntary work**.

The subsequent coding shows that the main reasons for volunteering on the board of an association are highly individualistic. The volunteers' main reason for their commitment happens to be the desire **to help**, although the way of helping varies. Another main motive is that the activity should achieve something **meaningful**. **Success** is another criterion that is also very important. However, there are very different ideas about what is meant by success. **Fun factor** is also an important reason for volunteering and likewise, the content they are involved in is very vital for some of the volunteers. **Professional interests** are also pursued with voluntary positions. Normally, involvement to volunteer happens by responding to a request from the association to take up the voluntary position. The most important reasons against volunteering are **time and health related reasons**.

Volunteers have the general idea of volunteering, that it is about providing time, knowledge or commitment to an organisation or project **without** being **paid** for it. **Good cooperation on the board** is also an essential part of volunteering, although the understanding of good cooperation also varies.

A key result of the research at hand is that there is a discrepancy between self-perceived reasons for volunteering and the actual reasons present, some of which could only be identified within the scope of the coding carried out.

The main categories for research question no. 2, **No knowledge of the liability risk, knowledge of D&O insurance and cognisance** during voluntary work, show that half of the test subjects have no knowledge of any liability risks, even though some have been already doing voluntary work since many years. Even negative experiences with liability scenarios do not necessarily lead to volunteers finding out more about liability risks. Regarding options and contents of a so-called D&O insurance for committees of registered associations, there is absolutely no knowledge.



Such insurance is intended to cover the risks of financial losses caused by the committee.

The main categories for research question no. 3 are **Consequences of knowing the risks and responses to cognisance during the interview**. The interviews revealed that even those who had experience with liability risks in their office or during the interview, were mostly willing to continue their voluntary work. Subsequent to the interviews, it turned out that nobody had drawn a conclusion from the interviews to request their association board to take out D&O insurance for them.

An examination of the characteristics of the criteria **Reasons for volunteering and reactions to knowledge of the liability risks** led to the finding that the combinations of content-related interests with absolute willingness to volunteer and success with absolute willingness to volunteer occur most frequently.

The typification that followed the qualitative content analysis led to the following types:

- Type A - who are **extrinsically motivated and aware of it**

- Type B - volunteers who are **extrinsically motivated** but consider themselves **altruistic**
- Type C -those who are **predominantly intrinsically motivated**.

## **5. New scientific findings**

The following hypotheses could be generated as part of the investigation:

**Hypothesis 1:** A volunteer who is predominantly extrinsically motivated and who is also aware of this is more willing to assume liability risks than a volunteer who is predominantly extrinsically motivated and is not aware of this.

**Hypothesis 2:** Predominantly intrinsically motivated volunteers are characterised by a great willingness to assume liability risks.

The findings from the typification result in better possible use of the volunteering resources for the NPO sector. This results in an economic benefit, which is also an aspect that should not be underestimated by NPOs. The wrong person in the wrong position, the resulting disadvantages and the renewed search for a more suitable person can be avoided.

In addition, individually tailored measures can increase the intrinsic as well as the extrinsic motivation of the volunteers and lead to an improved corporate culture. An organization with a good corporate culture is in turn more attractive in the competition for good and motivated volunteers.

## **6. Conclusions/recommendations and further research needs**

### 6.1 Recommendations

A well-thought-out personnel marketing strategy of NPOs is of great importance both for recruiting as well as for retaining volunteers. This applies to small as well as mid-sized and large NPOs.

**Recommendation 1:** NPOs looking for new volunteers should be aware of the circumstances that many volunteers misrepresent their interest in volunteering because they are unaware of their true motives. This discrepancy between the self-perceived motives and the actual motives is present in many volunteers both before starting to volunteer and during the voluntary work.

The results of the present work lead to the conclusion that those involved in the recruitment and retention process

should try to determine the true motives of the potential volunteers in preliminary talks and to match appropriate people to the three types of volunteers. The easiest to identify are those who are extrinsically motivated and who are aware of and admit it. They can be identified within the scope of preliminary talks with targeted questions about their motives. It becomes problematic with the people who belong to type B. They consider themselves to be intrinsically motivated and are in fact only partially motivated, if at all. The proponents of type C, who are predominantly intrinsically motivated, will also be difficult to identify. However, as motives cannot be perceived from outside, it is advisable to inform the (potential) volunteers about the possible liability risks in a preliminary talk, similar to a job interview, and to evaluate their reactions to them. Ideally, the NPO should already have a solution in the form of suitable insurance at the expense of the association and explains this to the interested party. Even if individuals allow themselves to be dissuaded from voluntary work by pointing out the liability risks, it is ultimately more sustainable to only accept people into office who, knowing all the circumstances, want to do

voluntary work. Identification with an organization that plays "with open cards" in this respect will be great. The corporate culture will also benefit from this - with all the resulting advantages. Dealing openly with risks and the maximum possible protection for (interested) volunteers also offer an NPO the opportunity to position itself vis-à-vis other NPOs.

It is therefore advisable for NPOs to deal openly with the issue of possible liability risks.

**Recommendation 2:** The NPOs, which have no knowledge of possible liability risks, may also use the typification described above for targeted measures to recruit and retain volunteers.

Type A, who has a clear idea of what he expects from volunteering, can have his individual expectations satisfied.

Type B is the most difficult to identify, as they don't know their own motives and may even be fooling themselves about their true motives. As the study has shown, recognition, positive feedback and a social component are important for all three types. That is why, these aspects should be addressed. A new trend that municipalities are

following in cooperation with NPOs, and which every NPO should follow, is issuing volunteer cards (includes benefits for volunteers in participating cities and districts). NPOs can nominate their deserving volunteers for nationwide engagement awards. Involving family members in the NPO promotes social bonding. A strong corporate culture should be striven for, especially with regard to type C.

**Recommendation 3:** The above-mentioned protection against possible liability risks for volunteers can, for example, consist of taking out a D&O insurance (directors' and officers' liability insurance). An advantage of this insurance is that the company does not have to insure the individual named manager or managers, but all persons who hold the insured committee position during the insurance period. Risks (allegedly) caused due to financial losses from voluntary activities by the committees are to be insured, whereby their private assets are to be protected from liability risks. Of course, this requires a thorough weighing of the individual risks of the committees in the specific association with respect to the insurance premiums incurred.

**Recommendation 4:** Since intrinsically motivated volunteers are generally easier to retain at the NPO, the focus should be on this group of people. NPOs should clearly define and communicate their field of activity and what they stand for, so that those interested in volunteering form a better basis for making decisions about getting involved in an NPO that is right for them.

The fact that, some volunteers are uninformed about the tasks of a volunteer, leads to the conclusion that a majority of NPOs should provide more information about the requirements of their respective voluntary activities. Depending on the size and financial resources of the NPO, training courses for volunteers could be organised to teach the essential business, tax and legal basics.

**Recommendation 5:** The present research shows that (potential) volunteers often have a misconception about volunteering. It is therefore important to explain to future board members about their duties, but also about their rights (for example, about the voluntary service allowance and reimbursement of costs), in order to eliminate the misunderstanding of voluntary work as unpaid work.

**Recommendation 6:** NPOs should always keep an eye on the composition of the board and value a combination of different personalities and people who complement each other professionally. It has been proven useful for board members initially to be accompanied in their activities by experienced board members before they exercise their full responsibility of the board office and later even take over the chairmanship. This is followed by the requirement to possibly avoid replacing an entire board.

**Recommendation 7:** Against the background of numerous experiences of the test subjects with improper management of the associations by their predecessors, it is made obvious, to pay more attention to the handover of offices.

## 6.2 Further research needs

Quantitative research following this study with the objective of verifying the hypotheses developed here makes little sense. It has been demonstrated in the course of this study that the motives for voluntary work indicated by the researched persons are partially superimposed by unconscious motives. However, quantitative research is not in a position to determine these latent structures of meaning.



Having said this, there is a further need for research with regard to the hypotheses generated in the form of further qualitative research with the objective of falsifying the hypotheses. In this context, it also presents itself, to research whether there are also volunteers who are intrinsically motivated but consider themselves to be extrinsically motivated. This type has not been identified in the present research.

There is a further need for research to conduct a survey among non-volunteering citizens about their reasons as to when they would take up voluntary work and the reasons, why they have not taken any yet. Such a survey for Germany does not exist.

A study on the possible analogous applicability of the Business Judgement Rule to non-commercial associations should be suggested. So far, this regulation has not been applicable to registered non-commercial associations in Germany and Austria.

## Own publications

MTMT publication and citation summary table				
Hofmann Daniela 's data (03.29.2022)				
Publication types	Count		Citations <sup>1</sup>	
	All	Detailed	Independent	All
Scientific publications	All	Detailed	Independent	All
<b>I. Scientific journal article</b>	<u>2</u>	---	---	---
in international journal in foreign language	---	0	0	0
in international journal in Hungarian	---	0	0	0
in hungarian journal in foreign language	---	<u>2</u>	0	0
in hungarian journal in hungarian	---	0	0	0
<b>II. Books</b>	0	---	---	---
<b>a) Book as author</b>	0	---	---	---
in foreign language	---	0	0	0
in hungarian	---	0	0	0
<b>b) Book as editor <sup>2</sup></b>	0	---	---	---
in foreign language	---	0	---	---
in hungarian	---	0	---	---
<b>III. Book chapter</b>	<u>2</u>	---	---	---
in foreign language	---	<u>2</u>	0	0

in hungarian	---	0	0	0
<b>IV. Conference in journal or conference paper</b>	<u>3</u>	---	---	---
in foreign language	---	<u>3</u>	0	0
in hungarian	---	0	0	0
<b>Publications (I.-IV.)</b>	<u>7</u>	---	0	0
<b>Abstract<sup>3</sup></b>	<u>4</u>	---	0	0
<b>Research data</b>	0	---	0	0
<b>Other scientific works<sup>4</sup></b>	0	---	0	0
<b>All scientific publications</b>	<u>11</u>	---	0	0
<b>Hirsch index<sup>5</sup></b>		---	---	---
<b>Educational works</b>	0	---	---	---
Higher educational books	0	---	---	---
Higher educational book in foreign language	---	0	0	0
Higher educational book in Hungarian	---	0	0	0
Higher educational book chapter in foreign language	---	0	0	0
Higher educational book chapter in hungarian	---	0	0	0

Educational material	0	---	0	0
<b>Titles of protection</b>	0	---	0	0
<b>Achievement</b>	0	---	0	0
<b>Popular science works</b>	0	---	---	---
Journal article		0	0	0
Books	---	0	0	0
Other popular science works	---	0	0	0
<b>Of public interest or unclassified publications</b>	0	---	0	0
<b>More publications<sup>7</sup></b>	0		0	0
<b>Other authorships</b>	0	---	0	0
<b>Citations of edited publications</b>	---	---	0	0
<b>Citations in dissertations and other types</b>	---	---	0	0
<b>All publications and citations</b>	<a href="#">11</a>	---	0	0