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The management quest for authentic relationships in voluntary social care

*Abstract:* Little research has been devoted to exploring the perspective of volunteer managers and the values guiding them in their effort to manage voluntary social care. The purpose of this paper is to begin to provide insight into the content of these values and their impact on the day-to-day practices of managers. The paper will proceed through three stages. The first provides a short review of the literature regarding the nature of research in the field of volunteer management. This is followed by a presentation of results from an exploratory study of how managers’ call for authentic relationships has specific consequences for how voluntary social care becomes an object of their management. These questions will be investigated among managers in four different organizational settings in Denmark, which organize voluntary social care in relation to children, the elderly, young people with mental health problems and hospital patients respectively. The paper concludes by discussing the kinds of challenges and dilemmas that these values and expectations bring about.

Keywords: Management, voluntary social care, authentic relationships.

Introduction

Cvil society has through history been associated with many different virtues, civilized political disputes (Ferguson 1991; Roepke 1996), self-governing citizens (Tocqueville 1996, Bobbio 1988; Kumar 1993; Rowley 1998) and collective free will (Gramsci 1971; Fioramonti & Thümler 2013), just to mentioned a few. But one virtue seems to be particular insignificant namely that civil society represent a autonome sphere of free and civilized people.In his investigation of the historical development of the concept Adam Seligman concludes: “Civil society is thus that arena where…free, self-determing individuality sets forth its claims for satisfaction of its wants and personal autonomy” (Seligman 1998:29).

In the recent decades the concept of authenticity has been added to the notion of civil society, because it is observed as the only sphere of society where you as a citizen have the freedom to be true to yourself (Guignon 2008, Rosenblum & Post 2002). Or as Michael Walter puts it civil society becomes the realm of “Concrete and authentic solidarities” (Walzer 1992:97-98). According to some researchers this is the case, because our lives have become increasingly colonialized by the rationality of the market and the state, that civil society becomes the only sphere were people can experience authentic and real feelings and passions (Habermas 2001, Cohen & Arato 1992; Putnam 2000). In the same vein, several scholars speak of “authentic communities” in which individuals can practice their freedom (Dell, 1993; Etzioni, 1993, 1996; Alexander 1998), while Zygmunt Baumann goes further and suggests that civil society as a community as such has been “lost” and that if there is to be a sense of collectivity again, it has to emerge from weaving individuals together in new authentic forms of mutual care (Baumann, 2001:149-150).

If we take a closer look,at the role that authenticity plays within the very idea of civil society, we will be able to see that it breaks with the essentialist notion of authenticity as a matter of “being true to one self”. The idea of an essential authentic self, takes its point of departure in the idea that authenticity relies on the single person ability to life up to her own moral standards, free of any constrains that others may would impose on her. As a consequence authenticity is something you find when you are isolated from others (Jourard 1971; Reis & Patrick 1996). Instead the literature on civil society focus on the need for authentic *relationships* for the individual to fulfill her potential for being her own true self (Baumann 2001; Barker 2010; Milner 2017; Putnam 2000; Walton 2007). Relational authenticity emphasize in this way the need for interpersonal relationships and true social engagements that can create meaning into people lives, and give them an sense of who they really are. In this interpretation authenticity is not considered as a personal virtue but a social one (Guignon 2008).

Relational authenticity is a demanding form of sociality because it involves valuing and striving for openness, sincerity, and truthfulness in one’s close relationships (Jourard 1971). Reis and Patrick (1996) emphasize that “authentic relationships involve reciprocal process of self-disclosure and of mutual intimacy and trust. And Kernis and Goldmann defines relational authenticity as “Valueing and achieving openness and truthfulness in one’s close relationships. Conceptually, the relational component presumes it is important for close others to see the real you, good and bad. Moreover, relational authenticity means being genuine and not “fake” in one’s relationships with others (Kernis & Goldmann 2006:302). Similar conceptions of relational authenticity is repeated in several other studies (see forexample Harter et al. 1997, Mikiluncer & Shaver 2005). Seen in these intrapersonal perspective authenticity is understood as the notion of “being true to oneself” which only can be fulfilled in a context of intimate and authentic relationships with other people. What is important to note in these arguments is that relational authenticity is not something that appeals to any external duty or formal rules. Instead, it represent a social relationship that develops an autonomy of its own free of any kind of external pressures.

Because the realization of authentic relationships has become increasingly difficult to realize in the modern society, several researchers points at voluntary organizations as the institutional safeguards for the realization of such vulnerable authentic relationships (Habermas 1996; Cohen & Arato 1992; Baumann 2001; Putnam 2000). Thus, the literature emphasizes the voluntary organizations’ capacity for creating spaces of face-to-face collectives that protect social identity and promote the creation of authentic relationships. Several studies on voluntary social work has emphasized the volunteers ability to establish authentic bonds to the ones they help through their willingness to listening and paying attention towards their problems (Sevigny et al. 2010; Vattano 1972; Mailloux et al. 2007; Folgheraiter & Pasini 2009; Leung 2010). As a result, voluntary organizations become a space where people are allowed to “authentically” express themselves (Hwang and Powell, 2009; Skocpol, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Brown & Hesketh 2004). Similarly, the increased orientation toward results and the general call for formalization and top-down steering of voluntary organizations, have resulted in widespread criticism of how this instrumental thinking has destroyed the authentic and spontaneous character of voluntary social care and its ability to be flexible and creative (Hustinx *et al*., 2010; Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Hwang and Powell, 2009; Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011; Salamon, 1995; Smith, 2003b, King 2017).

The expectations of authenticity within voluntariness have created what some researchers have labelled the “hope” (Luhmann, 1997: 109), the “fiction” (Barthel, 1997) or the“myth” (Eliasoph, 2009, Villadsen, 2009), of authenticity within communities and the voluntary organizations as their “safeguards.” Along the same lines, others have challenged the very idea that only good things happen within civil society (Deth & Zmerli, 2010, Keane 2006). According to these critics, if one looks at the claims behind the “jargon of authenticity,” the quality of voluntary care turns out to be mere wishful thinking and an illusory construct, which lacks any positive support, echoing Theodor Adorno’s general criticism of the modern existential longing for authenticity (Adorno, 2002). The different usages suggest that “authentic relationships” represent a rhetorical practice and therefor a polyvalent concept “presenting different meanings to different people” (Frenkel & Walton 2000:568). It is there for evidently a challenge to specify when a relationship live up to the demanding criteria for being authentic. In this sense the concept of “authentic relationships” appears rather broad and vague.

The topic of this article, however, is not to judge whether voluntary care situations represents an authentic relationship or not. It seeks instead to investigate what managers of voluntary social care understand by authentic relationships and how their call for authenticity creates different kinds of dilemmas in their management practices. The purpose of this article is therefor to take a closer look at how the ideal of authentic relationships work for the management of voluntary social care. How do the management translate the abstract notion of authentic relationships in such a way that it can guide them in their everyday management of voluntary social care? In other words, the paper will take “the myth” of authentic relationships seriously, because it guides the observation of the management of voluntary care. In this way, the very idea of authentic relationships exists not only as “pure abstraction” or merely as a “rhetorical practice”, but produces serious consequences for how voluntary social care becomes an object of management.

In the following we will investigate, how the ideals about the voluntary organizations as institutional safeguards of the vulnerable authentic relationships, is coupled with an increasing demand on the management of their welfare services.

Identifying challenges of volunteer management

The new forms of governance, has increased the volunteers presence in the provision of welfare services in the western world (Bode, 2006; Smith, 2003a; Eliasoph, 2011). Volunteers are regarded as an important resource for the improvement of services, away from the hierarchical steering of NPM, and towards new forms of collaboration and co-production of welfare, especially in areas in need of close face-to-face care between the provider and the recipient (Sherr, 2008). This development has caused an increased focus on strategies for the management of volunteers as a way to improve the quality of their contribution to the general delivery of welfare services (Irvin, 2005; Bode, 2006; Petrowits *et al.,* 2011).

As a result, we have witnessed an increase in the literature on volunteer management, delivering universalistic advise on nearly all aspects of the topic; how to prepare job descriptions for volunteers, how to match people, how to supervise, train and motivate volunteers, how to develop policies and procedures for their engagement, and finally how to evaluate the results of voluntary social care practices (e.g., Connors, 2012; Forsyth, 1999; Haivas, 2009; Hood, 2002; Lipp 2009; McCurley and Lynch, 1997; Sakaduski, 2013; Vineyard and McCurley, 2001). These studies define management practice as something simple and straightforward by privileging rational and structural responses to practice shortcomings. As a result, the handbooks have produced a long list of “how to do management,” generally disregarding the specific kinds of social care volunteers perform or the size of the organizations they work in. In this traditional approach, which Meijs and Karr (2004) have described as “programme management” the organization outlines the goals and volunteers are recruited to fill pre-determined roles, which is controlled by the management in order to secure that volunteers adhere to their specific roles within the specific service delivery.

There is, however, growing concern that the heavily prescriptive interest in what constitutes good volunteer management as such has ignored the organizational setting in which volunteering takes place (Howlett, 2011; Hustinx *et al*., 2010; Brudney and Meijs, 2014). In their review of the literature, Brudney and Meijs (2014) point to some management studies, which challenge the idea that “one size fits all” and argues instead that what counts as good volunteer management depends on the type of organization organizing the voluntary social care. These studies mention a range of variables such as size, culture and the level of paid staff in the organization, which determine what kind of management is required (Paull, 2002; Rochester, 1999; Meijs and Hoorn, 2008). Such studies have resulted in the development of a variety of different approaches to volunteer management suitable for different types of volunteer programs (Macduff, Netting & O’connor, 2009; Rochester, 1999; Meijs and Hoogstad, 2001).

A good example is Macduff, Netting and O’Connor’s four ideal types of volunteer management. They describe how managers can sometimes rely on formal descriptions of care practices when volunteers provide consistent and integrated services (traditional volunteer programs). If this is not the case, or when the task cannot be prearranged and scheduled, other forms of management are needed. Sometimes the manager has to ‘lead the way’ and be forward thinking in order to convince volunteers of “how to do things” (social change volunteer programs). In other cases where volunteers do not see themselves as members of the organization but simply want to make a difference, here and now, the manager must be open to “the subjective nature of human experience” and be willing to be highly flexible and accept a loose structure (serendipitous volunteer programs). The last ideal type Macduff et. al. mention is entrepreneurial volunteer programs, which pertain to volunteers who are not willing to accept any formal rules because they are so engaged in the activity at hand that they just want to be left alone. Here, the wise manager will have to develop ways for the organization to take advantage of the volunteer efforts without interfering in their work (Macduff *et al*., 2009).

Illuminating the complex challenge at hand, the study emphasizes that the four different programs represent ideal types, and that managers therefore in reality would have to approach volunteers in more than one way. The emphasis on the differences in norms and cultures in the relation between the goals of the program and the goals of the volunteers has also been discussed in other studies. Especially the value-oriented literature is focusing on how the voluntary sector should seek to attract volunteers with the same values as the organization (Bürsch, 2002; Händel-Burckhardt, 2000; Maran and Soro, 2010) to ensure that the organizations find the “right” volunteers (Pearce, 1993; Taylor *et al*., 2008; Jordan, 2009; Paton, 1996). Other researchers have investigated how managers of volunteers need to balance competing values between the organizations’ formal values and the values that are guiding the volunteers (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009; Gay, 2000; Safritt & Merrill, 2007).

In the same vein Jäger et. al. (2009) focus on how volunteer managers perceive the congruence between the goals of the organization and those of the volunteers, arguing that this is one of the single most important factors for being successful in establishing a good relationship with the organizations’ volunteers. The study describes how managers navigate these intricate relations by sometimes having to abandon top-down decisions and instead create “sensitive conglomerate practices” that respect the volunteers’ free will by allowing space for different opinions and supporting the volunteers’ potential. Within these balancing acts, “refraining from action can be seen as an important leadership practice” (Jäger *et. al*., 2009:91).

Other studies approach the same challenge by describing how managers must adjust the informal and spontaneous character of voluntary care by being highly flexible and collaborative in their decision making, while also disciplining volunteers in accordance with the overall goals of the volunteer program (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009; Vanstein, 2002; Leonard *et al*., 2004; Nisbet & Wallace, 2007; Macduff *et al*., 2009; Jäger *et al*., 2009; Stirling *et al*., 2011; O’meara *et al*., 2012). Taken together, these studies show how management attempts to balance the quest for autonomy among volunteers with the necessary policies and procedures of the organization. These studies have shed important light on how management practices constantly balance the micro-political task of respecting the volunteers’ positions without abandoning a focus on organizational results. Together these studies, albeit in different ways, have challenged the very idea that one size should fit all, and instead emphasize the complexity at hand when it comes to designing volunteer programs that live up to the expectations of the organization as well as those of its volunteers.

What is missing, however, in the above mentioned studies in order to deepen our understanding of de “delicate balancing act” of volunteer management, is a discussion of the specific goals that management is aiming at, and which have to be balanced against the autonomy of the voluntary practice. What are the values guiding management in its effort to steer volunteers? And how does these values create different kinds of dillemmas in their management practices. These are the questions we will turn to in the following.

Method

In order to provide an answer to the research question “what values are guiding the management of voluntary social care?” the article draws on the strengths of qualitative interviews (Kvale 2008). The interviewed managers was selected from four different organizations which all organize Person-oriented voluntary social care which aimed at providing individuals increased welfare and care through direct face-to-face contact. One was registered to care for older people who experience loneliness (Dane Age, visiting services), and another cared for young people between the ages of 6 and 12 who need support from and contact with adults (Voluntary Adult Friends). A third was registered to work with families to take care of young people with mental health problems who need contact with people outside their formal lives in public institutions (Contact Families). And the final organization provided volunteers for the social care of patients at public hospitals (Danish Red Cross, patient support volunteers).

The four examples cover two small organizations with a very limited number of employees, such as the organization Voluntary Adult Friends and Contact family Services, whereas the patient support services, organized by Danish Red Cross and visiting services, organized by Dane Age represent large national organizations with hundreds of employees. They also differ significantly in respect to the conditions for delivering their voluntary services. Patient support services, take place in the setting of a thoroughly formalized hospital while the other three forms of voluntariness all take place in private homes. Contact families are organized in the context of a public institution while the other three forms of voluntariness are organized by voluntary organizations. However, despite their differences, they share the same basic ambitions, namely to establish close face-to-face relationships between selected volunteers and people in need for social care.

A total of twenty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted across the four organizations, covering in all 12 managers. All managers interviewed twice. The interviews have been conducted as narrative interviews, using open, personal questions, looking for anecdotes, examples and critical incidents. Thus, the interviews have invited managers to engage in a critical reflection of how their own ideals and goals guides them in their management practices and how it foster specific forms of dilemmas they have to cope with subsequently. Such explorative research requires qualitative analysis of in-depth discussions with a limited number of managers (Hermanns, 1991; Mason, 2002)

The second round of interviews was carried out in order to clarify, explore in more detail, and reflect on events described in the first interview. In this way it was possible for the researcher to become more responsive towards what being said in the first interview and at the same time direct them towards specific topics and events, without determining the data. In this process the researcher has been moving between inductive and deductive positions, by bringing the participants unanticipated accounts in the first interview into the second interview and at the same time taken a sensitive theoretical stance towards how the issues from the first and second interviews could be conceptualized. The last stage of the analyse was to establish connections across all the interviews in order to define preliminary themes and clustering them appropriately, without losing the connection between the managers own words and the researcher’s interpretations. Smith (2004) suggest that the researches “imagine a magnet with some of the themes pulling others in and helping to make sense of them” (cited in Eatough 2008:1773).

Through this proces meaning units were condensed and abstracted into themes and a more limited list of clusters identified similarities according to how the managers reflected upon what ideals about voluntary social care that were guiding their management practices. In doing so the entire interviews was examined and divided into meaning units, that is, words or sentences containing aspects related to each other through their content and context (Graneheim & Lundman). The different descriptions where then compared in order to find if there was any emergent pattern among them. Secondly, the interviews were scrutinized with specific attention to the managers’ own examples of the kinds of dilemmas these ideals about authenticity gave occasion to in their everyday practices. The different anecdotes and incidents where then isolated in order for them to be able to stand alone as critical examples of how the quest for authenticity creates certain challenges for management.

The expectation of authenticity

While the aim of this study is to investigate what kinds of values are guiding managers of voluntary social care, two things appear striking. First, despite the many differences among the closures, all of the managers mention authentic relationships as one of the main goals and guidelines for their management practice. Secondly despite the fact that authentic relationships as already mentioned represent a polyvalent concept, which means something very different to different people, the managers’ interpretations of the concept are surprisingly similar. Even though they come from different fields of voluntary social care, they seem to agree that authentic relationships is achieved when voluntary social care becomes indistinguishable from the private care relations that takes place among families and friends

See figure 1:

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| Manager of the contact families: | “We try to achieve a kind of authenticity within the established relationships…where people can be true to themselves…Ideally, the family (the contact family ed.) isn’t too different from a normal family” |
| Manager of the visiting services: | “For us it is important that, over time, the visiting relationships evolve into real friendships, like the ones you would have if you did not have to contact us to get a volunteer to come instead” |
| Manager of the patient support volunteers: | “The patient support volunteers are supposed to stand in for the absent family member” |
| Manager of volunteer adult friends: | “The way we think of it, the adult friend should ideally become as close as possible to a real friend … you know, the kind of relationship the child would have with an uncle or something if he were present in the child’s network, which unfortunately is not the case for some children” |

The interviewed managers across the different organizations consistently emphasized the importance of the volunteer to become “real”. In figure 1. “real friend,” “real friendship,” “normal family” or “as an uncle” represent key words, which constitute the central features of authentic relationships. In the quotes, voluntary care is endowed with authenticity because it is about its ability to develop in the direction of a “real relative” (patient support volunteers), a “real family” (contact families), or a “real friend” (visiting services, volunteer adult friends). The expectation of authenticity is about establishing a form of sociality that looks like the form of care that exists among good friends or family members. Here, we recognize the desired virtue of authentic relationships, were one can be “true to one self” by becomming a “friend” or a “family member”, which has dominated previously presented literature on civil society. Seen in the intrapersonal perspective of the managers, the ideal is to establish authentic bonds between the volunteers and the one in need of care that are indistinguishable from private forms of care. The quest for authentic relationships results in an unwillingness among the managers to define in advance the preferred development of the different relationships with respect to specific content, such as what should be the focus of the meeting, how often they should meet or in what ways. Or as the manager of volunteer adult friends explains:

No two relationships are the same, so my ideas about what makes a good friendship are completely unimportant.

Another manager encourages members to develop their own kind of voluntariness:

We say to our families: take one step at a time and see how it goes. It is very important that the client and the families establish their relationships in their own way. We are not here to tell them how to do it, as long as it benefits everyone involved (Manager of contact families).

In these examples the managers do not answer questions concerning the content of the voluntary care, because it is up to the individual voluntary effort to make up its own content. Instead, the four cases indicate that the organizations expect voluntariness to explore the possibilities of care in accordance with its own person–oriented and situational premises. In this sense the social relationship should develop an autonomy of its own, free of any external constraints. As an consequence, the managers downplay the formalized guidelines for the content of voluntary care and the many descriptions that surround it because they impede the authenticity that the organization desires. Thus, the volunteer and the care recipient are not expected to take their organizational membership too literally and hide behind a role when they participate in the voluntary logic. This attitude results in a form of management that does not take its own rules too literally, or as a manager of volunteer adult friends explains:

They are only rules to begin with. They are rules that can be bent if the friendships among the volunteer adults and the children take a different development.

Or, as a manager of volunteer visiting services explain:

We have guidelines for our volunteers; for example, that they don’t do things that the home helper is supposed to do. But in reality there are lots of overlaps… shopping, cleaning…things like that…it happens. And if you ask them, why they do it, they say that well, this is what needs to be done. It is obvious that a task that appears unsolved demands a solution, and the volunteers feel good about solving these tasks.

Or as another manager of the volunteer visiting services puts it when confronted with the many examples of volunteers performing certain tasks even though the organization clearly states that the volunteers are not allowed to perform tasks that the municipality is legally responsible for carrying out:

You can’t expect a volunteer visitor to think about long-term local government policies every time she visits someone, basically that’s what you have to do, because if you do so and so, then the consequences will be such and such, and that wasn’t really the point, was it?

And she goes on:

I can only tell them (the volunteers ed.) to use their common sense and to set their own limits. I mean, once people have known each other for a while, what would you do as a family member, if you were visiting an old relative, well then you’d help, wouldn’t you?

Seen in this way, in order to avoid becomming defined by the organization’s formal structures, voluntary care has to make decisions for itself even to the extent that it means disregarding organizational rules. Here, true voluntariness is the expression of an absolute form, which does not involve rules, governance or organizational duties. In other words, the language of authenticity appeals to the voluntary care to not allow itself to be conditioned by the rules of the organization. In general terms, this means that the voluntary effort, in all of its possibilities, can choose itself and determine itself as its own measure with its own possibilities.

From the perspective of management, authenticity requires an active decision by the voluntary effort. But because management is unable to determine if a rule is followed because it is meaningful on the conditions of informality (authenticity) or simply because it is a rule (inauthenticity), management has to wait until the voluntary logic decides to violate that rule to determine whether or not the voluntary logic has claimed responsibility for its own development and use of its potentiality. In other words, that it has become authentic in the eyes of the management.

“What we are looking for?…I think it is when the relationship develops on its own, without the need for guidiance…without the need for us to interrupt all the time”

Or another managers put it in this way:

“When the volunteers is not blindly following our rules…when they instead seems to find their own ways of doing things, of course together with the youngsters, even if that should imply that some of our rules are ignored…I mean, it is all about what works for them and what doesn’t”

According to the managers understanding of what constitutes authentic relationships, the relationships shouldn’t be slaves of dogma, which would mean to follow the rules mindless and perform as the performance roles describes. Thus, management only recognizes authenticity and the sought after participant passion and engagement in situations when the volunteer and “the other” choose *not* to follow the organization’s decisions. Curiously, it is not until the logic of voluntariness is disloyal to the organization’s decisions that the participants are recognized as loyal to the organization’s values, because this is how voluntariness proves to the organization that it has risen to the occasion as voluntary logic and is taking responsibility for determining when the organization’s rules and guidelines make sense and when they do not.

In this way, the violation of rules is validated by the management as a sign that the relationship between the volunteer and “the other” has become authentic and real. Dis-identification of the rules is in other words observed as proof of the truthfulness and authenticity of the voluntary effort. Accordingly, when a patient support volunteer brings someone a glass of water or a volunteer adult friend establishes a friendship with a child’s mother, these actions create a sociality that violates the organization’s rules but which at the same time fulfills the organization’s ambitions for the voluntary effort to stand in for the absent friend or family member. Thus, the violation of rules proves to the organization that the voluntary effort is evolving on its own conditions and not just as a passive appendage to the organization’s decisions.

We might say that voluntariness, which blindly follows the organization’s rules, is disloyal to the organization’s goals and expectations about authenticity precisely because it effectively comes to represent inauthenticity. The violation of rules indicates that voluntariness does not mistake the organization for itself but that it actively relates to the organization’s decisions as something in its external environment, which exists as a necessary precondition for its continued development. This creates a form of management, which does not seek to bind the dynamics of the voluntary action to the organization’s decisions but which precisely encourages voluntariness to explore the potentiality of voluntariness on its own conditions in order to develop its own logic, removed from the organization’s many decisions and rules.

Peculiarly, therefore, disloyalty to the organization’s rules is recognized by management as an example of “authenticity” and “true voluntariness” and thus paradoxically represents a deeper sense of loyalty to the organization’s goals than a passive subordination to the organization’s decisions. This insight shifts the question of whether or not voluntariness is authentic to a question of whether or not voluntariness is authentic in the right way. For management, it becomes a question of how to create the best conditions for the development of authentic voluntariness, which is authentic in a way that corresponds to the values of the management.

Striving for impossible authenticity

While the managers all strive for an authentic relationships within their specific form of voluntary social care, which is indistinguishable from private forms of care, they also acknowledge that voluntary care is unable to ever achieve this. Or as a manager of the volunteer visiting services explains:

We would like our voluntary visitor relationships to evolve into real friendships, but we also know that this isn’t possible, because all around it we have our rules that have to be followed in order to be a part of the organizations’ visiting program…but what we would like is for the relationships to develop on their own…without any need for us.

Or in the words of a manager of the Contact family service:

Even though we seek authenticity, these are ultimately not real friends or real families…all we can hope is that they evolve in some way… in accordance with their idea of a meaningful relationship.

Because the managers observe the organization as inauthentic, they are facing the paradox that because the voluntary effort cannot place itself outside the symbolic order of the organization, because its existence is always-already within the organization, the voluntary effort represents from the very beginning an inauthentic form of care. Thus, the managers recognize that their volunteers are not real family members or ordinary friends. Therefore, the expectation of authenticity becomes the managers’ unattainable goal because the organization knows that voluntariness rests on a non-authentic foundation, which is constituted by the organization’s many decisions about membership, content and procedures. In other words, voluntariness always contains a touch of inauthenticity because it does not simply emerge from the premises of the informality of the encounter but refers beyond itself to organizational rules. The question of authenticity is therefore fundamentally contradictory, because the organization knows that the voluntary nature of the care impedes the authenticity that the organization strives for.

But even though authentic voluntariness is structurally impossible and therefore remains “impracticable,” this very impossibility continues to guide the observations and decisions of the managers. In this way, authenticity only exist as its own impossibility, but in order to manage in accordance with this impossible premise, the managers transform this impossibility into a “mere difficulty,” thus creating the impression that its realization is at least potentially possible. In other words, the discourse of authenticity becomes a discourse of potentiality-for-authenticity, which means that authenticity is never fulfilled or complete but is always in a process of becoming. Thus, management configures authenticity as a question of the potentiality for voluntary care to become what it is not: fully private and human. At this stage you may conclude that managing authentic relationships is a matter of ensuing that the different relationships develops on entirely their own and autonomous premises. But this would be a too fast conclusion, because the potential redemption of the potentiality of voluntary social care, can also take less fortunate directions.

Loyal and disloyal forms of authentic relationships

The ideal of authenticity seeks voluntariness without rules and without the calculation inherent in organizational programs; a voluntary exposure without any limits, open toward whatever it has the potential to become. Yet the organization cannot suspend itself and continually reinforces itself by insisting on its responsibility for guaranteeing a “proper” form of voluntariness that does not violate the values of the organization. Thus, authentic relationships is only accepted as long as these imperatives for authenticity correspond to the ideals of the organization. In this way, the organization protects itself against the boundlessness of the authentic relationships.

There are many examples of voluntary social care, which has been managed according to the values of authenticity, but has developed in directions that ultimately remain unacceptable to the management. All of the managers in the interviews tell stories about situations, when the self-centeredness of voluntary care caused it to develop in an unappreciated direction:

There was a religious family, which hadn’t informed us about how religious they were. When we contacted the mentally ill individual, we could hear that there was something that was difficult for the young man to talk about. Because he had promised the family not to talk about it. But we could sense that it was necessary to visit the family again. After this visit we stopped the relationship, because we found out that the family was heavily religious and missionary (Manager of the contact families).

The manager of the contact families decides that even though the voluntary action has taken its own direction on the basis of its own idea of meaningful care, and in this sense lives up to the expectations of authenticity, it was nevertheless necessary to intervene. This particular kind of authenticity did not conform to the rules of the organization, namely that the contact families should refrain from trying to “rescue” the young people by encouraging them to stop taking their medication, developing a better relationship to their “real” family, or, as in this case, having religious ambitions on their behalf.

The other managers recount similar experiences of voluntary efforts developing in ways that the organizations find unacceptable. Examples of this is when the management of the patient support volunteers realize that the volunteers deliver food to the patients, which they are not allowed to, or help in the kitchen, which is the job of professional kitchen staff. Or when the care recipient exploits the volunteer and asks her to do more than she wants to do. The management does not accept this, because it is perceived to undermine the basis of a good visiting-relationship. However the importance of authenticity leads to a complex management issue: How to enforce authenticity and how to judge whether or not voluntariness lives up to management expectations about authenticity? Or to put it more precisely: How to distinguish between right and wrong forms of authenticity? As a result, the challenge for management is to be able to distinguish between forms of authenticity that are disloyal in a loyal way and ones that are simply disloyal, since clearly not all forms of disloyalty are perceived as loyalty to the organization’s values but represent wrong forms of authenticity, as we saw it in the previous section. In such cases, disloyalty is deemed dysfunctional. However, other forms of disloyalty are accepted precisely because they represent a form of disloyalty that indicates the emergence of the form of authenticity sought after by the organization.

However, it is no simple matter to maintain a clear distinction between forms of disloyalty that represent a deeper sense of loyalty to the organization’s impossible goal of authenticity and the ones that are simply disloyal and in relation to which the organization needs to intervene. Here too, reality is much too complex for management to establish clear rules. We can use a concrete example from the Danish organization Adult Friends to illustrate the point: An adult friend has developed a good relationship with a 12 year-old boy, who lives with his mother. After some time, the mother asks the adult friend to help her with practical chores. Unlike the mother, the adult friend has a car, so she asks the adult friend to help her with shopping or to give her rides to visit her friends.

On one hand, the situation represents a clear violation of the organization’s guidelines, which require the relationship between the adult and the child to be a one-to-one relationship with limited intervention by the mother, because the child needs to feel central to the relationship. On the other hand, however, the story suggests that the volunteer has developed a friendship with the mother, which appears to benefit all parties. In this sense it could be argued that the relationship between the adult friend and the boy has developed into a “real one” because it also includes the mother of the child. But then again, is it the right kind of authenticity - the kind that corresponds to the guidelines of the voluntary organization? For the manager, the question is whether the adult friend is being exploited by the mother in a way that the organization cannot accept? In this case, the management decided that the voluntary effort was disloyal in a way that remained loyal to the organization’s goals about authenticity.

The values of authenticity that guides the managers of voluntary social care are unclear. On the one hand authenticity becomes the opposite of following rules, but because not following the rules can lead in a direction that the organization cannot tolerate (and which explains the reasons for the rules, in the first place), the managers establishes yet another distinction to guide them: the distinction between loyal and disloyal forms of authenticity. However, this distinction does not represent a clear value either, because managers have no safe guidelines for judging whether a certain form of voluntary social practice, which violates the rules of the organization, represents loyal or disloyal forms of authenticity respectively.

Concluding discussion

Taking its outset in the identification of authentic relationships as the guiding principle for the management of face-to-face volunteering, the study shows how managers are struggling to make a clear distinction between loyal and disloyal forms of authentic relations within voluntary social care in order for the full potential of the voluntary practice to be realized. In doing so, the study comes closer to an understanding of the contingent nature of this particular management practice, which hitherto has been ignored within the dominant discourse on management.

However, emphasizing the contingent aspect of volunteer management does not mean that this form of management should be entrusted to anyone with time to spare, because it is assumed that no special knowledge or skills are required in order to carry out this function. In fact, volunteer management must be based on the insight that no formal procedure can guarantee the success of one’s attempt to manage voluntary social care through the impossible request for authentic relationships.

So you could finally ask, what does this analyze have to offer managers of voluntary social work? First, it gives an insight into the tragedy that governs the managers, by pointing at the impossible goal that is guiding their practices. Second, it provide an explication for why it may be that managers of voluntary social work experience such a great deal of difficulties in doing their job. Third, it shows that the contingent aspect of volunteer management, open a certain space for decision making, that can never be analysed away, which on the other hand provide the managers with a certain degree of freedom in their decision making. And finally, it shows that because the management never really will meet its ideal, it will always be charged with the paradox of authenticity.

At this point you may ask, why not abandon the very idea of authentic relationships, and get rid of all the puzzles and thereby avoid to be involved in a game that you are deemed to loose anyway? Maybe because the American psychologist Richard Farson (1926 – 2017) was right when he stated; “Lost causes are the ones most worth fighting for because they tend to be the most important, most humane ones… Lost causes cannot be won, but because they are so crucial to us, we nevertheless must try” (Farson 1996:163).

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