

Nonprofit Organizations: The Challenges and Long-Term Effects

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As a third sector of the economy, nonprofit organizations play a vital role by addressing critical social issues, providing services to underserved populations, and advocating for positive societal change. However, the sector has its fair share of challenges, which can significantly impact organizations, communities, and the broader social fabric.

Helmut K. Anheier's 2005 study highlights some challenges nonprofit organizations face and how these challenges affect several critical areas, impacting their sustainability and effectiveness. The issues surrounding funding constraints, governance, leadership, changing social and economic contexts, and volunteer management are interrelated and have significant implications for how these organizations function and thrive over time.

This article explores the challenges nonprofit organizations face and their potential long-term effects:

Funding Constraints

Nonprofit organizations often rely on various funding sources such as grants, donations, government funding, and earned income. Each source comes with its own set of challenges. For instance, grant funding can be highly competitive and tied to specific projects, limiting the organization's flexibility and performance.

Funding is a significant challenge nonprofit organizations face, impacting their ability to deliver services, achieve their missions, and sustain operations. One of the significant difficulties in securing funding is the increasing competition among nonprofits for limited resources. Funders have become more selective as nonprofit organizations grow, often prioritizing specific programs or organizations over others (Berman, 2017). This competition can lead to funding disparities, where smaller organizations or those addressing niche issues struggle to attract financial support (Froelich, 1999). Moreover, the funding landscape

is influenced by broader economic conditions, which can affect charitable giving and government budgets. Economic downturns often result in reduced donations from individuals and corporations and cuts in government funding (Reed, 2015). This volatility makes it challenging for nonprofits to maintain stable funding sources, which can jeopardize their sustainability and the services they provide to the community (Dart, 2004). Additionally, many nonprofits grapple with the complexity of grant writing and the requirements attached to funding. Government and foundation grants often have stringent stipulations, including detailed reporting and accountability measures (Mero & Jones, 2020). Meeting these requirements can be resource-intensive and may divert attention from the nonprofit's core mission and activities. To address these challenges, nonprofits are increasingly exploring innovative funding strategies. Social entrepreneurship, which blends social missions with entrepreneurial principles, has emerged as one approach to diversify funding sources and enhance financial sustainability (Dees, 1998). Furthermore, cultivating relationships with donors and building a solid case for support through compelling storytelling can help organizations secure more donations (Baker, 2020).

Funding remains one of the primary challenges for nonprofit organizations, affecting their operational capabilities and long-term impact. Addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted approach that diversifies funding sources, enhances grant-writing skills, and fosters strong relationships with donors.

Long-Term Effects of Funding Constraints as a Challenge for Nonprofit Organizations

Funding constraints present a significant challenge for nonprofit organizations, impacting their ability to fulfill their missions and serve their communities effectively. Nonprofits use private donations, government grants, and earned income to sustain their operations. However, economic downturns, shifts in donor priorities, and increased competition for limited resources can create long-lasting effects on these organizations. One of the primary long-term effects of funding constraints is reduced program services. When financial resources are limited, nonprofits may be forced to cut programs essential to their mission.

This reduction can decrease the organization's overall impact on the community, as fewer services are available to those in need. Nonprofit organizations that faced funding difficulties often scaled back their offerings, ultimately affecting the vulnerable populations they serve. Moreover, funding constraints can hinder the capacity for strategic planning and growth within nonprofit organizations. Limited financial resources can lead to short-term thinking, where organizations focus on immediate survival rather than long-term sustainability and impact. This scenario can result in a lack of investment in necessary infrastructure, such as staff training, technology, and marketing. As Renz (2016) highlighted, many organizations struggle to innovate or expand their reach when they constantly operate on tight budgets, ultimately stunting their growth and effectiveness. Finally, chronic funding issues can lead to staff burnout and turnover, diminishing an organization's effectiveness. Nonprofits often employ passionate individuals dedicated to their missions; however, the stress associated with financial instability can lead to low morale, increased workloads, and, ultimately, employee attrition. A report by the National Council of Nonprofits (2020) emphasized that underfunding threatens the sustainability of organizations and affects employee well-being, which can compromise service quality and consistency.

Governance Issues

Governance Issues as a Challenge for Nonprofit Organizations Governance within nonprofit organizations is a critical aspect that influences their effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability. Unlike for-profit entities, nonprofits face unique governance challenges due to their reliance on volunteers, donor funding, and the need to meet diverse stakeholder expectations. Some key governance issues nonprofits face includes board structure and composition, accountability, and ethical considerations.

Board Structure and Composition

The governance structure of a nonprofit organization is pivotal in determining its overall effectiveness. Nonprofit boards often have volunteers who may lack the necessary skills and

experience to govern effectively (Boris & Kranich, 2018). This lack of expertise can lead to poor decision-making, limited strategic direction, and ineffective management oversight. Furthermore, board diversity is essential for reflecting the community served and ensuring a range of perspectives in governance (Miller, 2017). However, achieving diversity remains a challenge, as many boards are dominated by individuals from similar backgrounds, which can inhibit innovation and responsiveness to community needs.

Accountability

Accountability is another significant governance challenge for nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits are accountable to various stakeholders, including donors, beneficiaries, government agencies, and the general public. This multifaceted accountability often creates tension regarding how resources are allocated and how programs are evaluated (Ebrahim, 2019). Furthermore, unlike for-profit organizations, where financial performance is often the primary measure of success, nonprofits must demonstrate social impact. Establishing clear metrics for accountability and effectively communicating these to stakeholders can be challenging but is essential for maintaining trust and support (Murray & Ralston, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical governance is crucial for maintaining public trust in nonprofit organizations. The potential for conflicts of interest, financial mismanagement, and lack of transparency can erode stakeholder confidence (Parsons, 2018). Nonprofits must establish and adhere to ethical standards and practices to ensure their operations align with their missions and values. This involves developing policies for conflict of interest, financial accountability, and transparency that guide the actions of board members and staff. Additionally, fostering a culture of ethics and accountability within the organization is vital for reinforcing these principles across all levels of governance (Schwartz, 2021).

Long-Term Effects of Governance Issues as a Challenge of Nonprofit Organizations

Governance issues in nonprofit organizations significantly impact their sustainability, efficacy, and ability to fulfill their missions. While some problems might be apparent in the short term, the long-term effects can be profound and far-reaching. Below are several ways through which governance issues manifest into long-term challenges for nonprofit organizations:

Erosion of Trust and Credibility

Governance problems, such as lack of transparency or accountability, can lead to a decline in the trust of stakeholders, including donors, beneficiaries, and the community. Over time, this erosion of trust can severely limit an organization's ability to raise funds, attract partnerships, and engage volunteers, ultimately hindering its mission.

Inconsistent Leadership and Direction

Poor governance often results in inconsistent leadership, whereby board members or executive directors may not align with the organization's vision or strategies. Over the long term, this can create confusion regarding the nonprofit's mission, weakening its identity and diminishing its effectiveness and relevance in its community.

Financial Instability and Inefficiency

Governance challenges can lead to financial mismanagement or lack of financial oversight. This can result in budget shortfalls, inefficient resource allocation, jeopardizing the organization's stability. Long-term financial instability may force nonprofits to cut programs, lay off staff, or even face closure.

Compliance and Legal Risks

Nonprofit organizations are subject to various laws and regulations. Governance issues can lead to non-compliance with these requirements, exposing organizations to legal risks, penalties, or loss of tax-exempt status. Over time, repeated legal troubles, even if resolved, can damage a nonprofit's reputation and affect its operations.

Stagnation and Reduced Innovation

Effective governance allows for strategic planning and implementation of new ideas.

Governance issues, such as a lack of diverse perspectives on boards, can stifle innovation.

In the long term, an organization that fails to innovate may become stagnant, unable to adapt to community needs or societal changes, ultimately reducing its impact.

Limited Stakeholder Engagement

Governance issues can lead to disengagement among stakeholders, including staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries. When stakeholders feel their voices are not heard or valued, their engagement wanes. Over time, this disengagement can create a culture of apathy within the organization, making it challenging to inspire participation and support for its initiatives.

Difficulty in Succession Planning

Succession planning is often neglected when governance structures are weak. If crucial individuals leave, this can result in leadership vacuums, disrupting continuity and weakening organizational effectiveness. Over time, this chronic lack of planning can hamper the organization's sustainability and growth.

Cultural Implications within the Organization

Poor governance can contribute to a toxic organizational culture characterized by conflict, mistrust, and lack of collaboration. A dysfunctional culture can lead to high employee turnover, decreased morale, and a disheartened workforce, compromising the organization's ability to attract and retain talent in the long run.

Impact on Service Delivery

Governance issues can directly affect the quality and reliability of nonprofit services. For instance, if an organization cannot effectively manage its programs due to governance

problems, it may not be able to deliver services effectively, impacting the communities and individuals it serves. Over time, this can perpetuate cycles of need and dependency.

Leadership and Talent Management

Leadership and Talent Management as Challenges of Nonprofit Organizations Nonprofit organizations play a crucial role in addressing social issues and serving communities. However, they face unique challenges in leadership and talent management. Effective leadership and the ability to manage talent are essential for achieving nonprofit organizations' missions, but various factors complicate these processes.

Leadership Challenges in Nonprofit Organizations Leadership in nonprofit organizations often differs from that in for-profit businesses. Nonprofit leaders must navigate complex stakeholder relationships, including donors, volunteers, beneficiaries, and governmental bodies (Miller, 2018). The need to balance these interests while pursuing the organization's mission can create tensions and challenges in decision-making. Additionally, many nonprofit organizations face financial constraints that limit their ability to attract and retain experienced leaders (Bennett & Savani, 2020). This financial instability can lead to high turnover rates among leadership, contributing to inconsistent vision and direction, which are crucial for long-term success (Boris & Steinhart, 2021). Nonprofit leaders must also exhibit transformational leadership qualities to inspire and motivate their teams and stakeholders. Transformational leadership focuses on vision, inspiration, and the empowerment of others (Bass & Riggio, 2006). However, with limited resources, it can be challenging to implement such leadership styles consistently (Eisenberg et al., 2016). Leaders who neglect to foster team engagement may face burnout, further complicating retention and productivity.

Talent Management Challenges In addition to leadership challenges, nonprofit organizations struggle with talent management. Most nonprofits operate on tight budgets, making it difficult to offer competitive salaries and benefits to attract high-quality talent (Marques, 2021). As a result, many nonprofits rely on volunteers and part-time staff, which can result in a lack of

continuity and organizational memory (Renz, 2016). This reliance on non-paid staff complicates the implementation of formal talent management frameworks, which are vital for assessing performance, providing feedback, and facilitating professional development (Garrow & Hirsh, 2009). Moreover, nonprofits are often viewed as stepping stones for individuals seeking experience before transitioning to more lucrative opportunities in the for-profit sector (Schmidt, 2019). This perception can result in a lack of long-term commitment from employees, leading to high turnover rates that hinder the development of a skilled workforce (Harris et al., 2020). The resultant talent gap can weaken service delivery and diminish organizational impact as nonprofits struggle to build expertise and capacity within their teams.

The public sector has increasingly adopted the methods and values of the market to guide policy creation and management (Eikenberry et al., 2004).

Strategies for Improvement To navigate these challenges, nonprofit organizations can adopt several strategies. First, cultivating a supportive organizational culture that acknowledges the contributions of all team members can enhance employee satisfaction and retention (Burke, 2020). Creating professional development opportunities and pathways for advancement can also improve talent management, making positions within the nonprofit more attractive (Garrow & Hirsh, 2009). Investing in leadership development programs is another critical strategy. Training programs that focus on building leadership skills can help current and aspiring leaders effectively manage teams and develop a compelling vision for the future (Osborne & Hammel, 2021). Additionally, partnerships with educational institutions can provide a talent pipeline, offering students practical experience while fostering future leaders within the nonprofit sector (Marques, 2021).

Nonprofit organizations often face challenges related to leadership and talent management. Many operate with limited budgets, restricting their ability to offer competitive salaries and benefits. This can make it challenging to attract and retain skilled professionals.

Long-term effects of the Leadership and Talent Management

Talent Drain

Over time, the struggle to attract and retain employees can lead to a talent drain, compromising the organization's effectiveness and capacity for innovation.

Leadership Vacuum

The absence of solid and stable leadership can hinder strategic planning and program development, affecting long-term sustainability and growth.

Changing Social and Economic Contexts

Changing social and economic contexts pose significant challenges for nonprofit organizations, impacting their operations, funding, and ability to meet mission goals.

Nonprofits operate within dynamic environments influenced by economic fluctuations, social movements, demographic shifts, and changing public attitudes toward philanthropy and social issues. These transformations require organizations to be agile, innovative, and responsive to meet the evolving needs of their communities. Economic changes, such as recessions, fluctuations in donations, and increasing competition for funding, can profoundly affect nonprofit organizations. Economic downturns typically lead to decreased government funding and reduced private donations, placing immense pressure on these organizations to maintain their services with dwindling resources (Drees & Heiko, 2021). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many nonprofits faced financial strain due to the dual impact of increased demand for services and decreased income from fundraising and grants (Patel et al., 2020). As a response, nonprofits have had to rethink their funding strategies, diversify

revenue streams, and adopt more entrepreneurial approaches to sustainability (Boris & Steuerle, 2020).

Social Context Social dynamics challenge nonprofits, including demographic shifts, public expectations, and advocacy movements. Organizations must navigate increasing awareness and activism around various social issues, including racial inequality, climate change, and health disparities. This awareness requires nonprofits to adapt their programs and messaging to align with the values and concerns of current and potential supporters. Additionally, the rise of social media has empowered individuals to voice their opinions and demand accountability from nonprofit organizations, necessitating greater transparency and engagement (Riley, 2022).

Adaptation Strategies In response to these challenges, nonprofit organizations are adopting several strategies. They leverage technology to enhance operational efficiency, broaden outreach, and improve stakeholder engagement (Brooks et al., 2020). Collaboration among nonprofit organizations, as well as with public and private sectors, has also become a vital strategy to amplify impact and share resources. Moreover, nonprofits increasingly prioritize data-driven approaches to assess community needs, measure effectiveness, and demonstrate impact to funders and stakeholders (Young, 2021).

Volunteer Management as a Challenge for Nonprofit Organizations

Volunteer management is a critical challenge faced by nonprofit organizations (NPOs), as volunteers are essential for delivering services, advancing missions, and ensuring financial viability. However, managing volunteers effectively involves numerous complexities, including recruitment, retention, training, and motivation. Effective recruitment strategies should consider the motivations and interests of potential volunteers. According to Brudney (2010), understanding the demographics and motivations of volunteers can help organizations tailor their recruitment efforts. For instance, younger volunteers may seek skill development, while older adults may desire social connections or community service. Failure

to align recruitment strategies with volunteer motivations can lead to high turnover rates and lack engagement (Hager & Brudney, 2004).

Retention Once volunteers are recruited, retention becomes a critical concern. Volunteer turnover can disrupt programs and increase recruitment costs (Morris et al., 2019). Factors affecting volunteer retention include the level of support and recognition received, the fitting of volunteer roles with individual skills and preferences, and the overall organizational culture (Penner, 2002). Organizations often implement strategies such as providing adequate training, recognition programs, and opportunities for feedback to enhance volunteer satisfaction and commitment (Fischer et al., 2020).

Another significant challenge is effectively training volunteers. Many nonprofit organizations face resource constraints that limit their ability to provide comprehensive training programs (Gordon et al., 2013). However, inadequate training can lead to confusion, frustration, and disengagement among volunteers. Research emphasizes the importance of providing clear expectations and ongoing training opportunities to support volunteers in their roles (Garrow & Getting, 2015). This investment not only aids performance but also contributes to volunteer retention.

Motivation Understanding and addressing volunteer motivation is crucial for effective management. Volunteers are often driven by intrinsic motivations such as personal fulfillment, altruism, and a desire to make a difference (Clary et al., 1998). Nonprofit organizations that recognize and foster these motivations through meaningful engagement and opportunities for personal growth are more likely to encourage long-term volunteer commitments. Additionally, offering flexible volunteering options can enhance volunteer satisfaction, allowing individuals to contribute according to their availability and preferences (Cnaan & Cascio, 2003).

The Long-Term Effects of Volunteer Management for Nonprofit Organizations

At the heart of many Nonprofit organizations is a dedicated group of volunteers who contribute their time, skills, and passion. However, managing volunteers effectively presents unique challenges and opportunities that can have long-term effects on the sustainability and success of nonprofit organizations. Effective volunteer management is crucial for nonprofits, as volunteers are often the backbone of these organizations. They provide essential services, raise funds, and spread awareness about mission-driven causes. However, the challenge lies in coordinating, engaging, and retaining these individuals, which requires strategic approaches and systems in place.

Long-Term Effects of Inadequate Volunteer Management

Volunteer Burnout and Attrition

Poor volunteer management can lead to burnout, negative experiences, and attrition. Without proper support and recognition, volunteers may feel undervalued and disengaged, leading them to leave the organization. High turnover disrupts ongoing projects and incurs additional costs for recruiting and training new volunteers.

Impact on Organizational Capacity

In the long run, ineffective volunteer management can significantly diminish an organization's capacity to deliver services. If talented volunteers depart due to poor management, it hampers the organization's ability to fulfill its mission. A constant cycle of recruiting new volunteers can take time and resources away from core activities.

Loss of Institutional Knowledge

Experienced volunteers often have valuable institutional knowledge and relationships within the community. When these individuals leave, nonprofit organizations risk losing this knowledge, affecting program continuity and effectiveness. This knowledge gap can hinder an organization's ability to make informed decisions and sustain its operations over time.

Decreased Community Engagement

Nonprofits often rely on word-of-mouth and community relationships to promote their missions and engage new supporters. Negative volunteer experiences can lead to a diminished reputation in the community, causing potential volunteers and donors to hesitate. Over time, this can reduce the organization's overall support base and limit funding opportunities.

Compromised Mission Alignment

Volunteers may feel disconnected or unclear about their roles when volunteer management strategies are not aligned with the organization's mission and values. This misalignment can lead to a decline in motivation and a failure to meet the nonprofit organization's objectives, impacting program delivery and community impacts.

Long-Term Benefits of Effective Volunteer Management

Despite the challenges, organizations that prioritize effective volunteer management can reap significant long-term benefits such as:

Enhanced Volunteer Engagement:

A well-structured volunteer management program fosters commitment and engagement. When volunteers feel valued and supported, they become advocates for the organization, increasing retention and recruitment of new volunteers.

Increased Organizational Capabilities

Properly managed volunteers expand an organization's workforce and capabilities. Engaged volunteers can take on leadership roles, contribute expertise, and generate innovative ideas that enhance programs and services.

Stronger Community Relationships

Organizations that cultivate strong relationships with their volunteers often enjoy strengthened ties to the community. Volunteers become ambassadors for the organization's mission, helping to raise awareness and secure support from local stakeholders.

Sustainable Growth

Focusing on long-term volunteer management fosters organizational sustainability. By investing in training, recognition, and development opportunities, nonprofit organizations can create a loyal and skilled volunteer force that drives impact and supports growth.

Improved Reputation and Funding Opportunities

Nonprofits known for effectively engaging and managing volunteers often enjoy a better reputation in the community and among funders. This positive perception can open doors to new partnerships and increase the likelihood of securing grants and donations.

In conclusion, Nonprofits compete with collaborators and collaborate with competitors regularly. Collaboration, a long-standing normatively preferred strategy for nonprofits, is utilized as a modus operandi without considering the potential unintended consequences (Berman, 2017).

Nonprofit organizations face complex and multifaceted challenges with far-reaching implications. Addressing these challenges is critical for their sustainability and the well-being of the communities they serve. It requires a concerted effort from nonprofit organization leaders, donors, policymakers, and community members to create a robust support system that enables nonprofits to thrive in an increasingly complex environment.

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