Does Interpersonal Communication Carry Its Own Reward In Civil Society?
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“If marketization is changing the nature of NPOs and the volunteer work that takes place in them, then what happens to the relationships between people in the organisations?”

1. RATIONALE & BACKGROUND

The conditions non-profit organisations (NPOs) exist under are changing. According to Eikenberry & Klue (2004) market values increasingly influence NPOs, and this can be seen as a threat to their contribution to building and maintaining a strong civil society.

Building social capital is one way NPOs may contribute to civil society. Social capital is also important for the existence of the NPOs, because building strong local networks of trust (i.e. good relations between people) is traditionally needed to mobilise collective action amongst volunteers.

My aim is to take a closer look at these relations between people, through a study of their interpersonal communication and the context it takes place in. I hypothesise that one reason people choose to work voluntarily (i.e. unpaid, in NPOs), is because this type of work often differs from interpersonal communication and relations than their paid work.

Market value from the private and public sector are increasingly influencing the NPOs, thereby: one could argue that the differences between paid work and volunteer work are becoming smaller in terms of social capital and interpersonal relations. One could ask if non-profits traditionally have built stronger social bonds than for-profits, but this is changing, what is then left for the non-profits to keep their individuals engaged? Although marketising the differences between profit and non-profit sector, the hypothesis forms the background of my project.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study’s overall purpose is to develop distinctly communicative explanations for non-profit phenomena like social capital, and to understand the role different types of organisations play as context for this social capital.

This focus is inspired by Kroszner (2012), who argues that communicative explanations, which can “complement, challenge, and extend existing theoretical frameworks” (Kroszner, 2012, p. 129) are missing in non-profit research. Social capital specifically, is according to Lewis (2005), a central example of such a non-profit phenomenon, and I argue that an important understanding of social capital can be found through micro level analyses of interpersonal communication. When social capital is understood in terms of interpersonal communication, we can then understand how micro level analysis of interpersonal communication between volunteers can show in what way the volunteers in organisations share trust and reciprocity.

Combined with analysis of the organisational context and with interviewing volunteers, the study seeks to explain which specific context this communication takes place in, and importantly how this communication and this context is experienced by the volunteers.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is planned to be a case study (Malter, 1996) where a small group of people will be followed in both their paid and volunteer work.

Field notes, photos and video recording will be used to document the field work, and micro level analysis of the interpersonal communication will be conducted with among others Conversation Analysis (Femø Nielsen & Beck Nielsen, 2005) and theories on Facework (Goffman, 1955).

The micro level analysis of the communication will be combined with interviews (Alvesson, 2003; Kvale, 2007) where the volunteers own understanding of their choice to volunteer, for their understanding of the organisation they are part of and of their understanding of their communication with other volunteers will be explored.

REFERENCES