“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 the 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 offers different interpersonal communication and relations than their paid work.

Volunteer work that takes place in NPOs is traditionally seen as fundamentally different from paid work, yet 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 the 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 volunteers engaged? Although one can simplify the differences between for-profit and non-profit sector, this 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 phenomenon. Instead of social capital as existing in NPOs, we will be looking at the different ways of organisations play a context for the interpersonal communication.

This focus is inspired by Koschmann (2012), who argues that communicative explanations, which can “complement, challenge, and extend existing theoretical frameworks”, Koschmann, 2012, p. 129) are missing in non-profit research. Social capital specifically, according to Lewis (2005), is a central example of such non-profit phenomenon, and I argue that an important understanding of social capital can be found through micro level analysis of interpersonal communication. When social capital is described in such a manner, it can be seen as an important perspective in non-profit research.

I will be looking at the interpersonal communication between volunteers. To do this, I will use Conversation Analysis (Femø Nielsen & Beck Nielsen, 2005) and theories of interactional analysis (Silverman, 2008). 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. 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.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is planned to be a case study (Maaløe, 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 interactional analysis (Silverman, 2008).

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 is explored. The volunteers own understanding of their choice to volunteer is explored. 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.

4. INTENDED FINDINGS

I will follow the same person in their paid and volunteer work respectively, and will be conducting micro level analysis of interactions taking place in the two contexts, along with analysis of the two contexts. My understanding of the interaction will look at both a context dimension (i.e. what they are talking about) and a relation dimension (i.e. the relationship between the people talking). Importantly, I will also interview the person about their own understanding of the interaction and the context, and I will discuss the results from my analysis with the person.

I aim to find:
1) Distinctly communicative understandings and explanations of a group of people’s volunteer work
2) Differences between paid and volunteer work that make a difference. In a time where the lines between paid work and volunteer work are becoming blurry / aim to contribute with an insight into aspects, which are important to keep separate.

REFERENCES


Maeløe, E. (1996). Casestudier af og om mennesker i organisationer: forberedelse, feltarbejde, ge-

DOES INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CARRY ITS OWN REWARD IN CIVIL SOCIETY?