



My Second Curve

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I was delighted last month to attend the seminar organised by the Centre for Charity Effectiveness which featured Charles Handy as the guest speaker. It was a delight both because he is such an inspiring speaker – and he certainly didn't disappoint on this particular evening – and because the subject of his address, and indeed of his new book, *The Second Curve*, had a particular personal relevance, given that I had just embarked on my own Second Curve a few weeks earlier when joining Cass after a career in voluntary sector management and leadership. My time at Cass, over the next couple of years at least, will involve a split between lecturing and research on volunteering, and writing the history of NCVO, which will be celebrating its centenary in 2019. Handy's work will have a place in both endeavours.

Handy kicked off his lecture with an observation that while the voluntary sector has something to learn from the business sector, business has just as much, if not more, to learn from charities. This is particularly so I would argue in relation to human resource management. In a seminal book written almost three decades ago, *Understanding Voluntary Organizations*, Handy launched a debate about how HR managers could learn to motivate the workers of the future by examining how volunteer managers go about their business. In the absence of a cash-nexus, or calculative contract, volunteer managers, he argued, have to develop and strengthen the psychological contract between the volunteer and the organisation if they are to retain their commitment and engagement. Developing this strong psychological contract would not only strengthen the volunteering experience but would pay enormous dividends in the paid workforce, particularly among those individuals for whom pay was more of a hygiene factor than a primary motivating force.

Volunteer management has come a long way as a profession over the thirty years and, through the work of organisations such as Volunteering England/NCVO, CSV/Volunteering Matters and, more recently, the Association of Volunteer Managers, much more is known about the best ways to engage and inspire volunteers. But there is a danger that as voluntary organisations have become increasingly professionalised the practices for managing volunteers have become overly formalised and rooted too much in the systems for managing paid staff. I believe further work is required to identify more clearly what it is that is different about the volunteer experience and what distinctive management techniques are required to maximise this experience and the contribution volunteers can make.

In Handy's terms we need to know more about what the key elements of the psychological contract should be and how best we can develop a volunteer management style (or styles) fit for the volunteering movement of the future. Some exciting [new research](#) from the charity Join In, for which I sit as a board member, has identified a range of organisational behaviours which they believe will nudge more people to volunteer and to remain involved. It is an issue I hope to explore further during my time at Cass.

There is another live issue in the volunteering space which has the potential for the cross fertilisation of ideas between the voluntary and business (and indeed public) sectors, and that is the growing interest in what has become known as Employer-Supported Volunteering. Although the latest figures from the Community Life Survey suggest that its rapid expansion



over the past decade has tailed off somewhat, there is a growing recognition from employers that volunteering programmes organised through the workplace have the potential to deliver significant benefits not just for the community and the individual volunteer but for business too. And should the government ever get around to implementing its pre-election pledge to mandate all large businesses and public bodies to offer three days paid volunteering leave to its staff, we can expect to see a significant expansion in these programmes. Implementation will not be without its difficulties and recent research from the universities of Hull and Sheffield have pointed to the need for a clear articulation of impact and for effective brokerage schemes to be in place if the full benefits are to be realised. Central to success will be the move away from the traditional team challenge model of engagement to one based on the transfer of skills between the business and the community. After all, community groups need their premises painting only so many times.

But as Handy reminds us such initiatives are best seen as an exchange rather than a one-way gift. Take for example NCVO's Step on Board programme which helps place executives from blue chip companies in trustee positions within the voluntary sector. Yes, the sector benefits hugely from the financial and business acumen of the volunteer; but feedback from those who take part shows that the volunteer gains too from being exposed to new management ideas and thinking within the voluntary sector, and the business benefits from a more motivated and skilled workforce. The time is ripe for further exploration into how best to organise Employer Supported Volunteering programmes so as to deliver the maximum impact for all stakeholders, and again I look forward to giving attention to this issue at Cass over the coming months.

Handy was one of the pioneers of the development of voluntary sector management and this theme will no doubt feature in the history of NCVO which I have been commissioned to write (in association with my colleague Dr Peter Grant) as part of the organisation's centenary celebrations in 2019. The history of NCVO will encompass some of the big themes which have confronted the voluntary sector over the past 100 years, from the development of closer relations with the state during the 'new philanthropy' of the first half of the twentieth century to the establishment of a new settlement in the post-war years, and through what Professor Nicholas Deakin has called the 'perils of partnership' in the latter years of the twentieth century, to the Third Way and the Big Society. But the history will not only be concerned with NCVO's (and the voluntary sector's) relations with the State. The current 'crisis' in fundraising and concerns over a dip in public trust and confidence in the sector are not new and it will be of interest to see how similar periods of disquiet were dealt with. And, to get back to Handy, it will be informative to look at the drive towards professionalisation within the sector over the past century – much of it led by NCVO - and the benefits and drawbacks which this has brought, and what if any are the lessons for the future.

Second Curve careers, as Handy reminded us so eloquently last month, are by definition something of a step into the unknown. But I am energised and excited by the challenges which lie ahead and enormously grateful for the warm welcome I have received from within Cass and City, and the generous wishes of support I have brought with me from colleagues and friends in the voluntary sector. If any of the issues above interest you please do get in touch as I would love to hear your ideas and discuss how we might work together to take them forward.