



Exploring Current Third Sector, Volunteer Delivered Service Models and the Merits of Adopting a Shared Model of Practice

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Abstract

The aim of this Research Briefing is to critically explore literature on shared models of practice (SMOP) that voluntary organisations have adopted, and to explore the associated merits of doing so. The term 'shared model of practice' essentially refers to ways organisations work together collaboratively. Further, it presents findings from a research study exploring volunteers' and voluntary service executives' perspectives on voluntary organisations adopting a SMOP, on sharing volunteers and on the concept of an online-shared resource where voluntary organisations could access volunteers and their details throughout their volunteering journey.

Keywords

Shared model of practice, collaboration, voluntary organisations, third sector

Key Points

- There are many benefits that voluntary organisations can gain from adopting a shared model of practice. Some benefits include, sharing knowledge, sharing expertise, extending their networks and enhancing the efficiency of their services.
- There is no standardised framework voluntary organisations can be guided by when adopting a shared model of practice.
- The form of shared model of practice depends upon the unique needs of the voluntary organisations involved.
- Relationships between voluntary organisations are greatly important if voluntary organisations wish to adopt a shared model of practice where they need to have trust and share values.
- Not all forms of shared models of practice will suit all needs.
- Care has to be taken not to affect the relationship between volunteer and voluntary organisation

Background

Voluntary organisations are vital to the economy but, due to growing pressures on their services and feeling financial pressure from funding cuts, some have to consider alternative ways of working to survive. Through adopting a shared

model of practice that involves voluntary organisations collaboratively working together, it could be one solution that could help them survive whilst also helping to potentially enhance their services.

Findings

1. No standardised shared model of practice

The existing literature strongly highlights the many variations of SMOPs voluntary organisations can adopt and the lack of one standardised model to follow. One key article that highlights this is by Proulx et al. (2014).

Eight collaborative models were discovered: Fully Integrated Merger, Partially Integrated Merger, Joint Program Office, Joint Partnership with Affiliated Programming, Joint Partnership for Issue Advocacy, Joint Partnership with the Birth of a new Formal Organisation, Joint Administrative Office and Back Office Operations and a

Confederation. (see Proulx et al. 2014 for full details). However, the models are based upon American non-profit organisations, which could be irrelevant within the UK due to potential differences in organisational structure. The non-profit organisation collaborations varied exceptionally from formal to informal collaborations, and collaborations between schools, libraries and religious groups. It is unknown if any of the organisations included voluntary organisations which were a key focal point of this research and therefore may not be fully relevant.

In contrast, Rathi et al. (2014) sought to uncover inter-organisational partnerships amongst non-profit organisations and explore how knowledge is shared where they discovered eight collaborative models. The eight models were as follows: Business Partnership, Sector Partnerships, Community Partnerships,

Government Partnerships, Expert Partnerships, Hybrid Partnerships, Endorsement Partnerships and Charter Partnerships (see Rathi et al. 2014 for full details). However, the focus was on inter-organisational collaborations. This was common amongst the reviewed articles: voluntary organisations forming collaborations with organisations outside their own sector (Ramsundarsingh and Falkenberg 2017; Rathi et al. 2014; Leung 2013; Rees and Bovaird 2012; Claiborne et al. 2009; Sowa 2009).

They are very different to Proulx et al. (2014) where they detail voluntary organisations adopting SMOPs with for-profit organisations, or where they formed government partnerships. One commonality is that they also discovered sector partnerships; highlighting intra-sectorial SMOPs could be appropriate. This study was found to be significant as it highlights other forms of SMOPs that can be adopted, reinforcing the diverse needs of voluntary organisations.

Leung (2013) also explored inter-organisational collaborations. They sought to review the experiences of inter-organisational collaborations and explore how the complex working relationships between the organisations were managed. The collaboration was different to those identified by Proulx et al. (2014) and Rathi et al. (2014). The study followed five voluntary organisations that formed a consortium. Although a consortium was previously detailed in Proulx et al. (2014), this involved five voluntary organisations being the umbrella organisation instead of one. The collaboration involved both intra-sectorial collaborations and inter-sectorial collaborations with private-sector organisations.

Again, demonstrating the diversity of collaborations. Overall the voluntary organisations found collaborating was complex and required time to build and maintain healthy working relationships. This could infer interpersonal skills are important for successful collaborations. The organisations involved found the collaboration successful and helped extend the reach of their services to more vulnerable service users, highlighting how SMOPs can be beneficial even when many different organisations are involved. Therefore, there are many forms of SMOPs voluntary organisations can adopt, it solely depends on their needs which they choose to adopt.

2. Need for shared goals, vision and trust

Although there are many differing frameworks of SMOPs, one commonality discovered in most of the articles was the need for trust between organisations (Proulx et al. 2014; Rathi et al. 2014; Crump and Peter 2013; Rees and Bovaird 2012; Leung 2009; Halseth and Ryser 2007; Schlappa et al. 2006). Rees and Bovaird (2012) found partnerships between organisations where they did not share trust, can be problematic and could cause conflict.

Within a more dated study by Schlappa et al. (2006) where they sought to explore partnerships between small and large organisations, they also found trust important where in order for organisations to benefit from working together, they initially have to develop a responsible, trusting relationship. Therefore this suggests relationships are greatly important for voluntary organisations considering a SMOP and

important for them to be successful. This is especially the case as Proulx et al. (2014) in a more recent study discussed that when trust is broken between organisations, it can cause them difficulty to reach their common goals. This could be due to the relationship being compromised and potentially no longer wanting to work together. Although, Claiborne et al. (2009) and Leung 2013 found trust can take time to build between organisations. Therefore, it could take time to establish a SMOP because of the need to establish a relationship and build trust.

Further, another commonality discovered in some articles between organisations in order to be successful, was the need to share the same goals and vision (Blakey et al. 2016; Crump and Peter 2013; Leung 2013; Schlappa 2006). Blakey et al. (2016) followed the collaboration between two differing sized voluntary organisations. The voluntary organisations involved shared similar goals: to create a program designed for Asian families to support their loved ones with dementia. Without this common goal, it is unlikely the collaboration would have been successful as motivations would have differed. In fact, Crump and Peter (2013) when exploring voluntary organisations perceptions on sharing computing services, found 74% of 431 non-profit organisations recognised the need for organisations collaborating to have a shared vision. However, the study solely focused upon SMOPs involving sharing computers between non-profit organisations and therefore is unknown if the respondents would consider a shared vision to be needed for other forms of SMOPs.

Even though all the articles reviewed do

not discuss shared goals, vision and trust as being important, the findings can still be found significant, especially as they all varied in the SMOPs they adopted, in age, country and their methodologies, therefore providing broad perspectives and helping contribute towards generalisability. This highlights shared goals, vision and trust are important and something voluntary organisations should consider before adopting a SMOP.

3. Benefits of adopting a shared model of practice

One main commonality between the reviewed literature was the benefit of voluntary organisations adopting a SMOP with other organisations. Sharing information and expertise were benefits discussed most often (Blakey et al. 2016; Rathi et al. 2014; Crump

and Peter 2013; Halseth and Ryser 2007; Schlappa et al. 2006). Halseth and Ryser (2007) explored networks voluntary organisations adopted and the resources they shared. Thirty-one senior members of voluntary organisations located within four rural regions of Canada were interviewed. 82.6% agreed that sharing information and expertise was a key reason for adopting a SMOP. They found sharing expertise helped enhance service delivery which service users provided positive feedback on.

One recent UK article that provided an urban perspective and also found sharing information and expertise a benefit was by Blakey et al. (2016). The collaboration involved two differing sized voluntary organisations sharing their unique knowledge to establish a program providing South Asian carers with skills

to care for relatives with dementia. Overall, the collaboration was successful and service users benefited from the program. However, the smaller voluntary organisation found information was not shared equally. This could make smaller voluntary organisations vulnerable, especially sharing specialised knowledge with similar voluntary organisations with greater status where it could further strengthen the other voluntary organisations' position within the sector, and increase competition for funding.

Gaining access to alternative networks was another common benefit to adopting a SMOP (Proulx et al. 2014; Leung 2013; Halseth and Ryser 2007; Schlappa et al. 2006). An American study by Halseth and Ryser (2007), found over half of the 31 rural voluntary organisations interviewed formed a SMOP to benefit from network expansion. This article discussed networks more than others, but it may be due to how valuable networking is for voluntary organisations residing within rural communities. Also, Leung (2013) followed five voluntary organisations who established a consortium, found working together helped extend their reach by gaining access to networks where they were able to help more vulnerable populations. This may not have been possible without adopting a SMOP. Not only did it extend their reach, but it enhanced their visibility which could help in their case to secure funding. Not all the articles discussed networking but this could be due to the unique needs of each voluntary organisation.

Lastly, enhancing efficiency and delivery of the voluntary organisations' services was another common benefit. Sowa (2009) explored the reasons behind non-

profit organisations establishing inter-sectorial collaborations, and the benefits associated with this by exploring 20 inter-agency collaborations. Interviews with non-profit organisation managers involved in collaborations revealed they all formed inter-sectorial collaborations to benefit their organisation. Some felt adopting a SMOP helped extend the length of care that was delivered to their service users, which enhanced their quality of care. This can be considered a significant benefit and could be a great motivator when considering a SMOP. One limitation was that the study solely focused on early childcare service voluntary organisations, thus further research would be beneficial to gain different perspectives from other types of voluntary organisations.

Schlappa et al. (2006) although dated, also discussed enhancing efficiency as a benefit alike Sowa (2009). Instead of solely gaining insights from managers, they also obtained views from service users. Service users found the voluntary organisations engaging in collaboration helped add value to the service. One participant also voiced that through collaboration they were able to respond to community matters more efficiently, further benefiting service users.

This literature review aimed to explore SMOPs that have been adopted and the merits of doing so. It highlighted SMOPs can greatly benefit voluntary organisations. Some of the benefits highlighted were: sharing knowledge; sharing expertise; expanding networks; and enhancing efficiency of services. However, although literature highlighted there are indeed benefits to voluntary organisations adopting a SMOP, there are many complexities, especially

with the variety of SMOPs voluntary organisations have adopted and it being evident there is no one standardized SMOP voluntary organisations can adopt. Therefore, it could suggest the form of SMOPs voluntary organisations adopt solely depends upon the unique needs of the voluntary organisations involved.

The literature also revealed it can be important for voluntary organisations to share the same goals and overall vision. Without this, it could make the collaboration unsuccessful. Further, trust was also found greatly important between voluntary organisations considering adopting a SMOP with the majority of studies emphasising this. This could suggest relationships are important between voluntary organisations adopting a SMOP.

Gaps however were identified within the literature. For one, volunteers' perspectives were not gathered regarding their thoughts on voluntary organisations adopting SMOPs nor the impact it would have on their volunteering role. Secondly, voluntary organisations shared many differing resources from knowledge, expertise to computing services, but volunteers were one resource not discussed as being shared

A study was conducted involving 2 separate focus groups, one with volunteers and one with voluntary service executives to gain their perspectives on voluntary organisations adopting a shared model of practice and on the concept of voluntary organisations sharing volunteers. Further, the study aimed to gain their perspectives on the concept of an online shared resource voluntary organisations could access volunteers and their details throughout

their volunteer journey as this was a form of SMOP People Know How had an interest in exploring.

Findings from the study revealed that SMOPs can indeed be beneficial for voluntary organisations. However, what was evident in the findings was that in order for any form of SMOP to be beneficial or successful, voluntary organisations need to have built a positive and trusting relationship with one another whilst also share similar values.

Further, not only were the relationships between voluntary organisations important, but what also became clear was the importance of the relationship between the volunteer and the voluntary organisation. This relationship needs to be considered before voluntary organisations adopt a SMOP as adopting a SMOP could unintentionally affect this relationship and their volunteering role if support is weakened, especially if it involved a SMOP sharing volunteers. Opinions were mixed amongst volunteers on the concept of sharing volunteers and therefore may not be appropriate for everyone. However, it was positively received by volunteers who had multiple volunteering roles suggesting that it could have potential as a form of SMOP and may be useful for volunteers who like volunteering for short periods of time and wish to gain different experiences: something known as episodic volunteering (Randle and Reis 2018). However, this could be timely for volunteers having to repeat recruitment stages and administrative tasks, something some volunteers voiced as being bothersome. This is where sharing volunteers and having an online-shared

resource were considered beneficial as volunteers could gain different experiences, and the prospect of an online-shared resource could reduce repetition of administrative tasks. Care, however, would have to be taken of an online-shared resource that it would not interfere with the service delivery of the voluntary organisation as concerns were raised regarding the management of such a resource. However, the findings suggest sharing volunteers should be done through personal recommendation through the voluntary organisations based on their knowledge of the volunteer.

Overall adopting a form of SMOP between voluntary organisations can be beneficial for the VO, volunteers and the service user. Although, concerns and complexities were discussed more so than the benefits were, which emphasises the complexity of SMOPs, and the many factors needing considered as not all forms of SMOPs will be appropriate for everyone. This is where a flexible, informal form of SMOP may be more appropriate to suit diverse needs.

Limitations

One main limitation was that the focus groups only lasted an hour which was considered a short amount of time and not sufficient enough to provide enough time for in-depth discussion. Further, with the vast amount of questions asked and the numerous aims of the study, it also did not allow for enough in-depth discussion.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complexity involved regarding voluntary organisations adopting SMOPs where there are many factors they have to consider and with there being no standardised model or framework to follow, this can further complicate matters. It has also significantly highlighted that not all forms of SMOPs will suit everyone, and can suggest that voluntary organisations adopt forms of SMOPs that are informal and flexible in nature in order to meet varying needs.

Recommendations

1. Further research exploring SMOPs, sharing volunteers and an online-

shared resource involving gaining the perspectives of volunteers and voluntary service managers from different locations to build on the findings from this study.

2. Voluntary organisations to gain perspectives from volunteers regarding any potential changes in practice as changes may affect their volunteering role.
3. Voluntary organisations to be mindful that adopting a SMOP may affect volunteers and the relationship between the volunteer and the voluntary organisation.
4. Voluntary organisations to continue to network within the voluntary sector as it could lead to future working relationships and adopting a SMOP.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Model name	Description
1. Fully Integrated Merger	2 or more organisations become one single entity forming one organisation. This requires the 2 or more organisations to have complimentary and similar goals in order to adopt this shared model of practice. One of the organisations will have to give up their identity and adopt and share the identity of the other organisation.
2. Partially Integrated Merger	2 organisations merge together but both keep their identities. One larger organisation supports a smaller organisation that may be experiencing difficulty. The smaller organisation gains stability and security whereas the larger organisation gains knowledge from the smaller organisation. Both organisations will compete for funding and may overlap in the services they provide.
3. Joint Programme Office	2 or more organisations with similar vision work together to reach a common goal. They do not work on the project independently but collaboratively which can enhance efficiency. Only organisations that deliver similar services adopt this shared model of practice. All organisations maintain their full organisational identity. As the organisations offer similar services, there may be overlap.
4. Joint Partnership with Affiliated Programming	2 or more organisations which do not deliver similar services work together on a shared project. Each organisation works independently on the shared project due to their differing expertise and services.
5. Joint Partnership for Issue Advocacy	2 or more organisations with different expertise and resources work collaboratively together short term informally. All organisations retain their independence. It is used at times to highlight a problem or issue that if they were to do alone may not reach as many people. Through combining the organisations' resources they could have greater impact highlighting their cause through a unified campaign.
6. Joint Partnership with the Birth of a new Formal Organisation	2 or more organisations collaborate together to form another organisation when their intended mission is outwith the other organisations' scope to achieve on their own. The organisations involved need to offer similar services and also share similar goals.

7. Joint Administrative Office and Back Office Operations	2 or more organisations maintain their identities but they combine their administrative activities and resources.
8. Confederation	One umbrella organisation sees over and supports 2 or more organisations that are similar but that provide services within different localities (nationally or internationally). One organisation will oversee and assert control over other organisations depending on all the organisations' needs.

Appendix 2

Model name	Description
1. Business Partnerships	A non-profit organisations shares their knowledge with a for-profit, private organisation. Both organisations share knowledge or resources between one another for mutual benefit.
2. Sector Partnerships	When 2 non-profit organisations collaborate with another for mutual interest. Collaboration can be informal or formal depending on their needs. Organisations involved have to have similar interests or goals.
3. Community Partnerships	When a non-profit organisation shares their knowledge and expertise with local community groups or individuals and the local community shares theirs too. This can help enhance service delivery
4. Government Partnerships	When a non-profit organisation will share and exchange information with government institutions or representatives. These partnerships are often used when an non-profit organisation exchanges information on a local community or an at risk group in order to advocate for change in policy or legislation.
5. Expert Partnerships	When a non-profit organisation collaborates with either groups or an individual who can offer their expertise in order to help the non-profit organisation reach their goals and mission. This can be an informal, short term collaboration.
6. Hybrid Partnerships	When a non-profit organisation forms collaborations with various organisations including other non-profit organisations, businesses, governmental bodies or even local community groups. These usually are informal where information sharing occurs. Any knowledge or resources that are exchanged depends on the mutual interests of the organisations involved.

7. Endorsement Partnerships	A non-profit organisation endorses either another non-profit organisation or any other form of organisation. No knowledge or resources are exchanged between and instead the status of one organisation helps the other. Both organisations benefit from this where both their reputations can be enhanced or they can promote a cause both organisations are interested in.
8. Charter Partnerships	Where a non-profit organisation may exchange property of their organisation such as their logo or any media they have created online.

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