

The Plight Breakthrough and Path Optimization of Voluntary Service of Local Social Organizations from the Perspective of Resource Dependence

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Abstract: With the establishment and improvement of the socialist market economic system, the transformation of government functions and the deepening of reform, social organizations continue to improve and develop, and gradually play an important role in public management. But its problems and difficulties are also increasingly prominent. Based on the theory of resource dependence, this paper studies the two local social organizations in S Province through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, and goes deep into the internal volunteer service of the two social organizations to understand the problems they face in development, and puts forward the corresponding optimization path in combination with the actual situation. The purpose of this study is to provide a practical reference for local social organizations to break through the bottleneck of volunteer service development and promote the sustainable and healthy development of volunteer service.

Keywords: Social organizations; Voluntary service; Predicament; Path optimization

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1. Introduction

Since 2017, with the development of the social economy and the improvement of public welfare undertakings, public participation awareness has increased, and the number of social organizations has continued to grow. As of the first quarter of 2025, it has reached about 870000, covering social organizations, foundations, and private non-enterprise units. It plays an important role in micro social services, improving the efficiency of public product supply, and has become an inevitable product of socialized and market-oriented public management.

However, in the rapid development, local social organizations face significant challenges: although the number of volunteers and service frequency have increased, there are problems such as a lack of credibility in personnel recruitment, management, and supervision, shortage of funds, and high turnover of volunteers, which restrict the sustainability and stability of volunteer services. Especially in the global trend of marketization of

social organizations, the sustainability and strength of related services in China are significantly different from those in developed countries.

In view of this, this article takes the dilemma of volunteer service for social organizations as the core, selects two local social organizations in S province as cases, uses participatory observation and semi-structured interview methods to analyze their specific problems in volunteer recruitment, management and supervision, analyzes the influencing factors from multiple dimensions, and proposes relief measures, providing practical and theoretical support for social organizations to break through development bottlenecks.

1.1. Literature review and basic concepts

Currently, academic research on social organizations focuses on five core issues. The scale of volunteers expands with the increase in the number of organizations, but the problem of insufficient professionalism is prominent. Some scholars suggest optimizing selection, strengthening training, and enhancing motivation to solve this problem. Social organizations are still in the early stages of development, with low efficiency in fund operations. It is necessary to improve social donations and financial transparency, strengthen internal control to control management costs, and enhance the ability to increase fund value through the construction of concepts, talents, and systems ^[1]. The problem of insufficient information disclosure is significant, rooted in weak organizational capabilities, weak external supervision, and weak disclosure awareness. Countermeasures include improving regulations, expanding diversified disclosure channels, strengthening internal governance and external auditing, etc. ^[2]. The academic community emphasizes the construction of a supervision and management system based on the rule of law, which requires clear legal recognition of organizational qualifications, standardized activities, and the establishment of a reward and punishment system ^[3]. Inefficient regulation and opaque funding can easily lead to a crisis of trust. Scholars have proposed the path of “digital technology empowering repair”, while advocating for a dual approach of improving information disclosure within organizations and supporting and guiding government regulations to address public doubts about efficiency, transparency, and regulatory strength ^[4].

1.2. Resource dependence theory

The theory of resource dependence was proposed by Pfeffer and Salancik in 1978. Its core lies in the high dependence of organizational survival and development on external key resources. Due to the scarcity of resources and power asymmetry, strategic adjustments such as diversifying acquisition channels and establishing alliances are needed to reduce external dependence and maintain autonomy. This theory has adaptability in explaining the dilemma of volunteer service in local social organizations. The issue of dependence on funding, manpower, and legitimate resources is essentially a manifestation of an imbalance in resource dependence ^[5]. Based on this, combined with field observations and interviews, this study found that resource constraints stem from external factors such as insufficient government policies, limited corporate support, and public cognitive biases. The lack of internal management mechanisms and weak resource integration capabilities have severely constrained the sustainable and healthy development of volunteer services due to the single path solidification and power imbalance dependency structure.

2. The challenges and reasons faced by local social organizations in volunteer service from the perspective of resource dependence theory

2.1. Volunteers have strong mobility

In local social organizations, the high mobility of volunteers is a significant and urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Both organizations are facing the challenges of unstable volunteer teams and serious staff turnover during their volunteer service process.

The strong mobility of volunteers directly affects the sustainability and stability of volunteer services. The unstable volunteer team makes it difficult to establish a long-term mechanism for volunteer service activities, and the quality of services is also difficult to guarantee. At the same time, frequent personnel changes also increase the management costs and difficulties of the organization.

2.2. Shortage of funds for volunteer services

A shortage of funds is another major challenge faced by local social organizations. For X and Y service centers in W city, funding issues directly constrain the scope and depth of their volunteer services. There are three main reasons for the shortage of funds. One is that individual citizens have insufficient understanding of voluntary service provided by social organizations, believing that voluntary service does not require financial support, resulting in fewer social donations. Secondly, there is a lack of motivation for corporate donations, which fails to fully mobilize the power of enterprises to participate in social welfare undertakings. Thirdly, government funding is limited, and although the government provides certain financial support, it is often difficult to meet the actual needs of social organizations.

The severe shortage of funds has severely constrained the volunteer service capabilities of social organizations. Due to the lack of sufficient financial support, social organizations are greatly limited in the design and implementation of volunteer service projects, making it difficult to carry out large-scale and high-quality volunteer service activities. Meanwhile, the shortage of funds has also affected the credibility and sustainable development capabilities of social organizations.

2.3. The management mechanism is not sound

Firstly, there is a lack of reasonable incentive mechanisms, resulting in poor volunteer motivation. The management of two local social organizations is relatively simple. Firstly, there is a lack of incentive mechanisms for volunteers, and volunteers lack vitality. Secondly, there is a lack of necessary training mechanisms, and the professionalism of volunteers is poor. Through observation, it was found that the volunteers of the two social organizations are mostly leaders from local villages or college students who participate in public welfare activities during their spare time. Their volunteer services have a strong amateur and mobile nature, and lack relevant knowledge and professional guidance. Again, there is a lack of a sound volunteer performance evaluation mechanism, and the volunteer team is loose. Through investigation, it was found that there is a lack of effective research on volunteer needs and reasonable human resource planning within the organization, and the performance evaluation standards for volunteers are not objective and scientific.

2.4. Lack of strong regulatory mechanisms

Firstly, the government's supervision of social organizations is relatively simple. For social organizations, the government focuses more on registration and registration of social organizations, and the classification of social organizations is relatively vague. Secondly, social supervision is extremely weak. Due to limited publicity efforts

and low awareness among local residents, they lack a basic understanding of social organizations and their operational mechanisms, as well as the important role they play in social governance. At the same time, due to the low transparency of organizational information, its daily management and finance cannot be disclosed to the public in a timely manner, which seriously affects the implementation of social supervision. Again, the news media's supervision of public opinion on social organizations is relatively weak. In the era of well-developed information networks, social organizations have failed to make reasonable use of new media channels to expand their influence.

3. Countermeasures to alleviate the difficulties of volunteer service for social organizations

3.1. Carry out publicity work on volunteer service and expand the volunteer team

Carry out volunteer service promotion work, attract volunteers, and expand the volunteer team, especially young volunteers^[6]. Organizations can attract volunteers through the Internet and offline publicity. Online rely on new media such as short videos and official accounts to share daily work and information disclosure, and improve public trust. Offline promotion is carried out in streets and towns, and cooperation is established with schools to attract student groups through credit exchange, material and spiritual rewards, strengthen the young volunteer team, and alleviate the problem of manpower shortage^[7].

3.2. The government will increase funding support and strengthen cooperation with enterprises

The government will increase funding support for volunteer services and strengthen cooperation between social organizations and enterprises^[8]. Provide key support to social organizations in economically weak areas. Encourage corporate donations through tax incentives, exemptions, and other policies, promote cooperation between social organizations and enterprises, form a diversified funding supply system of "government+enterprise+society", and solve the bottleneck of funding shortage.

3.3. Expand the service targets of social organizations

Within the existing resource capacity, identify uncovered needs within the region through preliminary research, such as potential service groups other than impoverished families and left-behind children. By combining publicity to expand influence, linking volunteers and funding resources, gradually broadening service coverage, and avoiding overly single service targets^[9].

3.4. Establish and improve management mechanisms

Firstly, establish a hierarchical incentive mechanism. Combining spiritual and material incentives, volunteers' sense of belonging and achievement is satisfied through recognition and annual awards, supplemented by material rewards such as small prizes and commemorative awards, to stimulate participation vitality and reduce mobility. Secondly, strengthen professional training for volunteers. Group volunteers according to their personality and willingness, equip them with basic and professional teachers, carry out targeted skills training, balance organizational mission with the personal growth needs of volunteers, and enhance service professionalism. Secondly, standardize the assessment and reflection mechanism. Establish a regular assessment system for training results and each volunteer service, combining self-evaluation and organizational evaluation. After assessment,

summarize and reflect in a timely manner, optimize service processes, and avoid loose management. Finally, select professional managers and strengthen internal communication. Prioritize the selection of managers with risk prediction, professional knowledge, and overall planning abilities, and regularly assess their performance. Drive managers to delve into the volunteer team, understand needs through face-to-face communication, and solve problems in a timely manner.

3.5. Improve the social supervision mechanism

Social organizations actively disclose financial and activity information, expand the scope of publicity through news media, and activate social supervision^[10]. At the same time, we will strengthen information exchange with the government, align government work priorities with our own service directions, and form a collaborative pattern of “government macro-control+organizational micro services” to enhance service accuracy and credibility^[11].

3.6. Strengthen information communication with government cooperation

The government mainly conducts macroeconomic regulation, while social organizations focus on serving the people at the micro level. Through information communication, it helps to promote mutual understanding between social organizations and the government, facilitate government supervision, and understand the service scope and feedback information of social organizations. At the same time, social organizations can also understand the government’s work priorities and needs, and then carry out corresponding volunteer services, achieving mutual benefit and win-win through mutual understanding.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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