

Making use of qualitative tools to understand the voluntary sector's engagement with the public service delivery: the example of the New Deal for Young People government welfare-to-work programme.

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Abstract

Qualitative tools are potentially powerful to gain understandings of the voluntary sector's (VS) engagement with public service delivery. This is because of the strengths associated with qualitative methods to gain specific information on an area as diverse as the VS and the ability to carry out comparative analyses. Despite this, research on the VS is dominated by work that uses quantitative tools. Using illustrations from a study to examine the extent to which the VS could successfully engage with the government's welfare-to-work programme, the New Deal for Young People, I discuss three advantages commonly associated with qualitative tools. These are the flexibility of open-endedness and the importance of understanding processes and staff's perspectives. I conclude that if the government wants to keep the VS engaged in the delivery of public services, they need to understand what keeps the VS involved and that qualitative tools can make a substantial contribution towards understanding this.

Introduction

Qualitative tools are potentially powerful to gain understandings of the VS's engagement with public service delivery. This is because of the strengths associated with qualitative methods to gain specific information on an area as diverse as the voluntary sector (VS) and the ability to carry out comparative analyses. Despite this, the proliferation of research on the VS in recent decades is dominated by work that uses quantitative tools (Moxham & Boaden, 2007). The aim of my paper is to discuss some of the advantages of qualitative tools with illustrations from research on the VS's engagement with the government's welfare-to-work programme, the New Deal for Young People (NDYP).

The paper is not intended to be anti-quantitative, neither is it intended to suggest that any one tool is superior to another, quantitative and qualitative. Instead, the purpose is to raise the profile of what can be a useful set of tools to understand aspects of the VS. This is a salient time for such discussion for several reasons. These include the government's increasing interest in engaging the VS's in a series of social and economic policy initiatives (HM Government, 2006; HM Treasury, 2007) and the continued emphasis on evidence-based

policy making; that is, devising policy based on information on what works (Wells, 2007). The importance of these developments is reflected in the recent establishment of the Office of the Third Sector,¹ within the Cabinet Office, and the five year £10.25 million co-sponsored venture² to create a research centre dedicated to understanding aspects of the VS.³

I divide this paper into three main sections. In the first, I provide a broad overview of research on the VS to illustrate the dominant use of quantitative methods. This is followed by an outline of my research on VS's engagement with the NDYP. I then move on to the final section in which I use a selection of my findings to illustrate three main advantages for the use of qualitative methods: the flexibility of tools with open-ended components, the ability to gain information on processes and on perspective. I close by concluding that qualitative tools can contribute towards the opportunity of a fuller understanding on the VS's ability to successfully engage with the NDYP which, in turn, provides information that can help to redesign the programme to maintain its initial policy objectives.

Understanding the performance of the VS

The VS consists of a potage of organisations that differ in multiple ways: who they serve, how they do this, their size and structure. The sector is a heterogeneous and fuzzy-edged entity and the sheer variety of organisations within it make it difficult to define. Further, several labels are used which may or may not identify different groups of organisations, including: the non-profit sector, charitable sector, Non-Governmental Organisations, and the more recent mainstream term is the Third Sector (Halfpenny & Reid, 2002; Kendall & Knapp, 1995). In this paper, I use the term VS unless I refer to others' work in which another term is used.⁴

There is a burgeoning literature on research designed to understand different aspects of the VS's performance. Much of this is grey material; unpublished papers and in-house publications – often produced by and for voluntary organisations themselves. It is impractical to provide a comprehensive picture of this work in the short space available here. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper I describe two broad trends. These are research on cost-effectiveness and impact assessments. The division is somewhat arbitrary and there are overlaps. Nevertheless, it is a useful way to manage the sheer volume of work on the VS's performance and provides a sufficient overview to highlight the dominant use of quantitative tools.

Turning first to the material on cost-effectiveness, this work came into prominence during the 1980s and early 1990s and consists of a variety of different models and frameworks. The aim was usually to demonstrate value-for-money; whether this was on the delivery of services, a specific activity or the sector as a whole. Despite variations, the tendency was to use economic models and to convert phenomena into numerical values to use in formulae. The formula frequently contained the following units: 'inputs', 'activities' and 'outputs'. Briefly, inputs are the resources, such as staff and volunteer time and equipment used in a programme or activity. Activities are what an organisation does with its resources in order to achieve its aims, such as

¹ The Office of the Third Sector (OTS) was established in May 2006. For information on the OTS see http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/about_us.aspx

² The partners in this venture are the OTS, the Economic and Social Research Council and Barrow Cadbury. The first two have contributed £5million each and the last one has contributed the remaining amount

³ See briefing produced by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) on <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/research/index.asp?id=1195>

⁴ There is no political reason for this choice; instead, for simplicity one label was selected and used consistently throughout the paper

training and counselling. Outputs are the direct products achieved by a programme - for example, the number of classes, workshops and training courses delivered (Wainwright, 2000, p. 104).

This work reflects the wider environment in which the agencies operated: a period of increasing contractual competition in which agencies across different sectors were encouraged during the Thatcher administration to compete to deliver public services. In addition, this was a time in which there were increasing demands to demonstrate transparency, public accountability and the ability to (efficiently) meet targets. For further discussions on this, see the Home Office report on efficiency and scrutiny, published during the Thatcher administration (Home Office, 1990); Kendall (2003) on the UK's voluntary sector; Jacobs and Manzi (2000) for the UK's public sector; and Flynn et al. (2001) for the US's non-profit sector.

One of the main criticisms of this earlier work is its failure to account for the multitude of social and less tangible (immediate and long term) benefits arising from the work of VSC organisations; the social contribution towards individual recipients (the beneficiaries), their families, the community and society at large (Wainwright, 2000). In more recent years and partly in response to these inadequacies, there has been a shift towards research that aims to do these aspects. They are frequently referred to as impact evaluation and impact assessment, the second type of research I consider.

Despite variants of impact assessments, terms such as input, activity and output continue to have relevance but there is an additional emphasis on other terms such as: outcome and impact. Briefly, outcomes tend to be planned and set out in an organisation's objectives, and can be described as benefits or changes that are intended for the beneficiaries of an organisation's activities or programme. Impacts, however, go beyond the recipients; benefiting others around them, such as their families, friends, immediate community and society as a whole (For more detailed definitions and distinctions, see Wainwright (2000)). This said, there is no consensus on the definitions for each of these terms. Further, some evaluators even question the distinction, or do not attempt to distinguish between them (Moxham & Boaden, 2007; Wainwright, 2000).

In contrast to earlier work on cost-effectiveness, however, impact assessments are not formulaic approaches to provide a numerical value on cost-effectiveness. Nevertheless, this does not mean there was a shift on emphasis towards the use of qualitative tools. To the contrary, quantitative tools continue to be the most frequently used tools⁵ whereby lists of indicators to operationalise concepts such as 'social benefits' tend to be tailored for the specific purpose of an individual organisation to demonstrate the contribution of their work. Some of this work is well known as Social Accounting, and is considered by some to be good practice and a more useful way to demonstrate organisations' social contributions and impact. For an example, see FRC Group (2003).

To complement this work, there is a mass of literature on 'do-it-yourself' tool kits that offer guidance to organisations on ways to do impact assessments (See, for example, Pearce, 1993; Spreckley, 2000). Amongst this literature are extensive discussions on the indicators available to measure social benefits. The lists of available indicators are vast. They include benefits to individuals, communities and to society at large; they cut across different aspects of life, such as health, crime and economics; and many of them utilize concepts such as citizenship, quality of life and human and social capital. To illustrate, the New Economics Foundation produced a report Prove It! as a resource for organisations to develop tools to assess the effects of their projects on local people and the relationships that exist in their communities, which they refer to as 'social capital'. In this, they identified over 100 indicators for consideration (NEF, 2000).

⁵ There are, however, qualitative studies. For examples, see The UK Voluntary Sector Research Group 2003 and Wainwright 2004

Alongside these two types is work produced primarily by academics. This work is diverse and a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods is used. They cover a disparate range of topics, including: partnership, volunteering and the social and economic contributions of the sector (see, for example, Glendinning, Powell, & Rummery, 2002; Kendall, 2003; see, for example, Quarter, Mook, & Richmond, 2003; Richmond, Mook, & Quarter, 2003). Overall, this work does not amount to much cumulatively. The majority of research is undertaken by and for practitioners. Further, the most frequently used tools to understand the performance and the impact of the work of VS organisations are quantitative; even when the research is on a very small number of organisations. The work seems to be driven by the emphasis to measure and demonstrate outcomes. There is, however, little about how these outcomes come about – how, for example, VS organisations deliver their services (or not) and the extent to which these organisations can successfully engage with government initiatives. Nevertheless, if the government and policy-decision makers want to keep the VS engaged in the delivery of their social and economic policies, they will need to understand why VS organisations take part. Qualitative tools are particularly well suited to do this for several reasons; some of which are demonstrated with the findings from my study on the VS's engagement with the NDYP programme.

The research

The NDYP is a flagship scheme and is one of a series of government welfare-to-work programmes that were implemented towards the end of the 1990s. Their primary aim is to improve the employability skills of long-term unemployed people so they can move into non-subsidized work. The NDYP is aimed at young people aged between 18 and 24 years old and is compulsory for those who are unemployed for more than 26 consecutive weeks. The programmes are delivered through 'forged' partnerships with the public, private and voluntary sectors (HM Treasury, 2001; NAO, 2002; Philpott, 1999).

The focus of my study was to examine VS's ability to engage with the programme as Individual Placement Providers; organisations offering temporary employment opportunities to young unemployed people who entered the programme (New Dealers)⁶. The aim of the study was to examine the extent to which the VS could successfully sustain engagement with the NDYP programme. This was broken into two main questions 1) whether or not the organisations were able to advance their missions and 2) whether they could sustain these advances.

The fieldwork was carried out in 2003 and 2004, five or more years after the (national) implementation of the NDYP programme. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with paid staff from the organisations in two employment areas in Greater Manchester, which cut across four (out of 10) local authorities. A decision to interview paid staff⁷ was made because they were considered to be in the best position to provide information on the impact of engagement with the programme on their organisations' missions.⁸ A total of 30 interviews were

⁶ For brevity, hereon I use the term New Dealer to refer to young unemployed people who entered the NDYP programme

⁷ One of the interviewees was on the management committee of an organisation, but was a paid staff during their organisations' engagement with the programme. Interviewees across the 27 organisations held different positions in their organisations; nevertheless, there was evidence of generic issues arising amongst many of them

⁸ It is well known that there are different stakeholders of voluntary organisations, such as: paid staff, unpaid staff and beneficiaries and that they can offer different perspectives about the work of the organisation.

undertaken for 27 organisations.⁹ In all cases, interviewees had some direct involvement with their organisations' engagement with the programme.

The interviews were conducted at the workplace and lasted for approximately one hour. Interviewees were asked about their organisations' missions; the reasons for engagement with the NDYP programme; the type of work carried out in the organisation and the type of work given to New Dealers; the benefits and the challenges arising from the work the New Dealers did; overall benefits; and their reasons for remaining (withdrawing) engagement with the programme. The interviews were taped and transcribed and data was stored and analysed using the software package Atlas/ti.

The 27 voluntary organisations in the study do not reflect the full diversity of the VS: there were high concentrations of organisations that are relatively stable (they have been around for some time) and many of them are affiliated to larger parent bodies with access to internal and external support and resources. Further, there was a clear absence of very small grass-root agencies that make up a large number of the sector (NCVO, 2006). This pattern is likely to reflect those organisations that are most likely to engage with other government initiatives (Alcock & Scott, 2002). Despite this, the variety of organisations in the study still captures some aspects of the diverse organisations that make up the VS. Some of these variations are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of variations amongst the organisations

Variations in:	Illustrations of difference
Mission (objectives and goals)	To improve the well-being of the elderly, to care for the young, to provide opportunities for the homeless, to improve the environment; to raise money for their parent body
Beneficiary (those aim to serve)	The elderly, the young, particular ethnic group, society
Services	Caring, support, advice, provisions (eg. Furniture, transport)
Area served	Local, regional, national, international, mixed
Staff	Paid, unpaid, mixed

There were other variations to do with the ways in which voluntary organisations were contracted to engage as placement providers, which reflects the local specificity and inherent changes built into the Welfare-to-Work programmes (Sunley, Martin, & Nativel, 2001). Some of these are summarised in Table 2:

Table 2. Variations in the way organisations engaged with the NDYP programme

Variations in:	Illustration in difference
Money obtained from the programme	None, nominal and enough to hire extra staff
Length of work placements	Six months and 12-months
Level of paperwork	None, little, large amounts
Number of New Deal posts offered	Ranged from between 1 and 90; further, some organisations placed New Dealers in other partner organisations
Types of posts	More than 16 different types of posts, ranging from unskilled and low-skilled manual work to skilled-office and skilled-manual work

⁹ For reasons to do with eligibility, two interviews were excluded from the study. This is because one of them was from an organisation that engaged with other welfare-to-work programmes, but not the NDYP; the other provided training support to New Dealers, not temporary employment opportunities.

As noted earlier, this paper is not intended to provide a full analysis of the research study. Instead, aspects of the findings are used to illustrate how qualitative tools can provide information that can offer a fuller understanding on the extent to which voluntary organisations can successfully sustain engagement with the programme. In particular, I show how this contributes towards understanding why, by the end of my fieldwork, there was a decline in the initial variety of organisations that continued with the programme; and, more so, why those organisations that continued with the programme are concentrated towards those offering low-skilled and unskilled manual work to New Dealers.

The advantages of qualitative research tools

Quantitative and qualitative research tools are vastly diverse. Crudely, I refer to quantitative tools as those used primarily to gain quantified information, such as the survey method; and, qualitative tools as those used primarily to gain detailed textual information, such as the depth-interview and participant observation (For more information, see for example, Bryman, 1988; Mason, 2002). My distinction is an over simplification: using one type of method does not guarantee a certain type of information; indeed, this outcome is sometimes intended.¹⁰ For example, participant observation can be used with matrices to gather numerical information. Nevertheless, making qualifications on the nuances of different methods and the ways in which they can be used would make for a difficult and tortuous discussion here. For the purpose of this purpose, I use the distinction to allow me to take my argument forward to discuss three advantages for the use of qualitative research tools, which are by no means exhaustive.

Flexibility – coping with diversity and change

Turning to the first advantage, one of the most commonly accepted strength of qualitative tools is their flexibility to gather complex information without the use of predefined frameworks and existing lists of indicators (Bryman, 1988). This flexibility and openness is particularly advantageous in situations where the phenomena under study are vastly diverse, constantly changing and where there is little already known about them; all characteristics of the VS and their engagement with the NDYP.

Given that one of the aims of the research was to examine the extent to which voluntary organisations were able to advance their missions through their engagement with the NDYP programme, it was essential to use a tool that could gain detailed information on each of the organisation's specific missions, which could then be used as a benchmark to examine their overall levels of success (or failure) with the NDYP programme. Even amongst the 27 voluntary organisations I studied (which by no means reflect the full diversity of the sector) it was evident that this variety of missions could not be captured in a generic list.

To illustrate, some of the organisations aimed to improve the well-being of the elderly, to provide for the young and the homeless. Some supported immediate local communities, others promoted improvements to the environment at local and national level. In addition, there were charity shops that aimed to raise money for their parent body, who in turn worked on issues to do with, for example, research and development on disease and poverty. To complicate this even further, several of the organisations had multiple missions. For example, one of the organisations had three missions: to alleviate poverty through the provision of affordable furniture and transport, to improve the environment through recycling and to increase individuals' opportunities through training opportunities. Consequently, a general framework originally incorporated into the pilot

¹⁰ More so, whilst not discussed in this paper, quantitative and qualitative tools have similarities as well as differences. Discussions on this can be found elsewhere, in for example, Halfpenny, Peter (1997 and 2005)

interview was replaced with a series of open-ended questions to gather information on each of the organisation's specific missions and how they achieved them.

Like diversity of the VS, the constant changes within the NDYP programme presented difficulties in devising predefined frameworks and comprehensive lists. In contrast, however, this is because of the difficulties in anticipating factors likely to arise to include in the design of tools. This point is particularly relevant as inherent changes were built into the design of the NDYP programme: by the time the fieldwork was underway, the NDYP programme was undergoing its 25th national phase of structural modification.¹¹

This difficulty was amplified because little was known about the VS engagement with the NDYP. For example, the interviewees from the organisations themselves talked about their difficulties in estimating the cost of engagement and whether this would be cost-effective. In one case, the Director of an organisation that serves elderly people explained,

...there were ... various elements that you would include in your proposal ... fees for the young people ...tools ... that might have been a computer, a set of knives ... safety clothing catering-wise, desks, locker ... a management element ...I remember doing this calculation and *it really was plucking it from the air** ... and we're used to doing a unit cost with things if we're doing things in daycare ... from our point of view ...*we completely underestimated** the support costs and the management costs ... it was because they [the New Deal participants] had baggage and the baggage was often both varied and disabling and of course we had no knowledge of that [before engagement with the programme] ...

Director
Source: VS and NDYP dataset 2004 (P12:37)
emphasis added*

The flexibility of an open-ended approach helped to identify – during interviews – a variety of factors that contributed towards understanding the organisations' overall levels of success (the first research question). In the case immediately above, one of the main difficulties was underestimating the high levels of support that the New Dealers needed to do the work given to them. This was the main and most frequent difficulty experienced by other organisations (24 out of 27 organisations). These problems include the New Dealers': lack of fundamental personal, social and work skills; poor attendance and time-keeping; lack of motivation; aggressive behaviour and multiple personal problems. Some of these are captured in the quotation below by an interviewee who prior to his current job used to work in an organisation that was responsible for finding New Dealers' work placements:

... there are times when you're thinking blimey I've got somebody here who's a current drug user or you know turns up at 9 o'clock smelling of beer and you're thinking I can't ring up a charity shop or an animal shelter or wherever ... we put the reputation of our organisations on line by saying here is this person that may steal from you, may not turn up, may abuse members of staff, may abuse members of public ...

New Deal Supervisor
Source: VS and NDYP dataset 2004 (P18: 156)

Several of the interviewees from 24 (of the 27) organisations made references about the limited capabilities the New Dealers, including: 'dire', 'hard work', those with 'baggage', 'unemployable', 'the bottom of the barrel' and 'high maintenance'.

¹¹ On top of this, there were other changes, including: different contractual obligations, the change of boundaries in Employment Areas, the change of partnership intermediary agencies.

In addition to identifying problems arising with the programme, it was possible to identify a combination of core factors from the interviewees' accounts that contribute towards understanding the organisations' different levels of success with the programme. These are summarised in Table 3 and include: the amount of money obtained from the programme; length of placements; and the type of work given to the New Dealers. Whilst some of these factors may well have been included in the design of a survey questionnaire, it is likely that some would have been missed.

The luxury of retrospective insight from this study (and others) now makes it possible to develop a more structured tool with a fairly comprehensive list of indicators and questions that are well suited to survey questionnaires. In turn, allowing for the collection of information at a much wider scale than is usually possible with qualitative tools. In this context, then, the use of qualitative tools can be considered as an excellent strategy to gain information to build theories and subsequently generate further hypotheses for testing. Nevertheless, qualitative tools have other virtues that make them more than a hypotheses generating tool; they offer something extra that is difficult to achieve with the use of quantitative tools. Two of these, discussed in the remainder of the paper, are on processes and perspective.

The process – knowing the ins and outs

Turning to the advantage of gaining information on processes, qualitative methods are particularly helpful in revealing the linked steps that lead up to a certain outcome (Bryman, 1988). In other words, this is the advantage of gaining information that can go beyond identifying correlations such as problematic young New Dealers (x) lead to difficulties for organisations to achieve their missions (y) and to understand how such problems unfold and impact on the organisations. This is illustrated using two examples.

The first example is a case in which an organisation that offered general advice and legal services to clients experienced disruptions as a result of the mismatch between the New Dealer's disability and the (inappropriately supported) work (s)he was given:

Well there were times when it did actually inhibit [the organisation's missions], we had several dyslexic admin works; how the jobcentre let us have dyslexic admin workers I don't know. But I remember we had one day when there was absolute panic because somebody had misfiled loads of things and we had the solicitor who was going to a ... big hearing and we could not find the files and the whole place was in pandemonium for a couple of days. So when it was bad it was very bad ... if we hadn't have managed to find [the file] that could have been dreadful for the individual client. As it is, the solicitor nearly had a heart attack but was ill from it, so it definitely was detrimental...

Chief Executive Officer
Source: VS and NDYP dataset 2004 (P14: 98)

The mismatch led to severe disruptions for the organisation whereby staff were distracted from doing their own work to (directly and indirectly) achieve their organisation's missions to deal with the problems arising with the work the New Dealer did.

The second example is an organisation that delivered services to women (who have been abused by a significant other) and their children. In this case, the poor attendance and time keeping of a New Deal playworker¹² resulted in disruptions to the running of the organisation and, even worse, directly compromised

¹² The label Playworker is used rather than childcare because the interviewees explained that the work was more to do with play and interaction rather than childcare

the aims of the organisation. In one instance, for example, on the day of a scheduled outing, the New Deal playworker did not turn up for work. The New Dealer's presence was needed to meet the minimum legal ratio of staff to children. Although the young New Dealer was aware of the outing, she did not telephone the organisation's office to let staff know that she would not be attending work on this day. As a result, and because an immediate replacement worker was not available, the children's outing was cancelled. This caused disappointment to the children and inconveniences to the mothers: some of whom had appointments to see doctors and solicitors. In addition, the cancellation of the outing had a profoundly negative effect on the relationship between the organisation's staff and community. The trust built up between the staff and women is a central component of the organisation's work and was compromised; at the next organised outing – out of disappointment and anger – the women and their children did not show up.

028a: ... when you're going on trip or whatever and just not turning in, it's not good...

Int: So how would you say that impacts on the children and the women

028b: oh disappointment, a very small thing would be disappointment, but anger and upset

028a: yeah because it disheartens them

028b: well what happened then is that the next week when we were supposed to go out they didn't turn up, they probably thought well if you can do it to us we can do it, you know, I know it sounds childish but they were let down so ... some of them had appointments and things and we were taking the kids so they can see solicitors and doctors, that's when they get that wee bit of time ...

2 interviewees: Children's worker and Supervisor
Source: VS and NDYP dataset 2004 (P27: 328)

These two examples are unique but they typify problems found in other organisations in receipt of problematic New Dealers. At best, as in the first case, they reflect the tension between the time spent by the paid staff with the New Dealer and the time spent on their own work. A dilemma captured by an interviewee who exclaimed 'am I shop manager or a support worker?' and the another interviewee who explained:

... every hour that is spent with a trainee is an hour that's not spent with an old person ... every single one of those [hours] is a deficit to an older person who will be there because they are frail and needy.

Director
Source: VS and NDYP dataset 2004 (P12: 47)

At worse, as in the second example, the problems were a direct impediment towards the delivery of the organisations' missions.

The ability to reveal processes makes a major contribution towards understanding the effects of the problems on the organisations. More so, understanding these processes in conjunction with other information and the comparative element built into the research design, contributed towards understanding why some organisations managed to advance their missions from their engagement with the programme, whilst others did not (findings summarised in Table 3).

The importance of understanding staff's perspective

The final advantage discussed in this paper is that of gaining information on staff's perspective: their understanding of their organisations' engagement, their evaluation of the impact of this on their organisations, and their willingness for their organisations to continue with the programme.

As noted earlier, staff were considered to be well positioned to understand the voluntary organisations' engagement with the programme and subsequently offer indications of this on the impact on their organisations' overall levels of success. Qualitative tools offered the advantage of gaining detailed information on staff's evaluations for several reasons. In particular, because these evaluations were not systematic and did not consist of a clear analysis of the events described to me. Instead, the interviewees talked about a mesh of benefits and problems arising with: New Dealers, the labour suppliers and structural and operational aspects of the programme. Their judgments about overall success, or lack of it, were not a formulaic exercise in which the benefits and problems were enumerated to calculate where the balance lay. Indeed, the interviewees seldom talked about monitoring the overall outcome in this calculative way. Instead, in almost all cases, the interviewee's judgment of success was, implicitly, based on the extent to which the young New Dealers work generated instrumental benefits for their organisation; particularly in terms of the everyday running of, and services delivered by, the organisations.

To illustrate, in one case the Manager of an organisation that serves the local community talked about multiple ways in which New Dealers (and others) contributed towards the work of the organisation:

... everybody does everything apart from the admin worker [includes staff, volunteers, New Dealers and other placement trainers/students] ... if we have a playscheme on then it would be all hands on deck, because you need everybody... generally they will do whatever was required of them on a day-to-day basis ... it's meeting people who come in the afternoon and dealing with whatever they come in with like the young people ... it could be just playing pool and table tennis, but it's not just playing pool and table tennis, it's building up relationships, talking to that person. ...

Manager

Source: VS and NDYP dataset 2004 (P22: 160)

The benefits arising from the programme were rarely monitored and measured; nevertheless, this work was valued. Indeed, in the case above, the manager described the NDYP programme because they offered a much needed free source of labour.

Whilst there were complexities in the ways interviewees made judgments on whether or not their organisations gained net benefits by advancing their missions, on an analytical level, it was possible to discern variations and to identify combinations of factors that (directly and indirectly) determined their different levels of success with the programme. These factors are summarised in Table 3 and a more detailed discussion can be found in Soteri-Proctor (2007).

Table 3. Summary of main factors that contributed towards overall levels of success with the NDYP programme

Factors	How it works
£ and time	This combination works best: with sufficient amounts of money to hire staff to support and train the young New Dealers AND with the time to train up the young New Dealers, these organisations can offer a variety of types of work to that can significantly contribute (directly and indirectly) towards their missions

Without £: Low-skilled manual work	Without the additional resources to hire staff to support and train the young New Dealers, then: the organisations that can offer low-skilled manual work that can significantly contribute towards their mission are most likely to gain success
Without £ and without low skilled work: Existing qualities of the young	Without the additional resources AND without low-skilled manual work that can significantly contribute, THEN: These organisations are largely reliant on the existing qualities of the young New Dealers for them to gain overall levels of success

Another reason for the importance of understanding the staff's perspective is their influential role (directly and indirectly) in deciding whether and how their organisations continue with the NDYP programme. Consequently, staff are an important source of information if the government is concerned with devising policy to sustain partnership in programmes such as the NDYP programme.

Conclusion

Despite the dominant use of quantitative tools to understand the performance of the VS, qualitative tools can make a major contribution towards a fuller understanding of the VS's engagement with policy initiatives. Using examples from my study, I have discussed three main advantages. They are the: flexibility of their open-endedness to cope with variety and change, especially on phenomena where there is little known about them; ability to reveal processes that lead up to outcomes; staff's evaluations of their organisations' engagement with the programme.

It is not any one advantage, but their combination that made them well suited to understanding the extent to which the VS could successfully sustain engagement. In particular, revealing important information on why, by the end of the fieldwork, so few of the initial variety of organisations continued engagement with programme and why those that continued were more likely to offer low-skilled and unskilled work to New Dealers. Findings that highlight the VS is not a cheap option: with sufficient amounts of money from the programme to hire extra staff to support the New Dealers and enough time train the New Dealers to do the work given to them, the organisations could benefit from the work given to New Dealers and simultaneously deliver the aims of the programme (increasing employability skills of young unemployed people).

If the government wants a variety of partners from the VS (and other sectors) to engage with and deliver their policy agendas, they need to understand what keeps partners involved. Qualitative tools can make a substantial contribution towards understanding this: uncovering important findings that can contribute to the development of more sustained partnership work.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for funding my study, *Can voluntary organisations successfully sustain engagement with the New Deal for Young People?* through the ESRC CASE STUDENTSHIP and for their further support to disseminate findings with an ESRC Postdoctoral fellowship. I am also extremely grateful to Professor Peter Halfpenny and Professor Fiona Devine for their continued tutelage and support. Thanks also to the staff in the Department of Sociology, University of Manchester, who were kind enough to provide useful feedback on a very unfinished presentation for this paper. Finally, but not least, I am thankful to the staff of the organisations in my study who were generous with their much-stretched time.

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