The NGOs, social constructors in the domain of occupying the labor force. The case of „Ruhama" Foundation

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Abstract

Among the Romanian NGOs, the case of the 'Ruhama' Foundation is a success story. Research undertaken by us captures the main determinants of its success: the quality of the human resources, the strategic management performance and determination (motivation) of the members of the organization. All those have generated complex strategies designed to change the attitudes, the values and even the organizational structure. The diversification of the organization activity, initially focused exclusively on social problems of vulnerable groups, led to a preventive approach to vulnerability respectively of the economic coordinates that allow the identification of the social inclusion and the preventing exclusion. This gave rise to the center "Careers" which offers programs of self-knowledge and career guidance, professional training or retraining correlated with the existing labor market needs, and also the desires and the possibilities and potential beneficiaries of these courses. Our research, conducted in several stages and using various research methods and tools in the context of appreciative inquiry (questionnaires, individual interviews and focus group interviews type), decrypts the process by which the organization is discovered and rediscovers itself, with its potential, values, and desires, based on the opportunities related to

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the environment in which it operates and it constructs on this basis a new architecture not only to maintain itself on the market, but even to turn it in a social actor, a genuine partner of bodies empowered to ensure social welfare and a promoter of best practice models.

Introduction

In a period of institutional decline, the NGOs - working in whatever field, seem to have adapted more easily to the postmodern imperative "Be operators, i.e. measurable, or disappear" (J. Fr. Lyotard), so they are a viable alternative for achieving goals of human rights, poverty reduction, civic attitude, promoting social values and may even influence the existing policies (Edwards and Hulme, 1992 apud Fowler, 2000). The NGOs, along with other forms of association, of promoting and developing social capital, consisting of informal social relationships based on trust and cooperation are appreciated as sources of social order recovery, badly affected by the "information era" (Fukuyama, 2002, Chapagain &Ojha, 2008). Whether acting locally or globally, through work, the way of approaching problems, involving issues of broad interest, the results, they are all perceived by the public as credible actors, impartial, efficient and responsible. Also stood out as the main initiators of public-private partnership, indicating its interest in advocacy skills and promoting ideas of customers we represent.

In Romania, the NGO sector is a relatively new reality, even if a history of association was observed in our culture. Built amid transition towards market economy, the lack of a culture nonprofit sector has induced some confusion about the purpose, the sources of funding, the nature of and manner of action. After 1990, the number of NGOs, especially in social sectors increased, at this time, being recorded in the National Register of NGOs 16,785 44,271 foundations and associations at the country level. If their initial work was characterized by some organizational inconsistency, high social costs, low supervision and control capacity (Bradu & Sandu, 2009), lack of a coherent and unified strategy, then, due to the reorganization of the system and the regulation of the conditions of providing social services, NGOs became examples of good practice for government organizations (Spârleanu, 2007, p. 247-253).

In a similar manner to that in which the global perspective, Fowler identifies a number of factors which determine the effectiveness of NGOs (Fowler, 2000; Cace, 2007) groups the difficulties faced by NGOs in Romania in four broad categories: structural problems/system problems (lack of funding, excessive

taxation, legislative imperfections, etc..) unfavorable institutional environment to functioning the NGOs (strained relations with local/central organization registration problems), problems of networking between organizations (low structure, limited partnership), internal management problems of organizations (poor staff training, lack of volunteers, mismanagement). In the economic context, institutional and specific relational Romanian environment, after 1990 and several NGOs were founded in the Bihor county, including the social domain, which is our object of interest.

The Ruhama Foundation, one of NGOs of high visibility, was established in 1996, having as main activity is the development of social welfare services and community development activities, especially in rural areas. It started in its constructive approach from an organization that enabled only two people, to one that currently leads a number of 30 permanent employees, 20 collaborator-employees (teachers, trainers) and 15 volunteers and students in different projects and services. During 1996-2004 the Foundation has succeeded in creating the independent Bihor county services such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Welfare services to the elderly at home, day care center for children Rontãu, Community Information and Counseling Centre Sânmartin, Counseling and Support for Children and Parents, along with other projects and activities in rural communities (Daragiu, 2004). By the services offered, the Foundation is currently involved in projects of social, medical and social care, civic and economic, acting not only to solve them, but also to prevent social problems, vulnerability which being "a state of potentiality, can turn into disadvantage in terms unused opportunities for change" (Cojocaru, 2005, p.13).

We consider that the organization under review is a representative one for a constructionist approach, offering a sustainable organizational architecture, which succeeded to impose in the public space of Bihor county. The interest not only for their own organizational development, but also for developing local NGOs at the local level was materialized in action by the Ruhama Foundation, this soon became a resource organization for newly locally, established organizations but also for those with experience in the field. Starting with existing models in this sector on the international level, namely: the creation of coalitions of NGOs to coalesce around specific policies and programs through planned interventions for accomplishing the reforms in the field (Fox and Brown, apud. Fowler, 2000), engaging actively in implementing the local change, Ruhama Foundation is the originator (along with five other NGOs in Bihor) to the Coalition to Strengthen the NGO sector in Bihor (STRONG). The coalition formation "came as a result of awareness by representatives of the six founding NGOs of the importance of pooling efforts to achieve results consisting in changing local social policies, favorable to beneficiaries they represent. Currently, the STRONG coalition brings together a number 45 NGOs members and supporters of its activities" (Social Services Guide provided by associations and foundations, 2009, p. 1).

Organization development through diversification (research itself, through the appreciative inquiry[5])

The Appreciative Inquiry proposed by Cooperrider and Strivatsva in 1987 represents an approach of organizations based on Kenneth Gergen's constructionism (1985), which conceives social reality as a social construction and continuous reconstruction in the relations between individuals. The principles underlying the method and synthetically expressing its essence are constructionist principle, according to that every organization is a reality of multiple interpretations of social actors and organizational change through appreciative inquiry means just changing their image interpretation and construction of a new, common image, simultaneity principle, according to which the research and change that occur simultaneously stimulate change, the poetic principle, in agreement with that organization is a result of multiple interpretations expressed through language, and ideas, representations, stories, metaphors expressed by members of the organization are ways of doing for their transformation; the principle of anticipation (Fernando, 2010), according to which the purpose of organization is a positive future image, constructed by members of the organization to influence events within the meaning of dreams made and the positive principle, which refers to the force which they exert positive feedback in building the organization by finding the positive aspects, the strengths of the organization and orientation of innovative change in positive correlation with prefiguring a future (Cojocaru, 2008).

Description of the research

The paradigm shift, namely the approach of appreciative inquiry perspective, as a response to research-action-centred problem, allowed organizational design from "choosing positivity and social context of intervention that the organization" (Sandu, 2010, p. 13-19; Sandu, Cojocaru & Ponea, 2010), the main assets of the organization and capitalization of the projects which have emerged due to involvement of all organization members and even some of the beneficiaries. We started with the idea that appreciative inquiry "lets practitioners move beyond traditional problem-centered methods - like participatory problem and needs assessment - to identify and build on past achievements and existing strengths within a community, establish consensus around a shared vision of the future, and construct strategies and partnerships to achieve that vision"(Duraiappah, Roddy, Parry, 2005, p. 19)

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[5] The research developed during December 2008-December 2009, during the same period the project regarding the center of "Career" was implemented.

Working Hypotheses

Non-governmental organizations are open to challenges regarding the development and diversification of activities and services they provide, benefiting from more flexible structures and mechanisms;

Human and Social Capital of the "Ruhama Foundation " is sufficiently developed and structured to build a new organizational architecture, from the organization's strengths and achievements;

The changes in the organization can be enhanced and channeled through appreciative inquiry.

Research Methodology

In our research we tried to detect, from the organization's strengths, its potential of development, covering stages of appreciative inquiry (Cojocaru, 2005). For this purpose several instruments were designed, to be implemented in two phases: - The first step to apply an initial survey to the existing staff within the "Ruhama" Foundation in December 2008, and after the data processing two focus groups were conducted, one aimed at managers and partners and the second employees and volunteers.

- In the second stage and the final questionnaire was applied to a focus group conducted with the beneficiaries of change in organizations (beneficiaries center "Careers").

Between the two phases an investigation of the labor market in Bihor was made, a research-oriented basis for decisions on the establishment of the center.

In order to achieve coherence of discourse, to build a continuum between assessment organization, expectation of its members, their possibilities to materialize, and organizational building itself, while I addressed the 4D algorithm included in the application of appreciative inquiry, items of each instrument of research covering all phases of the method.

Applying the Appreciative Inquiry

The initial questionnaire, structured on three dimensions of the organization's human capital (human resource quality, performance management and employee motivation) translated into 20 items, was to highlight how employees perceived their organization. The instrument was applied to all staff having the following structure: average age 30 years, 2/3 women and 1/3 men, 80% with higher education (75% of them social workers, sociologists, and psychologists), 10% with secondary education and 10% of vocational school graduates.

The conclusions inferred from data processing and impressions provided by the atmosphere during the filling of questionnaires (for fun, trust, commitment, optimism) confirms the idea about the virtues appreciative approach is used on its ability to induce the idea of social and organizational constructionism by participation to ensure sustainability of the organization to shape its long-term vision. Most of the respondents positively evaluated the concern to attract in the organization staff with high level of education, of a good quality, which has known the specific of the organization, since the period when they were students as volunteers or among motivated beneficiaries. However, most respondents appreciated being consulted about the difficulties and successes, and the future plans of the organization, many initiatives of the employees being implemented, which has generated satisfaction among the staff.

Regarding the management, the staff appreciates its disponibility for the delegation of responsibilities, the opportunity of lateral communication (between sections, departments within the organization), involvement in decision making and accuracy assessment, the ability to turn professional group leaders in a team (Preda, 2006). Among the ways of motivating staff, the most popular were: the transfer of know-how, regular working meetings, encouraging personal development, job satisfaction, flexible timetable, awarding the management in a specific field, differential salaries, the promotion opportunities, associating in the management team. The content of the respondent's answers, combined with the observation data regarding how networking between subjects work, tone, availability to communication, unconcealed optimism form are objective and subjective prerequisites offering sufficient ground to substantiate the conclusion that human capital (reflected in the education of staff, the communication abilities, the availability of addressing problems related to organizational development) and the social one (expressed in informal relations between the members of the organization, based on mutual trust and cooperation in carrying out the tasks) are strong elements of the organization. The managers' concern for the formation of the training team, their attracting in the decision process, intrinsic motivation and the increasing staff satisfaction, the concern for social networking, by initiating partnerships with other NGOs in the domain of social and public institutions are other advantages that promote the development of the organization.

As one can see, the motivation of the staff is not focused on financial rewards, the leaders interest center is a subjective dimension of work - it's about those awards "without money", which meet some needs, such as the need to learn through work, the need to know the nature of work and ways of achieving the tasks, the need to take decisions and to take initiatives, the need for recognition within the organization, etc.. (Mathis et al, 1997). This type of policy is specific to gifted leaders endowed with 'emotional intelligence', capable of empathy, social skills and talent to know the team and aiming the possibility of meeting their needs as the organization's objectives are achieved (Preda, 2006).

The table below shows the way of valorization of the organization by its members:

Nr.	Reference Categories	Relevant positive Aspects
I.	The Quality of Human Resources	1. The recovery of personnel initiatives 2. School Preparation 3. Information on future projects 4. Promote volunteerism 5. Engaging representatives of beneficiaries
II.	The Management Quality	1. Delegation of responsibilities, lateral communication 2. Correct assessment, decision at the management level but also group decision 3. Quality Management 4. Social networking
III.	Motivating employees	1. Transfer of know-how, regular working meetings 2. Encouraging personal development 3. Job satisfaction 4. Flexible timetable 5. Management assignment in a specific area, differentiated salaries, promotion opportunities, Co-opting in the management team

Table 1: The positive aspects pointed out by the organization members

Focus groups conducted in the "Ruhama" Foundation: a) managers and partners (8 persons), b) employees and volunteers (9 persons), c) recipients (5 persons) have sought to identify determinants of success of the organization. It should be noted that such discussions were moderated in order to foster positive, innovative expressions. In a first stage, participants in focus-group type meetings were managers, partners, employees and volunteers of the organization for subsequent meetings to be held the same type as the beneficiaries to offer a more complete and stimulating image in terms of organizational development. The elaboration of the interview guides has taken into account the appreciative inquiry stages, which are structured in the same sizes which were seen in the questionnaire.

The stages of appreciative inquiry (the four D)	Responses: employees and volunteers	Answers: the management team and partners
Strengths of the organization Appreciating (Discovery	1. multidisciplinary team with multiple skills; 2. individual and organizational values; 3. cooperation and association with the state institutions and nonprofit organizations; 4. medium and long term vision; 5. quest for continuous improving of human resources; 6. the diversification of activity.	1. human resources; 2. individual and organizational values; 3. intrinsic motivation of the staff; 4. opportunities of staff development; 5. management team expertise; 6. public-private partnerships; strategically thought; 7. the promoting the image of the organization; 8. competitiveness;

		9. accredited service;
		10. intra-organizational communication;
		11. attractive salary packages;
		12. indefinite hiring of staff;
		13. appropriate working conditions;
		14. experience in accessing external funds;
		15. diversified target group;
		16. ongoing assessment of client satisfaction;
		17. scientific basis for decisions through scientific studies:
Development perspectives Envisioning Results (Dream)	1. increased self-financing; 2. the multiplication of advocacy campaigns to stimulate involvement of decision takers; 3.the establishment of new social services; 4. accreditation of new training courses to the needs identified	1.the national business expansion; 2. proposed public policies (at local and national level); 3. the establishment of new services focusing on early education; 4. the increasing and maintaining the quality of existing services; 5. diversifying social assistance;

		6. increased revenue (fundraising by contributing to 2%); 7. developing new partnerships;
Solutions Implementation Co-constructing (Design),	1. the strengthening the organization's public image; 2. use of expertise by the government organization, 3. the diversification and development services (eg, a center that provides employment services, which complement existing training services); 4. create new working places in other counties	1. greater support from public authorities (partnerships by area of activity): 2. partnerships at the central level; 3. the development of service models to serve as an example for other institutions; 4. the analysis, testing, validation educational models that can be generalized; 5.attracting other grants; 6. promoting image; 7. increased self-financing;
Results Sustaining (Destiny)	1. increase in services; 2. Ruhama Foundation identified solutions in response to local issues of social be implemented by Local Public	1. increasing number of services (eg establishment of nurseries, construction of housing for disadvantaged communities, generating new jobs); Results

	Administration;	Sustaining
	3. functional workstations in counties or areas with social problems.	(Destiny)
		2. decrease the number of beneficiaries;
		3. revenue growth;
		4. increasing partnerships.

Table 2: The comparison of responses obtained in focus-groups

We mention that for reasons of space we only presented the systematic answer of the participants to the focus groups in the above table, in fact the answers, ideas, suggestions, dreams, individual interpretations being much more numerous, we practically assisted to a true "virtual laboratory" of ideas projects (Cojocaru, 2006). If we look at the comparative strengths of the organization, assessed, firstly in terms of employees and volunteers and secondly, in terms of the management team and partners we found that both groups have identified many common elements in all the 4 Ds, premise of co-participation in organizational design. Such common elements for Discovery are: human resources of the organization, multidisciplinary team with multiple skills, with emphasis on concern for the continuous improvement of staff and the creation of appropriate working conditions, plus individual and organizational values, also appreciated measure of both groups. The strengths of the organization activity, the responses of the management team and partners have focused on: the concern for accreditation services, promoting the image of the organization in public space, experience in accessing external funds and the responses of employees and volunteers have shown medium-term vision and long.

The development prospects (*Dream*) identified by participants in two focus groups designed an overall policy. Beyond the establishment of new social services designed to extend business expectation and involvement in national public policy building. If employees leads the increasing self-financing plan (security needs), the management team places the last places financial matters, (the emphasis being shifted towards the needs of self-achievement).

A common element identified in terms of implementing solutions (*Design*) is the acquisition of good practice models experienced by the "Ruhama" Foundation in the current business organizations and social institutions. Strengthening the organization's public image was captured by both solutions are among focus groups.

In case of *Destiny*, participants identified the main result was the growth of services, but also, paradoxically, decreased the number of beneficiaries with the motivation that aims at providing quality services, leading to decreased number of social services and growth-dependent own abilities to cope with problematic situations faced. A category of services to compete to achieving this was identified in the creation of counseling, mediation and training careers. This demonstrate that "the network-like structures that liberate not only the daily search into qualities and elements of organization's positive core but the establishment of a convergence zone for people to empower one another - to connect, cooperate, and co-create. Changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized when people constructively appropriate the power of the positive core and simply... let go of accounts of the negative" (Cooperrider, Whitney, 2000, pp 13-14). Starting from the idea that "a social problem exists when its existence is recognized by the community" (Cojocaru, 2005, p. 26) that the visibility of NGOs in society resulting from their involvement in social and non-governmental organizations is the better perceived message when it is intertwined with social action, the leadership o the foundation has reviewed the options and has based decisions regarding the future action and study of labor market of Bihor, initiated in collaboration with the University of Oradea, regarding the establishment of the Center Careers. The study[6] showed that 80% of Bihor managers are aware of their staff need further training, although only 15% of entrepreneurs from the sample considered as very high the need for such a center. Since large firms have expressed the need for continuing education in accounting for 100% expected them to address the mostly modern structures of this type. Therefore it is considered that high utility as Career Center to provide information about activities and services we can offer the benefits coverage staff training courses, primarily for large companies.

Investigated entrepreneurs were distributed in almost equal proportions between those who felt that counseling, mediation and training centers can support them in a large and highly (55%) proportion and those who thought that they can be helped in a small and very little (45%) proportion. A perception of this type may indicate either an inadequate information of the entrepreneurs about the centers competencies, or that firms with few employees are not interested in such services for their staff, or even experiencing negative situations with other providers of such services. Regarding the offer of the counseling center, most respondents (36%) opted for access to databases, information about labor market offer-demand of labor, to a certain surprising extent, given that there are many sources of information in this area, from those offered by AJOFM, to those found on various sites on the Internet.

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[6] The study was fulfilled in the period February-March 2009

Secondly the option turned for advice, counseling, legal assistance, advice, ideas (30.8%) and only thirdly for training courses, experts, trainers (13.8%). Finally, relatively few have opted for the promotion, advertising (1.8%) or mediation, collaboration (2.9%). If the low interest for promotion, advertisement can be explained by the existence of the firm of specialists in marketing, disinterest for mediation, collaboration cannot be explained only by a dependent mentality from the early period of transition, such as "with us ourselves", translatable by limited trust in employees, intermediaries and unwillingness to pay for such services.

The research also showed that the demand for vocational training is very large, closely related to the nature of each company. However, some trends can be identified, translated into the interest in:

- legislation, regulations, standards, European and international projects (EU legislation, ISO staff, international relations, EU regulations on tourism, language courses, international standard accounting and economic reports, Hungarian language courses, elaboration of projects for structural funds, information in accordance with EU rules);

- jobs for which, for various reasons, there are no enrollment forms; agriculture, animal career courses, poultry farmer, natural products, phytotherapy and organic food, pet shop, complementary medicine courses, good manners, chromatics, internal auditor;

- areas with relatively new and growing search market: environmental protection, computers, security and health, specializing in video security technology, public relations courses, new technologies, selling insurance, hair stylist;

- courses in the areas present in large numbers in the labor market of Bihor: footwear industry, bodywork, sales agents, trade, marketing analyst, foreman in constructions, plumbing and electrical workers, carpenters, mechanic, PVC carpentry, interior painting, interior design, tourism, catering, bartenders, waiters, cooks waiters.

- The study findings were exploited in order to establish the center "Careers"[7] in its organization, in determining the types of courses, services for employment, training complementary service. According to beneficiaries opinion about new center services, the present (9 persons) appreciated as positive aspects of the organization: solving, if only a part of their applications, updated and individualized information on which they have access, provided confidence, keeping long-term collaboration, timeliness, professionalism and team availability. Beneficiaries participating in the focus group considered appropriate the development of the database covering offer and demand for existing jobs on specific areas,

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[7] Practically the research and the change occurred in the organization appeared simultaneously according to the principle of simultaneity from the Appreciative Inquiry.

allocation of space for exercise practice theoretical knowledge acquired in courses, employers' and prospective beneficiaries' increased confidence through activities of promotion the center, monitoring the situation of persons who have received mediation and have been employed. As expected results, the beneficiaries were identified: the increasing of the number of beneficiaries, lower unemployment, finding new jobs according to skills and training consistent with the person, introducing new courses.

- The final questionnaire also apply to all employees (more due to the completion center "Careers"), highlighted not only changes in organization, but another state of mind, optimism, of course, and those which we believe, in future projects. Respondents became more communicative, to open questions by formulating a greater number and variety of responses, their expectation is a continuation of what has been achieved already, some being even more daring; many have reconsidered their views to the previous period intervention. Moreover, even the personnel structure has changed in the sense that increased the number of employees by 6 people, mostly women, graduates of social and legal specialties, including Hungarian, Romanian, and Rroma in the initial period.

- The very change of personnel structure, generated by the creation of the center "Careers", design the choices and the values of the organization and of the management team, a quality-oriented human resources, to professionalism and diversity, showing concern for proper human resource planning as a guarantee of reaching the targets.

The strengths of the organization, if the first place is the idea of maintaining of a multidisciplinary team, in the second place lies team management experience and expertise, personal values and the organization's strengths continue to be given priority. The strengths highlighted in the final questionnaire represent, we believe, explanatory aspects of success achieved by the creation of the center "Careers", but at the same time, premises and axiological assumptions for future achievement

Organization members imagine a future where new experiments will be the foundation for other projects, i.e. new services, new sources of funding, diversification of interventions. It may be noted that recent achievements are constituted in a structure that would enhance their dreams, they are the premise, but in reality foreshadowed future. As a result, foreshadowed objectives, such as new lines of work, new services, including for migrant labor, are constantly expanding.

The conduct of the research and assessment activities justify "Appreciative inquiry - the New Frontier" (Fitzgerald, SP, Murrell, KL, & Newman, HL, 2001) since it accepted and applied, beyond prejudices and habits, positive energy releases posed by the service organization and, ultimately, community, society at large.

Conclusions

1. The research has shown the potential of development of the organization starting from its strengths, from the ability of its members to collaborate in developing a "social mapping" and involvement of all staff in organizational design. The interest in diversifying services, while increasing their quality meet the market imperatives, including those related to prevention of social vulnerability, "vulnerability that can arise dependence" (Cojocaru, 2005, p. 40), through increasing employment opportunities in the activity of the center "Careers".

2. The development by diversifying the organization to create the center "Careers" has generated considerable added value, reflected in a new organizational architecture, but also in creating new services successfully and in increasing the capital of the organization, strengthening relations of cooperation based trust between employees, stimulated by the desire to continue with similar projects. Career Center looming as a service to be accessed not only by beneficiaries but by employers as a resource center, "resource organization" (MS, manager), focusing on component development trainings specialized teams working for employers and training component for advice and keeping a job by the beneficiaries. It also envisages the development of other services such as such head-hunting services (MS, IV, AC, focus groups with staff and volunteers running).

3. The achievement Center Careers "incited by future openings to new areas of social life, to projects for a medium term and removed, one aimed at providing early education services, project enthusiastically supported by members of the organization, other words "a story that can be constantly enriched" (Fitzgerald, SP, Murrell, KL, & Newman, HL, 2001, pp 203-221).

4. The study reveals the interest and availability of NGOs involvement in activities that transcend established areas of non-governmental action, demonstrating their willingness and commitment to be credible partners in social construction of state authorities (which can power a say in development of local/ regional, "Ruhama" Foundation Partner LP), able to offer value and good practices that can be exploited in the interest of community.

5. Applying the Appreciative Inquiry to be validated in the productive and organizational development through diversification of the "Ruhama" Foundation, it triggering a positive reaction, the emulation of staff on the idea of social constructionism, participate in shaping long-term vision of the organization, demonstrating that "more than a method or technique, the appreciative mode of inquiry is a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organization we are compelled to study" (Cooperrider, Srivastva, 1987, p. 131).

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