

Becoming Selfless: A Grounded Theory of Commitment to Service

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Abstract

This study focuses on the substantive area of commitment to service in the community of educational partners in the Philippines. Educational partners are lay people who assist religious organizations in the field of education, and in the Philippines, about 96 percent of educational partners are in Lasallian schools and organizations. Educational partners are young professionals, volunteers between the ages of 24-39 who strive to live the teachings of St. John Baptist De La Salle. The volunteers aim to generate a spirit of service, a sense of mission to the youth. By using a classic grounded theory approach, the theory of becoming selfless was generated. The theory explains the stages educational partners undergo when resolving their organizational commitment to service. Organizational commitment is the psychological attachment, involvement and identification of the individual to the organization. Becoming selfless provides a theoretical focal point to better understand the complex construct of commitment.

Introduction

In a predominantly catholic country like the Philippines, the role of educational partners is very important. But in spite of their importance, the role might be somewhat unclear even to the educational partners themselves. The initial research question of this study was prompted by a comment by a lay teacher from one of the De La Salle Schools who said, "Why not explore the area of being an educational partner, since even up till now, after many years of being an educational partner, I do not really know what it is to be one."

Educational partners' concerns of commitment to service are crucial especially in unpredictable times like in the aftermath of the catastrophe that hit the country because of the super typhoon in the fall of 2013. How might educational partners in the areas affected manage, or even understand, their commitment to service when schools are totally destroyed and some of their students' families are possibly wiped out? Thus, even though this study was conducted before the catastrophe, the question of what it is to be an educational partner transcends the tragedy that we have right now.

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and classic grounded theory

was used for data abstraction and conceptualization that is vital, relevant, and yields high-impact concerns (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, 1992). Stakeholders such as graduate students, administration, faculty, and academic service staff comprise the participants in this study. The inductive way of knowing was adapted in the process of emergence by being faithful to the concept-indicator model of Glaser (1978). Consistent with Glaser's (1998, 2001) recommendations, interviews of the participants were not tape-recorded. The researcher listened intently to the sharing of the participant after posing an initial question, then from time to time, in between and questions, the researcher jotted down notes that were substantial.

Theoretical sampling and incidents articulated in the data were analyzed and coded, using the constant comparative method, to generate initially substantive, and later theoretical, categories (Holton, 2010). It is by constantly comparing the meaning of indicators that concepts and their properties are slowly built. Like a "pendulum" that swings back and forth from one indicator to the next the data was compared and analyzed. The emerging categories were theoretically coded by naming the particular relationship that exists between them a process (Glaser, 1978). At successive stages of the study, themes moved from low levels of abstraction to overarching themes. These overarching themes served as the foundational pillars of theoretical saturation when the additional data for such themes failed to uncover any new ideas about the developing theory (Bowen, 2006).

The Theory

Becoming selfless emerged as a theory about a pattern of behavior of educational partners who seek to resolve the main concern of commitment to service. Essentially, educational partners undergo five stages of attachment to the Lasallian school or organization: 1) discovering the nature of being an educational partner; 2) realizing implications 3) contextualizing 4) living-out 5) unveiling expected outcome or consequences.

Discovering the nature of being an educational partner involves the imperative of being rooted in the founder. Being rooted means being deeply connected with the ideals of St. John Baptist De La Salle. These ideals include being a visionary, having a vocation to serve, a sense of stewardship and belonging to a network of Lasallians, assuming a role in the shared mission, and giving an undaunted service to the marginalized. A feeling of being rooted is expressed in sentences like "being an educational partner gives me a direction in life through the principles of the founder" and "...to have a strong sensitivity to work in the name of the founder." Discovering means figuring out what an educational partner is through statements like "we mold the children to love and serve." Stakeholders such as the graduate students, administration, faculty, and academic service staff begin to find out what it means for them to share in the Lasallian mission of being educational partners in service.

Realizing, on the other hand, requires stakeholders to comprehend more deeply the life and mission of the founder relative to their own work and lives. The realizing stage involves a dynamic sensitivity where educational partners are focusing more intensively on their own passion to teach and serve. They develop a personal conviction where the individual role of being a Lasallian is identified through statements like "educating the young, especially the poor" and "I knew that I have that calling to teach." Such passion and conviction connotes key intervening components, faith-compelling and formative encounters that are necessary in the process of recognizing, understanding and realizing the shared mission.

Discovering and realizing trigger the causal condition of being an educational partner, which is further contextualized through extended linkages of Lasallians in school, community and people; their dedicated excellence as graduate students, and in the administration, faculty, and academic service staff. Their connectedness to the Lasallian institution are identified in statements like "the need to get together in terms of our vision on why we are doing this is crucial," and "we work with different kinds of people in achieving our goals."

At the next stage, living-out, the actions and strategies of being a Lasallian educational partner become manifest. Educational partners now become more sensitive to their own passion to teach and serve, and they develop their own personal conviction. Living-out manifests through collaboration with other partners; practicing collegial-action; having unity of purpose with moral and ethical standards; taking part in different school and socio-activities; doing self-giving sacrifice of time and talent; dedicating one's self to progressive formation; and leading people towards God by salvation-orientation.

At the fifth stage of becoming selfless, the consequences of becoming an educational partner manifest in that he or she becomes associated living witnesses, value-driven individuals who are spiritually grounded agents of personal transformation. The theory of becoming selfless provides a substantive theoretical understanding of the systematic way that educational partners apply organizational commitment in their own lives.

Discussion

Becoming selfless, which emerged from the data of this study, is the core category of a basic social process by which stakeholders attempt to understand and articulate their commitment to service in being educational partners in the Philippines. The conditions that evoke becoming selfless may be outward actions or internalized mental/attitudinal states (Gatin, 2013) from being self-centered to selflessness.

From the data collected in this analysis, it emerges that the process of becoming selfless depends on how stakeholders in De La Salle Schools understand

and manage the seed of shared mission in being educational partners. Just like in the onset of seed germination, in their early engagement in the work of shared mission educational partners become selfless askernel seeds. They are beginners in the Lasallian school/organization that need to be configured, oriented and guided. When a catastrophe like a super typhoon devastates an area, novice educational partners will not yet be aware of what needs to be done; they still have to internalize the values of the organization and will remain numb of action.

Educational partners have the liberty to grow in the organization by enjoying their personal beliefs and attitudes. They also have the freedom to let this self-definition die and be sowed accordingly under the organizations' vision and mission to respond to such a need. They become very much willing to share and partake in the shared mission, but have certain personal reservations with shallow personal conviction with regard to their commitment to serve others and the institution. They have been attracted and inspired to do the shared mission, yet fall short to concretize their ideals in response to what has to be done.

Educational partners become selfless for others by being hard-coated seeds. They are the ones that can be pricked, chipped, nicked or fired. They usually take time to realize their shared mission and identity, as educational partners, but remain open to it. At first, they hesitate to be part of the many concrete ways to respond as partners to the mission and are not that receptive yet to change and progress. They know the demands of tradition and of the organization, yet remain blind to give up their self and become agents of transformation. They have to be softened through various exposure formation and integration in order to assimilate the life of the founder and the core values of the institution. Once fired-up, pricked, chipped or nicked from their selfishness through progressive formation, they eventually ignite the spark of other stakeholders to go out of their shell and be one together in fulfilling the mission. These are the educational partners that, in the aftermath of the storm, are willing to take the risk in order to bring relief, food, and service to those who are in need regardless of what the situation brings and no matter what the odds there is, they are willing to sacrifice now themselves given the chance to be of service to those in dire need. According to Hampton (1993), service to others in need is only morally acceptable when it arises from an authentically defined preference, interest, or project undertaken by one who pursues such legitimate needs as a human being.

Becoming selfless is the move educational partners take by being moisture-soaked seeds in times of those needs. They stir up the spirit of mission and germinate faster in terms of living up to the sense of service and commitment of this shared mission. They become living examples of being associated with the mission and a lasting influence on how to be committed to work together as a team for a common end and purpose. They function as helpers and doers of action giving hope to people in the darkest event of the situation (Sally & Sibley, 2004). The care that educational partners extend when they help those whom they do not know and to whom they have no relationship, manifest that their becoming selfless takes

countless forms that according to psychologists leads to higher levels of happiness (Anik, Aknin, Norton & Dunn, 2009).

In times of calamity, suffering and uncertainty, people who help other people and are humane by providing the best possible aid and care that they can, reflect the improbable thread that binds together the stages of becoming selfless and resolves commitment to service.

Implications and Limitations

The grounded theory of commitment to service in becoming selfless allows stakeholders/educational partners to view their work and their organizations not just a place of work, but a way of life. It supports the enduring principle that "teaching is a service and a vocation."

Moreover, the theory of becoming selfless can aid in creating a more encompassing theory that could explain a basic sociological process of not only being "interdependent" (Senge, 1994) but also of being "interconnected" (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), in which people in their everyday lives would make their own decisions to become part of something in discovering their own spirituality in the workplace. Further studies might be explored to find out more about predisposing factors that lead to a person's loyalty and commitment to the organization and its cause, especially in educational institutions.

Organizational commitment is indeed an important concept in management and has been widely studied by organizational researchers, especially in organizational psychology and organizational behavior (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002). The employees' commitment to their organization is of vital importance because employee interests, goals and needs have to dovetail with those of the organization so that it can work efficiently (Macmahon, 2007). Becoming selfless therefore allows people to direct their efforts effectively.

Moreover, recent studies have focused on the importance of some variables relative to the theory of becoming selfless, such as different self-concepts of caring and loving others (Johnson and Chang, 2006) and leadership behavior towards selflessness (Steyrer et al., 2008), which affect and modulate commitment to service.

Conclusion

In an article written by Barney G. Glaser (2010) entitled "Organizational Careers: A Forward Theory," Glaser points out that since so much of what we all do is linked with organizations, it is very important to consider an organizational career as a

special entity and develop our understanding of it.

The theory of commitment to service in becoming selfless therefore provides the interested reader, especially educational leaders, a body of comparative knowledge, experience, and thought on organizational careers. The theory can serve as a frame of reference upon which stakeholders in various organizations and educational institutions can better understand their behavior relative to their careers and commitment to serve, with its subsequent effect on the organization. In its entirety, the theory of becoming selfless points to a process of "being and becoming" that provides opportunities for personal growth, professional development and spiritual enfoldment.

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The Grounded Theory Review (2013), Volume 12, Issue 2

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