Introduction:

The specific area in which I would like to do research and would like to write my thesis is in the area of “Professionalisation & Management of Volunteers”.

In the limited study that I had (I say limited because I believe that there is very much more to be understood, researched and shared) and in my 15 years plus experience working in the NGO space I have come across this important aspect.

Having worked in various senior positions one of my key responsibility to ensure delivery against set objectives was to tap on Voluntary resources to carry out the actions that would ultimately be instrumental in achieving the objectives of the organisation. This was always a challenge and involved great managerial skills. The task was to first identify a volunteer skilled to perform the task, if no skilled was volunteer available then to do with the best matched and add on some training, then came the challenge of time management on behalf of the volunteer to ensure that voluntary time was made available and the same was quality time. The real challenge was to get the Volunteer to deliver if not more but at least to a minimal professionally expected standard. These being Volunteers you cannot really penalize them for non delivery nor can you be over demanding. The balancing act along with continuous motivation (very different from the traditional monetary motivation) was very important.

This important aspect I believe has great potential of being explored and the outcome would be of interest and help to many.

In an NGO environment Volunteers are the live blood without whom the system cannot work and may fall apart. They are the pillars and foundation on whose strength the Institution grows.

Questions that come up and need to be addressed and understood and thus justify the need for the research are:

- What makes them give their time and knowledge and monetary resources?
- What is it that motivates them?
- Why do they leave aside remunerative work to devote time to give Voluntary service?
- What is it that charges them up? How do you recognize their efforts? What is the future of volunteerism?
How does an organisation make the most of their contribution?
How does one get qualitative volunteer time?
How do you professionalise volunteerism?

In my view the best way to understand the importance of the proposed research work is to understand the expected results and possible policy implications as an outcome of the research work.

It is expected that the below mentioned results will be available

- It will be concluded as regards the importance of Volunteers (human resource) as an asset in decision making in organisations dependent on them.
- Traditionally monetary reason was considered as the key aspect that retains / motivates human resources. It is expected that this notion will stand negated.
- When an authority of governance is given to volunteers there is an attached responsibility. The message will be clear that certain basic standards of delivery are expected from volunteers.
- Volunteers are an asset to the organisation and they give their time and knowledge to the organisation.
- The manner / process to ensure a high percentage of professionalism from volunteers is expected to be much clearer.
- Importance of Orientation of volunteers as regards their roles and responsibilities and regular feedback and appraisal in par with Paid professionals is an additional expected result.
- Whether Reappointed volunteers also should be encouraged to attend the orientation exercise as it would reinstate the policies and principles is a question that is also expected to be addressed.
- The aspects of ethics and integrity in the delivery of voluntary service would be more clear and understandable.
- What is the vested interest (if any) that motivates a volunteer to give service. Is there a need to have a vested interest to ensure professional delivery of voluntary service? It is expected that the results will through light on these questions.
Leadership when in Voluntary capacity is critical and has even more importance. Volunteers having different diverse skill sets come together and have a huge capacity. How is it that this synergy can get best converted into an action / end result that is beneficial to the organisation. The research is expected to address this aspect.

- Conflicts between paid professionals and volunteers and resolution of the same are also expected to be addressed.
- The greater importance of succession planning in voluntary organizations and the taping of youth as volunteers is also expected to be addressed.
- The sex ratio of voluntary manpower and the time devotion between the genders. Is there a bias situation? Is a particular gender more effective in ensuring professional delivery of service? All questions that are expected to be addressed.
- Policy as regards training of volunteers and the importance of the same in ensuring professional rendering / delivery of service will be possible.

The above expected results would be of great value today as NGOs would be able to better invest in Volunteers and get the best professional output from them.