

# Between Volunteerism and Nonprofit Professionalization:

## **Ethnographic Case Study of Skills-Based Volunteers at Engineers Without Borders Sweden**

By: Mariia Wolf

Supervisor: Steffi Siegert  
Södertörn University | School of Social Sciences  
Master's Dissertation 30 credits  
Business Administration | Spring Semester 2022  
Program: Leadership for Sustainable Development



**SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY** | STOCKHOLM  
sh.se

## **Abstract**

In recent decades numerous nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are undergoing the process of professionalization characterized by increased attention to efficiency, accountability, and the adoption of “business-like” tools and practices. At the same time, the majority of NPOs rely on volunteer labor. Most nonprofit scholars focus on traditional volunteering in which one volunteers doing something other than their professional work. These studies see volunteerism and professionalism as two completely separate systems. Meanwhile, the subset of skills-based volunteers, i.e., volunteers who provide professionally-related skills or services in nonprofit settings is understudied and their views of NPOs' professionalization are generally unknown. The present thesis aims to help fill this gap by exploring how skills-based volunteers perceive their roles and increasing the professionalization of nonprofit organizations. The study is guided by two research questions: (1) how do skills-based volunteers react to the rise of NPOs' professionalization? and (2) how do they navigate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism?

The study is an ethnographic case study of skills-based volunteers at Engineers Without Borders Sweden. The data is collected through 14 semi-structured interviews with working and retired volunteers complemented by my participatory observations as a part-time employee at the organization. To analyze and interpret the study findings, the thesis employs the boundary work framework. The empirical findings indicate that, contrary to traditional volunteers, skills-based volunteers react to NPOs' professionalization positively. The professionalization helps them to integrate their roles as volunteers and professionals, thus, facilitating boundary blurring. At the same time, working and retired skills-based volunteers perceive student volunteers as a barrier to professionalization, consequently, emphasizing differences in competencies and reliability between themselves and students and performing demarcation work.

**Keywords:** Skills-based volunteering, Nonprofit professionalization, Boundary work, Engineers Without Borders Sweden.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many people have contributed either directly or indirectly to this study. I would like to thank my supervisor Steffi Siegert for your consistent support, kindness, and insightful questions. Also, I would like to thank all the professors and students I met during this master's program. Thanks to you, I learned so much about sustainable development, business administration, and myself. A special thanks go to the thesis seminar peers who have read earlier drafts of this text. Thank you for your constructive suggestions and thoughtful comments. Any errors or misinterpretations in the paper are entirely my own.

The study would be impossible without Engineers Without Borders Sweden. I am immensely grateful to all the informants of this study. It was a privilege and pleasure getting to know you, talking to you, and learning from you. I am also grateful to the staff and board of the organization. From the very first day, I felt appreciated and listened to. In particular, I would like to thank Caroline Bastholm and Marlene Rosendal for helping me to find a rewarding research topic, and for your valuable thoughts and words of encouragement.

On a personal note, my endless gratitude goes to my family. My dear Michael, thank you for your love, patience, and sense of humor. My remarkable parents, Olena and Vasyl, thank you for stubbornly believing in the value of education and my potential.

As I started writing this thesis, the full-scale war against my home country broke out. While it became the reason for the late submission of the project, at the same time, the incredible bravery and resistance of Ukrainians became my source of inspiration to persevere through difficulties in thesis writing as well as further in life.

Thank you. Tack. Danke. Дякую.

## **Table of contents**

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1. Background	5
1.2. Problematization	6
1.3. Research aim and questions	7
1.4. Case introduction	7
1.5. Thesis outline	8
<b>2. Previous research</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1. Volunteering and skills-based volunteering	9
2.2. Professionalization of nonprofit organizations	12
2.2.1. Occupational professionalism and organizational professionalism	12
2.2.2. Professionalization in the nonprofit sector's research	13
2.2.3. Causes and effects of professionalization	14
2.2.4. Professionalism and volunteerism	15
2.3. Socially responsible engineering	16
2.4. Summary	18
<b>3. Theoretical framework</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1. Boundary work	19
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1. Empirical context: Engineers Without Borders Sweden	24
4.2. Research design	26
4.2.1. Ethnographic case study	26
4.2.2. Participatory observation	28
4.2.3. Interview data selection	29
4.2.4. Interview data collection	31
4.2.5. Thematic data analysis	35
4.2.6. Ethical considerations and data protection	38
<b>5. Presentation of findings</b>	<b>40</b>
5.1. Observations and reflections	41
5.2. Interview findings	43
5.2.1. Changes towards professionalization	43
5.2.2. Reasons for professionalization	48
5.2.2.1. Stakeholder expectations and external pressure	48
5.2.2.2. Safety	50
5.2.2.3. Seeing results and impact	50
5.2.2.4. More interesting volunteer work	51
5.2.3. Challenges for professionalization	51
5.2.3.1. Student volunteers	51

5.2.3.2. Working with other volunteers	53
5.2.4. Risks and concerns of over professionalization	55
5.2.5. Regular job versus skills-based volunteering	57
5.2.6. Managing time, space, and thoughts	61
5.3. Summary	64
<b>6. Discussion</b>	<b>65</b>
6.1. Reaction to the rise of the NPO's professionalization	65
6.2. Navigating possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism	70
<b>7. Conclusions</b>	<b>74</b>
7.1. Theoretical contributions and practical implications	74
7.2. Limitations and suggestions for further research	75
<b>8. References</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>9. Appendices</b>	<b>83</b>
Appendix I: Interview invitation email	83
Appendix II: Semi-structured interview guide	84

## 1. Introduction

*The introduction section consists of a description of the background of research on nonprofit organizations and volunteering followed by problematization of previous research by highlighting the gap this paper addresses and presenting the aim and two research questions that guide this study. The section ends with the outline of the paper's structure.*

---

### 1.1. Background

In recent decades the nonprofit sector has become more professionalized and this process is likely to continue (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012; Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner, 2016; McAllum, 2018; Marberg, Korzilius & van Kranenburg, 2019). The process of professionalization of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) is characterized by an increased attention to accountability, efficiency, quantitative performance indicators, and the application of tools common for the private sector (Marberg, Korzilius & van Kranenburg, 2019, p. 116). According to Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner (2016), the concept of NPOs professionalization is a part of a “business-like” organization, also known as organizational rationalization or managerialization. This notion is related to the logic that key positions at NPOs should be given to specialists as they possess “authoritative expertise” (Salamon, 1999, p. 13). It might mean that organizations recruit more qualified volunteers and/or more paid employees (Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner, 2016, p. 71).

Historically, the term ‘professional’ is referred to “individuals who derive legitimacy and authority from their formal education and claims to specialized expertise” (Hwang & Powell, 2009, p. 268). Evetts (2006, p. 140) differentiates between occupational (more traditional) and organizational (more contemporary) professionalism. The first requires competencies in specific subject areas (e.g., medicine or law), and the second means managerial competencies (i.e., business management background) and is referred to as managerial professionalism (Hwang & Powell, 2009, p. 269). Managerial professionalism is equally associated with being a professional as with demonstrating professional performance in order to show meaningful and legitimate work practices<sup>1</sup> (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 778).

While the majority of nonprofit organizations rely on volunteer labor (Studer, 2016), most nonprofit scholars see volunteerism and professionalism as two opposite terms. The former is

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, in this study I refer to *professionalization* in the sense of organizational/managerial professionalism and *professionalism* in the sense of both occupational and organizational professionalism.

characterized by general knowledge, day-to-day tasks, and lack of internal control (flexibility and experimentation), and the latter is marked by specialist knowledge, complex tasks, and strong internal control mechanisms (consensus and group norms of excellence). In addition, volunteers are seen as heart-driven and person-oriented, while professionals are cerebrally driven and task-oriented (McAllum, 2018, p. 541). Moreover, definitions of volunteers are currently limited to the “traditional” volunteering in which “a person volunteers doing something other than his/her professional work” (Steimel, 2018, p. 134). This usually includes traditional service roles, such as serving in a food kitchen.

## **1.2. Problematization**

With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Steimel, 2018; Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2021), theorizations of volunteering tend to exclude skills-based volunteering, i.e., “the practice of using work-related knowledge and expertise in a volunteer opportunity” (Steimel, 2018, p.133). However, depending on industry and occupation, from 7 to 23 percent of volunteers in the USA provide professionally-related skills or services to NPOs (ibid., p. 134). These skills and services are often essential for NPOs’ infrastructure and capacity building and could not be afforded with the recruitment of paid employees (ibid., p. 134).

As the current understanding of volunteer management is largely shaped by traditional theorization of volunteering, an activity that is not related to the volunteer’s professional skills and occupation, a number of researchers pointed out a lack of studies about skills-based volunteers (Steimel, 2018; Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2021). Moreover, with the growing professionalization of nonprofit organizations, researchers indicate tensions between (traditional) volunteerism and the professionalization of NPOs (McAllum, 2018) as well as between what research knows about traditional volunteerism and how it translates to skills-based volunteerism (Steimel, 2018). Scholars refer to tensions in the sense of conflicting or even contradicting logic of norms, goals, and/or motivations of two phenomena (Weiss, 2021, p. 232). Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no one has studied tensions between skills-based volunteering and the professionalization of NPOs. Hence, McAllum (2018, p. 559) explicitly calls for such a study and, consequently this thesis responds to this call.

While skills-based volunteering involves a small but significant percentage of the volunteer workforce, which is critical for the development of nonprofit organizations, this subset of

volunteers is understudied (Steimel, 2018; Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2021). At the same time, the increasing professionalization of nonprofit organizations puts more pressure on volunteers regarding the quality of their performance (McAllum, 2018). Hence, the research of skills-based volunteers in a context of rising nonprofit professionalization is needed to address the current shortage of research in this area and provide real-world value to NPOs that rely on skills-based volunteers and wish to professionalize their operations.

### **1.3. Research aim and questions**

The present thesis aims to explore how volunteers who provide professionally-related skills or services in nonprofit settings (i.e., skills-based volunteers) perceive their roles and increasing professionalization of NPOs. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do skills-based volunteers react to the rise of NPOs' professionalization?
2. How do skills-based volunteers navigate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism?

### **1.4. Case introduction**

To answer the research questions, I conduct an ethnographic case study. The study informants<sup>2</sup> are skills-based volunteers at the nonprofit organization Engineers Without Borders Sweden (EWB-SWE). EWB-SWE relies heavily on its skills-based volunteers at all levels of the organization (from volunteers in local groups to the chairperson of the board) to perform qualified assignments in Sweden and abroad. Since the organization was founded in 2007, it has experienced considerable growth. According to Valeau (2015, p. 1897), time and growth as well as changes in the environment and normative demands from external stakeholders are the main factors that pressure NPOs to become more professional.

As EWB-SWE grows, it continues employing paid staff<sup>3</sup>, building partnerships with different corporate companies, and becoming more strategic in its planning and accountability (Engineers Without Borders, 2022b). The use of strategic planning, quantitative program evaluations, as well as aims to monitor and improve effectiveness are markers of NPOs' professionalization (Valeau, 2015, p. 1897). These markers are visible in the growth of

---

<sup>2</sup> According to the tradition of organizational ethnography research (Beaton (2021, p. 2), I refer to participants of this study as *informants* and not *research subjects*. Throughout the paper, the terms informants, participants, respondents, and interviewees are used interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> Since 2017, EWB-SWE has increased its team of staff from two part-time employees (of 10% and 20% workload) to six part-time and full-time employees (of 20%, 20%, 80%, 90%, 100%, and 100% workload).



EWB-SWE. Moreover, the majority of volunteering positions at EWB-SWE require both occupational professionalism in engineering and organizational managerial professionalism (Engineers Without Borders, 2022b). Hence, EWB-SWE is a suitable organization to study how skills-based volunteers react to NPOs' professionalization and navigate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism. EWB-SWE as an empirical context of the study is described in greater detail in the methodology section of the thesis.

### **1.5. Thesis outline**

The thesis is divided into seven sections: (1) introduction, (2) previous research, (3) theoretical framework, (4) methodology, (5) presentation of findings, (6) discussion, and (7) conclusions. These are followed by a list of references and appendices. Accordingly, in section one, I introduced the context of the study, identified the research aim and questions, as well as argued the value of such research. In section two, I review the previous research on skills-based volunteering, professionalization of nonprofit organizations as well as socially responsible engineering, which is important for understanding the implications of the engineering occupation and, therefore, the empirical context of the study. In the third section, I explain the theoretical approach of the present thesis, which is boundary theory. In the methodology section, I describe how I selected the empirical case, justify the adoption of the qualitative ethnographic case study method, and discuss research design choices including the limitations of the study. In the fifth section, I present and describe the study findings obtained through interviews with skills-based volunteers as well as my observations and reflections as an employee in the studied organization. In the sixth section, I discuss and analyze the findings through the lens of boundary theory and previous studies on nonprofit professionalization, skills-based volunteering, and socially responsible engineering. Finally, in the conclusion section, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, as well as suggest direction for future research.

## 2. Previous research

*The following section is a review of prior academic literature describing key concepts, definitions, and concepts associated with volunteering in general and skills-based volunteers in particular, as well as with the professionalization of nonprofit organizations and socially responsible engineering.*

---

### 2.1. Volunteering and skills-based volunteering

Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth's (1996) review of over three hundred articles and reports about volunteering states that the term "volunteer" is rarely defined. The authors suggest that the term might be perceived as a self-explanatory and agreed-on phenomenon. However, they argue that the term is used quite broadly and should be defined more narrowly. Further, by analyzing eleven widely used definitions of the term, the authors identify four key dimensions of volunteering, ranging from pure to broadly defined. Accordingly, the four dimensions for a pure volunteer are: (1) free choice, uncoercive nature of the act; (2) volunteers do not receive remuneration; (3) organized work under formal organization; and (4) intended beneficiaries are not previously known to the volunteers. However, the authors note that the second dimension is problematic as most common definitions of volunteering focus on remuneration and not on a broader spectrum of rewards (Cnaan et al., 1996, p. 381).

Clary et al. (1998) distinguish six motivational functions served by volunteerism. According to their functional framework, volunteers are motivated by opportunities to (1) express their altruistic and humanitarian *values*; (2) increase *understanding* by exercising and acquiring knowledge and skills; (3) start and strengthen *social* relationships; (4) gain and maintain professional skills important to one's *career*; (5) *protect* themselves from negative feelings e.g., guilt over being more fortunate than others; and (6) *enhance* their self and psychological growth (ibid, p. 1518-1519).

Traditionally, volunteering is seen through the lens of "not work", as an activity in which a person does something other than their professional work. Therefore, the segment of skills-based volunteering, i.e., "*the practice of using work-related knowledge and expertise in a volunteer opportunity*" (Steimel, 2018, p. 133) remains underresearched (Steimel, 2018; Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2021).

Most studies on volunteers assume that voluntary work is amateur and low-status. Thus, this work cannot be professional as volunteers “receive limited training, possess no disciplinary knowledge, and have little power even if their work has significant social consequences” (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 153). This notion is challenged by skills-based volunteers who often, by definition, have more specific education, knowledge, and competencies than anyone else (whether paid or unpaid) in a given nonprofit (Steimel, 2018, p. 134).

A study of skills-based volunteers done by Steimel (2018) challenges four common theoretical conceptions of volunteering as overly simplistic. First, traditionally, research bifurcates work and volunteer activity, generally defining volunteering in terms of its similarities and differences to employment. In the case of skills-based volunteers, it is problematic as this activity often exists in both overlapping spheres, work and not work. For example, volunteers receive opportunities to use and improve their skills that benefit both the nonprofit and their regular workplace (ibid., p. 137-138).

The second misconception is low barriers to volunteer entry and exit. For skills-based volunteers requirements for entry and exit depend on their occupation and for some professions might be quite high in terms of education (for entry) and legal requirements (for exit). For example, legal and medical professionals might have higher risks of being accused of malpractice when quitting their volunteer assignment compared to other occupations (ibid., p. 141). The third misconception is the lack of managerial power/control over volunteers. While nonprofit organizations might lack traditional mechanisms of control typical for paid work, volunteers are often aware of the potential consequences of volunteering for their regular workplace and professional reputation. Therefore, skills-based volunteering is not always perceived as entirely voluntary and can be described as both voluntary and not voluntary (ibid., p. 138).

The final misconception is the altruistic focus of volunteer work. Though altruism undoubtedly is an important reason for volunteering, skills-based volunteers often have other motives. For example, they might be strongly encouraged (and at times coerced) to volunteer by their employers (ibid., p. 141) or volunteering can be a means to develop professional skills (Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021).

Apart from overlapping spheres of Work and Not Work and Voluntary and Not Voluntary, Steimel’s (2018) study argues that skills-based volunteering exists in a space of Professional

and Not Professional. The study participants expressed that they enjoy skills-based volunteering because they feel more confident and competent in the volunteer work they were doing compared with non-skilled volunteering. From the start of their assignments, skills-based volunteers often have a degree of the status and credibility that they were used to in their professions. At the same time, some study volunteers were concerned that working for free would reduce both their individual professional value and the public value of their professions (the examples of a graphic designer and an athletic trainer are given in the study) (Steimel, 2018, p. 139-140).

The research on skills-based volunteering is scarce and mainly focuses on corporate volunteer programs where employees volunteer during their company's time (e.g., Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2021; Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021). The present thesis is focused on individual skills-based volunteers who engage at a nonprofit organization that does not participate in any corporate volunteer programs. However, some parts of the research on corporate volunteer programs appear to be appropriate for the present study as they explain skills donation and acquisition regardless of the type of volunteer involvement (i.e., with or without a dedicated volunteer program).

Accordingly, in their systematic literature review, Dempsey-Brench & Shantz (2021) offer the following definition of skills-based volunteering, which to a certain extent useful for this study: “Skills-based volunteering is a *strategically driven activity* that involves employees *donating job-related skills* and *acquiring or developing skills* through voluntary contributions to an external non-profit organization *that requires certain skill sets*” (ibid., p. 3, emphasis in original).

There are four dimensions in this definition: (1) strategically driven i.e., an activity that serves the firm's corporate social responsibility strategy, (2) not any kind of skills but the ones relevant to the employee's job should be donated, (3) volunteers should cultivate new or improve existing skills, and (4) nonprofits should need the skills that are donated as sometimes companies offer skills that NPOs do not require (ibid., p. 4).

The first and the last elements are not relevant for this study as they look at the relationship between the NPO and their for-profit partner that provides them with volunteers (a model that currently does not exist in the organization I study). However, the second and the third elements are applicable for skills-based volunteers in general and, therefore, explored further.

The majority of studies about skills-based volunteering, show that volunteers tend to give technical competencies (e.g., project management, financial planning, information technology) and gain interpersonal competencies (e.g., communication, leadership, teamwork) (ibid.). Volunteering in an international context fosters the development of cross-cultural skills, global leadership, and an understanding of complex social issues (ibid., p. 10). The number of developed skills and the depth of skills acquisition are usually impacted by the length of volunteering, however, the limit of these benefits may reach the level of diminishing returns as the person spends excessive hours volunteering (Booth, Park & Glomb, 2009, p. 242).

## **2.2. Professionalization of nonprofit organizations**

The professionalization of the nonprofit sector is a phenomenon taking place since the early 1980s and is characterized by nonprofit organizations becoming increasingly similar to for-profit organizations (Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner, 2016, p. 64; Peiffer et al., 2020, p. 359). Marberg, Korzilius, and van Kranenburg (2019, p. 116) define nonprofit professionalization as *“a tendency toward a focus on performance, measurable outcomes, accountability, and the use of private-sector management tools to structure activity, develop strategy, and improve efficiency and effectiveness.”*

### **2.2.1. Occupational professionalism and organizational professionalism**

The terms professionalization and professionalism are criticized for their ambiguity and multidimensionality (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 153). While these concepts are highly connected, they differ as “professionalization emphasizes structure and process and professionalism highlights practice and identity” (ibid., p. 153). Accordingly, professionalization processes include rationalization, bureaucratization, and marketization of nonprofit practices. Rationalization refers to practical rationality, i.e., the use of adequate means for the efficient achievement of ends. Bureaucratization focuses on formal rationality i.e., “the process of formalizing, standardizing, and institutionalizing systems, rules, and documentation requirements to ensure due process and fair outcomes” (McAllum, 2018, p. 539). Marketization can be understood as the adoption of marketized values and logic (e.g., flexibility, ease of exchange, and cost-benefit analyses) in different spheres of life (ibid., p. 539).

At the same time, professionalism might be understood as a type of occupational identity of modern industrialized societies that depends on a particular profession with its norms, rules, and ethical codes (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 155). Accordingly, Evetts (2006, p. 140) refers to these terms as occupational professionalism versus organizational professionalism (i.e., process of professionalization). Professionalization (or organizational professionalism) is sometimes called managerial professionalism (Hwang & Powell, 2009) and managerialism (Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011). Though different scholars approach these terms differently, in the present thesis, I refer to professionalization in the sense of organizational/managerial professionalism and professionalism in the sense of both occupational and organizational professionalism.

### **2.2.2. Professionalization in the nonprofit sector's research**

By analyzing a large body of research from 1990 to 2010, Marberg, Korzilius & van Kranenburg (2019) study how the nonprofit sector's professionalization is reflected in academic research. Consequently, the authors identify a substantial change regarding the increasing adoption of NPOs' vocabulary and terminology associated with managerial professionalism, efficiency, and measurable outcomes, which is seen as one of the main indicators of the professionalization process. Accordingly, the authors find that in the early 1990s the focus of nonprofit research was rather on "establishing purpose, doing good, change". Studies of this time were dedicated to defining and establishing what nonprofit organizations are, ways of studying them, as well as changing relationships between the nonprofit sector and other sectors (*ibid.*, p. 122).

The research of the following decades is pointing to the professionalization of the sector. Thus, a new theme emerged in 1995-1998, starting by addressing the "effectiveness and accountability" of NPOs. The research begins to pay more attention to goal realization, priority setting, evaluation, and professional management practices in NPOs (*ibid.*, p. 123). From 1999-2006, research is characterized by a larger focus on "management and globalization", i.e., organizational efficiency, leadership, finance, and international perspectives (*ibid.*, p. 124). The large focus on nonprofit research during 2007-2009 is "education and becoming more like a business." Articles of this period are dedicated to university education programs in philanthropic and nonprofit studies, and management development in the sector i.e., an increasing number of paid positions, resource dependence, and network links (*ibid.*, p. 125). In 2010, the tendency toward a narrative and practices

adopted from the private sector continues. Researchers more often touch upon the concepts of “strategy and regulation”, in particular, self-regulation and struggle to gain and maintain legitimacy (ibid., p. 126).

### **2.2.3. Causes and effects of professionalization**

According to an extensive literature review by Maier, Meyer, and Steinbereithner (2016, pp. 72-73), the causes of nonprofit professionalization can be divided into (1) exogenous causes (lie in the organization’s environment), (2) endogenous causes (lie within the organization), and (3) those that are situated in the interface between the organization and its environment.

Exogenous causes include civic, economic, and political conditions (e.g., New Public Management, neoliberal reforms, competition with the for-profit sector) and influences of collective and individual actors (e.g., political actors requiring more accountability or corporate donors wishing to establish more business-like relationships). Endogenous causes depend on different organizational qualities such as board characteristics, organizational culture, ideologies, a field of activity, and member- or public orientation. Causes at the interface of the organization and its environment look at interactions between NPOs and other NPOs, as well as government institutions, professional associations, and for-profit companies. These causes are often examined through institutional isomorphism and legitimacy approaches, i.e., NPOs want to become more business-like and professional because of their strive for legitimacy, which leads to isomorphism among NPOs as well as between NPOs and businesses (Maier et al., 2016, pp. 72-73).

Further, Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner (2016) divide studies about the effects of nonprofit professionalization into four groups. First, *effects on organizational performance*. Organizational performance is seen as carrying out the organization’s mission as well as protecting human resources and funds (ibid., p. 75). In particular, research suggests that professionalization may make it more difficult to retain “collective” volunteers (i.e., group-centered, interested in long-term, regular, and unconditional commitments) but suit well “reflexive” volunteers who are more individualistic, interest-centered, prefer short-term and project-based assignment (Vantilborgh et al., 2011, p. 647).

Second, *effects on NPOs’ fulfillment of societal functions*. This group includes impacts on the NPO's service provision, advocacy, and community-building. Volunteers are seen as a particularly important part of community building. Some researchers state that

professionalization may result in a mission drift away from community-building and partially from advocacy toward service delivery (e.g. Keevers et al., 2012) but overall evidence about mission drift is vague (Maier et al., 2016, p. 75). As the professionalization usually leads to employing more paid staff, they tend to perform central tasks in the organization, volunteers are left doing supporting tasks, perceived as those that require less training (ibid., p. 76).

Third, effects on NPOs' advocacy are related to *effects on knowledge, subjectivities, and power*. Accordingly, professionalization generally increases the optimization of the organization's goals fulfillment, while devaluing such qualities as empathy, aesthetics, and religion (e.g. Keevers et al., 2012). Moreover, NPOs tend to adopt neoliberal subjectivities (e.g. 'investors' for donors, 'entrepreneurs' for activists, or 'consumers' for beneficiaries), although some organizations refuse to employ this vocabulary. Regarding power effects on NPOs' governance, the research suggests a general strengthening of the position of elites which manifests itself in recruiting more business-like board members and the rise of business-like philanthropy (Maier et al., 2016, p. 77). Professionalization and more support for volunteers usually result in more participation, however, strict supervision practices weaken volunteer engagement (ibid., p. 78). The final group is *effects on NPOs' legitimacy*. Empirical evidence about the effects of professionalization on NPOs' legitimacy is scarce and controversial, showing both increases and decreases in legitimacy which might be explained by the ability of a particular NPO to meet the expectations of its institutional environment (ibid., p. 78).

#### **2.2.4. Professionalism and volunteerism**

Generally, volunteerism and professionalism are conceptualized as two completely separate systems. Professionalism assumes cerebral work and efficient, outcome-focused behavior, whereas traditional volunteerism (not linked to workplace expertise, i.e. not skills-based) is rather characterized by hands-on, emotionally close, and caring behavior (McAllum, 2018, 539). Thus, it is often argued that, unlike professionalism, volunteerism lacks a control mechanism of the volunteer's performance, criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of particular types of volunteers (e.g. based on their specialist knowledge), and evaluation of performance according to the organizational policies and practices (ibid.).

Therefore, most nonprofit scholars argue that volunteers resist professionalization as it is associated with higher control, internal and external discipline, and limited opportunities to



innovate and achieve emotional closeness (ibid., p. 540). Accordingly, Kreutzer and Jäger (2011) study perceptions of volunteers and paid staff through the lens of dual organizational identity in volunteer-based patient associations. Though all organizational members shared the mission of their organization, their beliefs on how the organizational goals should be reached varied. Thus, the authors identify clear intra-organizational tensions and conflicts of two coexisting dimensions - volunteer identity (with a few exceptions, the views of the majority of studied volunteers) and managerial identity (with a few exceptions, the views of the majority of studied employees) (ibid.). Hence, the studied volunteers enjoyed “creative chaos”, reliance on informal networks, and a lack of formalized division of responsibilities (ibid., p. 646). In contrast, the employees supported specialization of the tasks, structuring of work processes, and formalization of administration routine (ibid., p. 650). Consequently, the emphasizing and privileging of elements of managerial identity over the volunteer identity led to a decrease in volunteers’ motivation, sense of autonomy, and, as a result, their organizational commitment (ibid., p. 654).

McAllum (2018) stresses that volunteers’ reaction to professionalism depends on organizational context and the nature of volunteer work involved. The author studies two organizations with a high reliance on traditional human service volunteers. The first organization promoted children’s health by e.g. running support groups and organizing events. The organization’s volunteers divided volunteerism and professionalism as incompatible social systems and favored volunteerism due to the character of their work. Accordingly, they regarded a public sphere of professionalism as a rather inappropriate system for family and home matters (ibid., p. 557). The second organization provided emergency ambulance services (especially at night and in rural areas), where volunteers worked assisting paid staff. Depending on situational context, volunteers enacted either professionalism and emotional detachment (in situations of emergencies) or volunteerism and compassion (in non-emergency contexts) (ibid., p. 557).

### **2.3. Socially responsible engineering**

Since the middle of the 20th century and especially during the last decades, the engineering profession has been changing. Today, the requirements of an engineer in terms of both knowledge and responsibilities go beyond the technical expertise and basic demands for the safety, health, and welfare of the public (Douglas, Papadopoulos & Boutelle, 2010, p. 7). According to the United States National Academy of Engineering, engineers should “have

strong analytical skills, practical ingenuity, creativity, good communication, business and management skills, leadership, high ethical standards or professionalism, resiliency and flexibility, and a desire for lifelong learning” (Litchfield & Javernick-Will, 2014, p. 3). In addition to the traditional tasks and skills, the profession requires engineers who are trained to work with the large and diverse challenges of the globalized and complex world. It is pointed out that engineers, though they are not blamed for such issues as climate change, improper use of intellectual property, and loss of data privacy, had a role in creating these challenges and have to help to solve them (Douglas et al., 2010, p. 6).

There is no single view of socially responsible engineering but it is rather represented by a range of both micro ethical (e.g. adherence to laws) and macro ethical (e.g. the role of technology in society) issues different across countries and disciplines (Rulifson & Bielefeldt, 2019, p. 940). Thus, there are several closely connected concepts in this new type of engineering. Accordingly, Litchfield and Javernick-Will (2015, p. 394) refer to the combination of engineering and social engagements in sustainable community development, humanitarianism, social justice, and/or peace as *socially engaged engineering*. Douglas et al., (2010), in turn, talk about *citizen engineers*, who are “techno-responsible, environmentally responsible, economically responsible, socially responsible participants in the engineering community” and act as “the connection point between science and society - between pure knowledge and how it is used” (ibid., p. 5).

*Humanitarian engineering* is another related concept referring to “the application of engineering knowledge and skills to communities in need”, especially in developing countries (Leydens & Lucena, 2006, p. 1). The increasing importance of technology makes it more integrated into all aspects of people’s lives around the globe. Moreover, technological innovations that serve humanity have the potential to solve many environmental and humanitarian issues, such as global poverty. Hence, there is a growing demand for engineering skills for communities to meet their needs (Passino, 2009, p. 580).

Passino (2009) argues that professionalism and service are tightly linked and one cannot be called a true professional without serving people. However, while engineers often serve through their paid job, compared to other traditional professions such as medicine and law, there is a lower number of engineers who work pro bono i.e., voluntary, without payment. The author explains it by insufficient exposure to voluntary community service initiatives during engineering education, limited infrastructure to support engineering volunteerism, and

“*perceived* lack of a pervasive voluntary service spirit in the engineering profession” (ibid., p. 578, emphasis in original).

Often, engineers in more developed countries tend to become frustrated solving problems of wealthy and privileged communities as they become increasingly aware of the greater social significance of problems that people in poor and underserved communities face in less developed parts of the globe. Many are willing to donate their knowledge and experience trying to reduce the prosperity disparity in the world (Helgesson, 2006, p. 32). Gradually, there are more organizations around the world allowing people to dedicate time and effort to do voluntary engineering work. Among the most famous are Engineers for a Sustainable World, Engineers for Change, Bridges to Prosperity, and Engineers Without Borders (Litchfield & Javernick-Will, 2015, p. 396).

#### **2.4. Summary**

According to the thesis’s aim to explore how skills-based volunteers perceive their role and increasing professionalization of nonprofit organizations, I reviewed the existing literature on the topics of volunteering and skills-based volunteering as well as the professionalization of NPOs. In order to understand the empirical context of the study better, I also reviewed the literature on socially responsible engineering explaining the implications of the engineering profession in the 21st century. The above section of the thesis described key dimensions of volunteering and motivational functions served by volunteerism. It further presented definitions of skills-based volunteering, challenged traditional notions of volunteering applied to skills-based volunteering, and addressed the types of skills donated and acquired through such volunteering. Subsequently, the review provided a definition of nonprofit professionalization, discussed terms professionalization and professionalism, and described causes and effects of nonprofit professionalization. Moreover, the review gave an overview of how NPOs’ professionalization was reflected in academic research from 1990 to 2010. It also addressed conceptualizing of volunteerism and professionalism as separate systems and the widespread assumption that volunteers do not want to be professionals. The sub-section on socially responsible engineering discussed various requirements of the engineering professional beyond the technical expertise and presented closely connected concepts of socially engaged engineering, citizen engineers, and humanitarian engineering. It further touched upon engineers’ engagement in volunteering.

### 3. Theoretical framework

*To analyze how skills-based volunteers react to NPOs' professionalization and how they navigate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism, this thesis employs the boundary work framework. The following section describes boundary theory which is later used for supporting the analysis of the findings of the study and helping interpreting the results.*

---

#### 3.1. Boundary work

Studying boundary work allows social scientists to shed light on how individual members of society create, simplify, order, and reflect upon their own lives (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 564; Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000, p. 474). The concept of boundary work is defined by Nippert-Eng (1996, p. 563) as “*the practices that concretize and give meaning to mental frameworks by placing, maintaining, and challenging cultural categories.*” The author describes boundary work with the example of cultural categories (other authors e.g. Ashforth et al. (2000) call them social domains) of “work” and “home”. For every individual depending on their current life circumstances these categories/domains would be classified differently, and, therefore, each individual would negotiate boundaries (e.g., physical, temporal, mental, and behavioral) between these categories in varied ways. There is a multitude of variations of what is understood by each cultural category and the relationship between the categories. The process of creating, maintaining, and modifying cultural categories is constant, never-ending, and changing over time. Therefore, there are two forms necessary for placing and maintaining boundaries: boundary placement work (which separates realms) and boundary transition work (which makes it possible to mentally move back and forth through this placed divide) (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 569).

Two realms (e.g. “work” and “home”) are conceptualized as arrayed on a continuum ranging from *integration* to *segmentation*. Two ends of the continuum are extremes of, accordingly, full integration where there is no difference between the two categories, and full separation, when no physical or mental overlap of categories is experienced, the two seen as completely separate and mutually exclusive. Usually, people are neither extreme integrators nor extreme segmentators but rather combine the two views by actively or passively making countless everyday decisions and creating personal configurations (ibid., p. 568). The degree to which

one bounded realm influences another bounded realm is called *boundary permeability*. Permeable (thin/weak) boundaries encourage the integration of one realm into another and impermeable (thick/strong) boundaries, on contrary, lead to segmentation (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006, p. 1320).

Nippert-Eng (1996, p. 569) states that boundary work between work and non-work depends on how each individual thinks about their identities influenced by different social roles, as well as places, times, and groups of people. Later, Kreiner et al. (2006) study boundary dynamics between different identities, examining how complex identity demands are socially constructed and (re)negotiated. The authors look at individual identities as well as organizational identities i.e., ideas about “who we are as an organization” that differ depending on the individual’s position and history at the organization (ibid., p. 1317). First, they distinguish two types of boundary location: around a domain (*external boundary*) and within a domain (*internal boundary*). In the example of the work-home boundary, outside the “home” domain would be an external boundary, while different aspects of the home such as “parenting” or “gardening” would be internal boundaries (ibid., p. 1319). Then, the authors characterize two types of boundary interfaces: *intra-identity* (boundaries within an identity are negotiated and boundary dynamics refer to proportions of identity aspects) and *inter-identity* (boundaries between individual and organizational identities are negotiated and boundary dynamics refer to the overlap of identity aspects) (ibid., p. 1324).

Kreiner et al. (2006) further introduce constructs of *intrusion*, *distance*, and *balance*. These boundary dynamics can occur within individual identity, within organizational identity, or between individual and organizational identity. *Intrusion* is a conflictual boundary dynamic that takes place when a certain boundary is perceived as too permeable i.e., aspects of one realm spill over into other realms. Accordingly, when one aspect of individual/organizational identity is too big or when the overlap between individual and organization identities is too vast, the boundaries (within and between identities, respectively) will be unstable and identity change is likely to happen (ibid., p. 1328). *Distance* is also a conflictual boundary dynamic. However, contrary to intrusion, distance is not permissible enough or is too segmented. Within-identity distance on both individual and organizational levels means that a certain aspect of identity is perceived to be too far away than the individual wishes for. Hence, when one aspect of identity or the overlap between identities is perceived as insufficient, the boundaries will be unstable and identity change is likely to occur (ibid., p. 1330). *Balance* is a

non-conflictual boundary dynamic but a complementary one. It embraces the ambivalence of different aspects of identities and leads to more stable boundaries with less likely identity change. Optimal balance is described as “the state of being neither too distinct/independent nor too inclusive/dependent in relation to a particular social identity” (ibid., p. 1331).

Studying how individuals engage in daily role transitions involving work, home, and other social domains, Ashforth et al. (2000) apart from *permeability*, look at *boundary flexibility* and *role identity contrast*. Permeability is the extent to which a role allows the individual to be physically in one role’s domain but psychologically or behaviorally in another one. Flexibility refers to an extent of control the individual has over when and where a role is enacted (ibid., 474). Role identity contrast means an extent to which central and peripheral qualities are different between a pair of identities. Central features are the ones that define the identity more, therefore, they are more important. If the contrast is high, the magnitude of transition from one role to another (and the potential difficulty of this transition) will be also high, and vice versa (ibid., p. 475). Hence, high role contrast influences boundary flexibility and permeability negatively (ibid., p. 476).

Segmentation and integration are both associated with benefits and costs that influence the creation, maintenance, and transitions through boundaries. These costs and benefits are evaluated based on the assumption that both integrators and segmentators strive to minimize the difficulty of transitions between roles and the frequency of undesired role interruptions (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 473). Segmentation benefits creating and maintaining boundaries and enables one to see a clear difference between roles (i.e., reduces *blurring of roles*) and clear nature of transition (i.e., reduces *boundary-blurring*). However, segmentation complicates *boundary-crossing* i.e., an activity where the individual exits one role (psychologically and, when relevant, physically) and enters another role by overcoming boundaries (ibid., p. 477). Integration ease transitioning between roles as integrated roles tend to have lower contrast as well as more flexible and permeable boundaries. On the other hand, integration increases undesired interruptions and causes boundary-blurring and, therefore, often leads to confusion regarding which role identity to enact (ibid., p. 481). Consequently, the benefit of segmentation is the cost of integration and vice versa, which results in an ongoing tension between segmentation and integration and requires ongoing boundary and transition work (ibid., p. 482).

Ashforth et al. (2000) distinguish three individual and contextual factors that are likely to influence boundary creation, maintenance and crossing. The first factor is *role identification*, i.e., to what extent a person defines themselves with the role they occupy and internalize this role identity as an extension of oneself. The more one identifies with a role, the more likely it will be integrated among other roles in this person's life (ibid., p. 483). The second factor is *situational strength* or context when everyone involved understands what appropriate and inappropriate behaviours are. Therefore, the stronger the context, the weaker the effect of individual differences on creating, maintaining, and crossing boundaries (ibid., p. 484). The third factor is the *culture* of the society individuals come from. Accordingly, people who share values of collectivist, feminine, low uncertainty avoidance, and/or low power distance cultures<sup>4</sup> will tend to integrate roles. While individuals who bear values of individualistic, masculine, high uncertainty avoidance, and/or high power distance cultures will tend to segment roles (ibid., p. 485).

Cohen, Duberley, and Musson (2009) argue that although segmentation and integration represent opposite ends of Nippert-Eng's (1996) continuum, in terms of a sense of control and personal agency, they are experienced similarly. Thus, a person might choose to integrate or to segment and it will mean different implications for their identity. Yet, provided that this person chooses for themselves, any strategy is likely to give them a sense of orderliness. Accordingly, the authors distinguish boundary dynamics between those that maintain order, (when the level of control is experienced as high) and those that experience as disorder (when the level of control is experienced as low) (Cohen et al., 2009).

While a large body of boundary research is dedicated to studying work-family dynamics, very little attention is paid to additional non-family life domains in relation to work and family. In particular, how the volunteer role (non-work and non-family) complicates boundary dynamics and role management decisions (Cruz & Meisenbach, 2018, p. 183). Accordingly, Cruz and Meisenbach (2018) study how volunteers manage interfaces of three role boundaries: work role – volunteer role, relational<sup>5</sup> role – volunteer role, and work role – relational role.

---

<sup>4</sup> According to the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory.

<sup>5</sup> In previous work-family research, only marital relationships were considered as the family role. Here, the term *relational role* included parent-child, married, divorced, dating, and other close relationships (Cruz & Meisenbach, 2018, p. 188).

Apart from role segmenting (in this study, the most common practice to manage the volunteer role in connection to both work and relationship) and role integrating, the authors identify the term *role collapsing*, i.e., a complete overlapping of roles. Unlike integration which is experienced as a quick boundary closing back and forth, collapsing is one merged role enacted in the same space and time. While sometimes role collapsing occurred across all three roles, it was more prevalent with volunteer-relational and volunteer-work interfaces than work-relational interfaces. Hence, boundaries collapsed when the participants simultaneously enacted at least two roles (e.g., over half of the participants volunteered with relational others) or roles were fused because they were rooted in a common value (ibid., p. 194). Role value fusion or value-oriented boundary collapsing took place when e.g., individuals were doing paid work for social justice-focused organizations while volunteering for the same cause or when they used work-related knowledge in their volunteering project (ibid., p. 196).

A study by Van Bochove et al. (2018) draws upon earlier studies from the sociology of professions field that sought to understand interprofessional relationships. Thus, the study adopts a boundary work approach to investigate relationships between volunteers and professionals (paid staff). The study is done in the context of social service organizations in the areas of long-term care and social work. The finding of the study show that paid professionals generally perform demarcation work by highlighting differences between them and volunteers i.e., setting and maintaining boundaries. Accordingly, three markers are used to underline differences between the two groups: (1) knowledge and skills (e.g. volunteers are not allowed to perform nursing tasks, only wellbeing ones), (2) status and authority (e.g., only paid staff is seen as judges in conflict cases), and (3) predictability and reliability (e.g., employees' complaints that volunteers do not carry their tasks seriously enough and cannot be counted on) (ibid.). However, apart from demarcation work, *welcoming work* was performed in cases when paid staff perceived that volunteers have necessary (similar to theirs or additional) competencies and were trustworthy. Hence, in every case, the same three boundary markers were used to either welcome or exclude volunteers from the professional domain. In cases when volunteers are welcomed to have more responsibilities and authority, the role of paid employees redefines or upgrades to focus on more specialized tasks or coordination (ibid., p. 407).



## 4. Methodology

*The following section presents and describes the methodological choices for this study. The section opens with a description of the empirical context of this study, i.e., the nonprofit organization Engineers Without Borders Sweden. It follows with the presentation of the research design, data selection and collection, data analysis, as well as ethical and data protection considerations for the study. Methodological limitations are addressed throughout the section.*

---

### 4.1. Empirical context: Engineers Without Borders Sweden

There are over 60 nonprofit organizations in the world that have the name Engineers Without Borders. All the organizations are independent, separate from each other, and operate in different ways, however, they are united by using engineering for global development work (McClements, 2020). Most EWB-affiliated organizations share the same vision: “a world where all people have access to basic resources and knowledge to meet their self-identified engineering and economic development needs” (Helgesson, 2006, p.32).

Engineers Without Borders Sweden (EWB-SWE) works to address social and developmental challenges through humanitarian engineering, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The work of the organization is guided by four values: curiosity, equality, inclusivity, and sustainability. EWB-SWE was founded 15 years ago in Gothenburg and from a small student organization, it has steadily grown and is continually growing. Today the organization has nearly a thousand members, almost 400 active volunteers, and 11 student and professional groups across Sweden (Engineers Without Borders, 2022a, p. 30). It also implements projects in ten countries in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South America in five areas of expertise: (1) construction, (2) energy, and waste management, (3) digitalization in education, (4) sustainable food production and processing, and (5) water, sanitation, and hygiene (ibid., p. 5). All international projects are carried out in collaboration with locally-established partner organizations. The projects mostly include knowledge-sharing and in some cases financial support (Engineers Without Borders, 2022b). Unlike some other “without borders” nonprofit organizations (with which EWBs are not affiliated in any way), such as Doctors Without Borders (2022) or Reporters Without Borders (2022), EWB-SWE operates only in safe and conflict-free areas and does not do advocacy work (Engineers Without Borders, 2022b).

In Sweden, the organization works with the projects Inspire Youth (aiming to encourage underprivileged children and teenagers to pursue higher education, in particular in STEM subjects), Engineer to Engineer (focusing on empowering social and economic integration and inclusion of newly arrived foreign engineers and scientists), and the Reflective Engineer (organizing seminars and workshops exploring the role engineers play for a sustainable future). Moreover, EWB-SWE has a daughter organization, a social company Openhack, that organizes physical and virtual hackathons facilitating innovation through digital solutions to societal challenges (Engineers Without Borders, 2022b).

According to the organization's annual report, in 2020 EWB-SWE directly served 35 000 people (Engineers Without Borders, 2021, p. 8). Yet the organization has only six employees, half of whom are employed part-time. Everyone else is a volunteer, from members and leaders of local groups to heads of the five areas of expertise listed above. It is different from e.g., Doctors Without Borders, where doctors working abroad receive a salary (approx. 14 000 SEK/month), 25 vacation days per year, and the experience counted towards their pension (Läkare utan gränser, 2022). Moreover, while it is generally common for boards of directors in nonprofit organizations to be volunteers, they are usually only responsible for governance, for setting the organization's strategy and policies. However, in addition to these responsibilities, each board member of EWB-SWE also has operational responsibilities and a leading role in the organization (e.g. Head of Inspire Youth or Head of Engineer to Engineer) (Engineers Without Borders, 2022b).

Volunteers who are operating the organization have professional (mostly, engineering) competencies, perform professional tasks and assignments, and hold professional roles. Approximately, 60 percent of these volunteers are young professionals and students and 40 percent are established professionals and seniors (Engineers Without Borders, 2021, p. 5). To realize its mission "through humanitarian engineering, we engage, inspire and unite people to build sustainable communities", EWB-SWE receives funding from corporations (65 percent), foundations (30 percent), and individuals (5 percent) (Engineers Without Borders Sweden, 2022a, p. 28). The main partner of the EWB-SWE is the engineering company Sandvik, with further partners including, among others, Bengt Dahlgren, Vattenfall, and HeidelbergCement. EWB-SWE is reviewed by the Swedish Fundraising Control (90-konto), which monitors that organizations use at least 75 percent of the income for the intended purpose. EWB-SWE currently directs approximately 81 percent of raised funds towards humanitarian engineering

activities. The estimated value of the volunteer work carried out at the organization is 15,7 million Swedish kronas (*ibid.*, p. 28). The organization has small offices in Gothenburg, Falun, and Stockholm. However, the majority of work by staff and volunteers is performed remotely (Engineers Without Borders Sweden, 2022b).

## **4.2. Research design**

### **4.2.1. Ethnographic case study**

To explore how skills-based volunteers perceive their roles and increasing professionalization of NPOs and answer the research questions “How do skills-based volunteers react to the rise of NPOs’ professionalization?” and “How do skills-based volunteers navigate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism?”, I have chosen to conduct a qualitative ethnographic single case study of skills-based volunteers at Engineers Without Borders Sweden.

The research questions of this thesis could be best answered by using qualitative research methods. Qualitative inquiry techniques are suitable for investigating the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of individuals or groups (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 6). Qualitative case studies are particularly suited for answering ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions as they allow for in-depth exploration of a certain real-life phenomenon within a specific context, compared to quantitative methods which are focused on measuring a broad spectrum of examples (Stewart, 2014, p. 5). A case study is a well-established approach and, to a certain extent, most qualitative research could be described as a case study (*ibid.*, p. 10).

Case studies produce practical context-dependent knowledge, which is vital and generally more valuable for social science than theoretical context-independent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 221). The objective of the qualitative research is the interpretation of the events and not generalizing the findings (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 8). Yet while there is no possibility for statistical generalization with qualitative research based on a single case, case studies are generalizable to the extent that they can “provide a clear illustration of the generalizability of a theoretical construct” (Stewart, 2014, p. 3), therefore, presenting “the force of example” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 228). Moreover, carefully selected case studies provide possibilities for analytic generalization (Yin, 2010) and theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Organizational ethnography is seen by many scholars as more than a method but rather a research tradition or a methodological approach (Watson, 2011; Gaggiotti, Kostera & Krzyworzeka, 2017; Beaton, 2021). Accordingly, Van Maanen (2011, p. 218) sees organizational ethnography as both a methodological approach to and an analytic perspective on organizational research, involving fieldwork, headwork, and textwork.

Ethnographic studies require the immersion of a researcher in the field, meaning a participant observation and first-hand involvement in the lives of research participants (Dumont, 2022). However, compared to traditional ethnography in the field of cultural anthropology, organizational ethnography is characterized by less intense involvement and immersion. Thus, direct observation and interviews dominate over full participant observation (Ciuk, Koning & Kostera, 2018, p. 3).

According to a framework developed by Dumont (2022), there are four methodological requirements organizational ethnographers have to follow to achieve immersion in the field. First, involvement in a studied organization by establishing a social role and participating in the everyday life of the organization enables ethnographers to legitimize their presence and build trusting relationships with research participants. It, in turn, provides access to in-depth information necessary for understanding the phenomenon under study. Second, embracing research participants' ways of thinking helps to access understandings of the common beliefs of the studied group. Third, it is important to spend an extensive amount of time studying the phenomenon as it not only allows to establish trusting relationships with participants but also to triangulate and empirically verify data collected during interviews. Finally, achieving immersion requires performing research across multiple field sites. It means that ethnographers should be present at multiple events following research participants and maintaining close ties with them not only through time but also through space (Dumont, 2022).

Van Maanen (2006, p. 18) points out that “ethnography maintains an almost obsessive focus on the “empirical”. This focus enables in-depth investigations of a particular phenomenon in specific social settings, enabling access to tacit knowledge and flexibility of the research process (Côté-Boileau et al., 2020, p. 10). Ethnographic case study research is inherently characterized by elements of subjectivity due to the researcher's closeness to study participants. While these elements can be sources of bias, as long as they are recognized and examined, they can be a valuable source of knowledge (Kisfalvi, 2006, p. 118). Moreover,

reflexivity and the active role of the researcher may enhance the credibility of the research design (Côté-Boileau et al., 2020, p. 10).

Methodological limitations of organizational ethnographic case studies include difficulties (in terms of time and energy) in gaining access and establishing trustful relationships with informants and additional ethical intricacies when seeking to give voice to certain informants and at the same time protect their privacy. The method is also characterized and limited by an ambiguity of the role of researchers as either “insiders or outsiders” to the organizations they study and a lack of methodological benchmarks that would define an organizational ethnographic case study (ibid., p. 11).

#### **4.2.2. Participatory observation**

The present case study was conducted within an ethnographic framework. Four consecutive months prior to starting this research (since September 2021) and all the time dedicated to writing this thesis, I was involved in the daily operations of Engineers Without Borders Sweden. During the first four months, I did a full-time internship in the area of member management and engagement. In January 2022, I became a part-time employee (20 percent workload which corresponds to 8 hours/week) within the same area. My responsibilities, among others, included managing databases of both active and supportive members of the organization (i.e., those who volunteer in addition to paying a membership fee and those who pay a yearly fee but do not volunteer). I was also supporting local activities of students and professional groups across Sweden and assisting in organizing national events for the whole organization such as Member Days (October 30th-31st, 2021) and the Annual Meeting (May 7th-8th, 2022). During my time at the organization, I also attended the monthly meetings of the board (overall, ten meetings, 1.5 hours each) and a two-day meeting in Gothenburg (April 2nd-3rd, 2022), where the organization’s staff and the board discussed the strategic direction of EWB-SWE for the next five years. In addition, I joined a meeting in Stockholm (June 29th, 2022) with EWB-SWE staff and the main corporate partner Sandvik, where the partnership was evaluated and future collaboration plans discussed.

As can be seen from the description above, being involved in the organization for almost a year, there were only a few instances where I interacted with the organization’s staff and volunteers in offline (physical) settings. As most of communication, collaboration, and

observation took place online, it involved certain challenges and considerations for doing organizational ethnography in online settings (Akemu & Abdelnour, 2020).

Generally, organizational settings are rather fragmented and organizational cultures are less immersive in comparison to larger cultural contexts (Ciuk, Koning & Kostera, 2018, p. 3). Organizations that operate almost exclusively online are even more fragmented as encounters between individuals are digitally mediated and often hidden from ocular observation. Hence, studying such organization is associated with limitations concerning demonstrating authenticity and representing the diversity of voices in organizations (Akemu & Abdelnour, 2020).

These limitations can be potentially overcome by obtaining longitudinal records of informants' digital interactions (e.g., email log) and being co-present with informants in real time (e.g., web conferences). However, collecting and analyzing a large body of data would imply considerable amounts of time and additional ethical issues regarding access and privacy (ibid., p. 314). Hence, taking into account the temporal limitations of the thesis course and, therefore, scope of this study, I could observe only a small fraction of informants' interactions. I did not work closely with the majority of the study participants but for the most part, my interactions involved other employees, board members, and leaders of local groups. During the time I was involved in the coordination of local groups (April-June, 2022), they almost entirely consisted of students (i.e., were not included in the unit of this study).

Throughout my time in the organization, I have taken notes, yet they are scarce and insufficient to explore the research questions. While the ethnographic approach and immersion in the field increased my understanding of the research topic and enhanced the study overall, participatory observation rather compliments the study and is not the main method the thesis is building on. My reflections on being a part-time employee are included in the paper's findings, however, the primary collection method of the study is semi-structured interviews, the "mainstay of so much social science research" (Watson, 2011, p. 211).

#### **4.2.3. Interview data selection**

The unit of this ethnographic case study is skills-based volunteers at Engineers Without Borders Sweden. The majority of EWB-SWE volunteers can be divided into three subsets:

engineering students, working engineers, and retired engineers. In accordance with the study's aim and its research questions, the two later subsets were suitable to be interviewed. I decided not to include engineering students in the scope of this study because, unlike working and retired participants, their occupational skills, as well as their experiences in professional life, are generally limited. However, some of the study participants have joined the organization while they were studying at universities and currently, after graduation, they continue being volunteers combining it with full-time jobs.

The sampling of participants was non-probability but criterion-based and purposive as I was looking for EWB-SWE non-student volunteers with some history at the organization. I sought to avoid interviewing people who were new to the organization because there was a risk they could not reflect on its professionalization and provide enough insights about their roles as volunteers. One of the sampling considerations of the ethnographic case study inquiry is that "informants have to be chosen among the most competent agents to increase the researcher's chances of accessing valuable, rare information" (Visconti, 2010, p. 31).

The reason for choosing a purposive sampling strategy is the assumption grounded on the prior theoretical studies of the research topic that "certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different, or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured" (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). Further, I strived for a balance when it comes to characteristics of age and gender, as well as the participants' involvement in different operations of the organization. These additions of inclusion and exclusion parameters increased sample homogeneity (*ibid.*, p. 26). According to the organization's annual report 2020, EWB-SWE has 370 volunteers (also called active members), 40 percent of which (i.e., 148 people) are established engineers (the rest 60 percent are students) (Engineers Without Borders Sweden, 2021, p. 5). Thus, the sample size of 14 informants that were interviewed for this study corresponds to approximately nine percent of all working and retired volunteers<sup>6</sup>.

I selected the first study participants by asking the secretary-general and the head of international projects at EWB-SWE to recommend suitable active skills-based volunteers. They responded with a list of eleven people. I contacted these people and seven agreed to be interviewed. The rest of the participants were selected using the snowball sampling technique, i.e., at the end of each interview, I asked informants to recommend other

---

<sup>6</sup> However, there are no statistics on the length of volunteers' involvement in the organization.

volunteers I could talk to. Usually, the interviewees could suggest one to three other volunteers by either providing their email addresses or only names (then, I searched for emails in the member database that I administrated as a part of my work at the organization). Purposive sampling and snowball sampling are both common and suitable techniques in ethnographic research (Dutta, 2014, p. 6).

As I stated above, while recruiting study participants I aimed for a gender balance within the sample as the gender distribution between the organization's volunteers is 50/50 (Engineers Without Borders Sweden, 2021, p. 5). Yet, though I contacted eleven women, only three of them took part in the study. Seven of the female volunteers I contacted did not respond to my email request to interview them, whereas one rejected the request stating she is not interested in participating, and one agreed to participate, however, long after the data collection phase of the study. The lack of female informants in this study can be explained by the phenomenon of self-selection (also known as nonresponse) bias. Self-selection bias means that individuals who consent to participate in interviews might be different "in a systematic and relevant way" from those who do not (Robinson, 2014, p. 35; Rönkä et al., 2014, p. 198). I do not have information to evaluate the reasons for non-participants who did not respond to my request. It could be anything from lack of time, to lack of interest, to any other reasons that kept them from responding. However, although overall the study sample is coherent with the research aim and questions, taking into account self-selection bias, any generalization from the study should be made cautiously (Robinson, 2014, p. 38).

#### **4.2.4. Interview data collection**

The primary data collection method of this thesis was individual semi-structured interviews. Interviews are defined as "verbal exchanges initiated by the interviewer in order to obtain relevant information, opinions or beliefs from the interviewee for research purposes" (Welch & Piekkari, 2006, p. 418). The main advantages of qualitative interviews are "the ability to capture rich detail and the flexibility to customize procedures and topics as needed to adapt to the background of the interviewees" (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 244). The semi-structured interview method is suitable for studying people's perceptions and opinions as the firmness of its structure is flexible and versatile depending on the research purpose and questions. Moreover, the method enables dialogue and reciprocity between the interviewee and the interviewer during the interview as well as allows the interviewer to improvise, changing the order of questions, and adding follow-up questions (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2955).



Overall, I have contacted 23 people and, consequently, interviewed 14 of them. All potential study participants were contacted by email. I sent an email from my EWB-SWE email address, thus indicating that I am a part of the organization. In the email (see Appendix I), I described the aim of the thesis and requested one hour of their time. I also explained that I will have to record the conversation, however, their participation will be anonymous and that personal data will be handled according to the GDPR guidelines of my university (including a link to the guidelines document available online).

I carried out semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions with current and former EWB-SWE volunteers who perform(ed) skills-based assignments at the organization. During the interviews, I asked the study participants to provide answers in their own words and raise additional points that are in their opinions important. To start a discussion with each informant, I prepared an interview guide (see Appendix II). The interview guide was semi-structured which allowed me to develop rapport with the study participants and ask more specific further questions to each interviewee depending on their responses to pre-constructed questions (Turner, 2010, p. 755). The guide was semi-structured around two broad themes: (1) professionalization of the organization volunteers are engaged in and (2) differences and similarities of volunteering and their regular job(s). The guide contained four questions about synergies between the informant's regular work and volunteering that were relevant only for working volunteers but not retired ones, therefore, I asked them only to the first category of interviewees. Appendix II presents the actual interview questions asked to the informants which makes it possible for other researchers to assess, test, and develop the guide further (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2962).

I have conducted fourteen individual interviews (see Figure 1 for an overview). While each interview lasted one hour, the recorded part when the participants answered the questions of the interview guide ranged from 24 to 62 minutes (45 minutes on average). The difference in interview lengths was dependent on my prior relationship with some informants in my capacity as an employee at the organization. Accordingly, in the case of several informants, I was more familiar with their histories at the organization and their views on the professionalization of EWB-SWE before the interviews took place and, consequently, those interviews became shorter. The length was also dependent on the social and power dynamics of my role at the organization and prior encounters with a few study participants. In addition, it was dependent on rapport and personality traits of interviewees such as talkativeness.

As study participants live and work in different places across Sweden and usually volunteer remotely, all interviews were conducted online via a video communication platform Zoom. Online interviews as a qualitative data collection method are associated with opportunities and challenges. Accordingly, the online mode of interviewing usually reduces time and cost investments for both the participant and the researcher, providing a convenient space for both parties to meet without travel (Engward et al., 2022, p. 1). Also, online held interviews tend to be shorter and more focused compared to those held face-to-face. While this can be efficient, the interviewer should be careful not to neglect to establish and maintain rapport with the interviewee. In particular, by paying extra attention to the introduction and ending parts of the interview (ibid., p. 6). Online settings give parties more control over self-representation and environment (in particular, by blurred, virtual, or non-virtual camera background on video communication platforms) (Zadkowska et al., 2022, p. 2). The lack of peripheral information might limit the interviewer's assumptions, influencing their behavior and the types of questions asked, while more staged self-presentation of the participants might result in additional research biases (Engward et al., 2022, p. 3).

Though all the study participants had Swedish as their native language, the interviews were conducted in English. This methodological choice has its advantages and disadvantages. The shortcomings of this decision are the following. First, using the native language of interviewees is regarded to produce more authentic and nuanced answers as interviewees are generally more open and relaxed, communicating in their native language (Welch & Piekkari, 2006, p. 428). The interviewee's native language usage is also more strongly associated with establishing rapport and a sense of connection between the interviewer and interviewee (ibid., p. 430). Moreover, I suspect that by offering interviews in Swedish, I could recruit more study participants. Accordingly, one person I invited to be interviewed replied that they are not interested in it. Much later, encountering this person during an event at the organization, I realized that they are not quite comfortable speaking English. Thus, my assumption is if I proposed an interview in Swedish, this person might have been willing to participate in the study.

That said, the logic and arguments for choosing English included the following. First, English is the official language of verbal and written communication at the studied organization. Second, though I would be able to conduct interviews in Swedish, my command of English is noticeably better. Thus, choosing Swedish would require additional time and accuracy

challenges while transcribing, translating (as the reporting language was English), and analyzing the data (i.e., having a two-stage process, analyzing the transcripts both in their original language as well as in translation) (ibid., p. 427). Third, as both the interviewees and the interviewer had English as their foreign language and both parties spoke the language fluently, it allowed having a more equal power dynamic. If the interviewee spoke their native language, there could be a risk of them “taking over” the interview causing me to feel a loss of control over the interview. Consequently, it could reduce my ability to ask follow-up questions (ibid., p. 431).

All conversations were audio-recorded and later fully transcribed near-verbatim (filler words that did not alter meaning were omitted), generating 208 pages of text (Times New Roman, 12 pt font with 1.5 spacing). Initial raw interview transcription was done using the software Transkriptor. Further, I read each interview text carefully (simultaneously listening to the corresponding recording) to identify and correct transcription errors in order to ensure the accuracy of the data.

<b>Informants</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Projects within EWB-SWE</b>	<b>Length of EWB-SWE involvement</b>	<b>Gender (M - male, F- female)</b>	<b>Interview duration</b>
Informant 1	Retired	International projects	≈ 6 years	M	44 min
Informant 2	Employed	International projects	≈ 8 years	F	48 min
Informant 3	Employed	International projects	≈ 5 years	M	47 min
Informant 4	Retired	Domestic projects	≈ 8 years	M	24 min
Informant 5	Employed	International projects	≈ 5 years	F	62 min
Informant 6	Retired	International projects	≈ 9 years	M	42 min
Informant 7	Employed	International and domestic projects	≈ 3 years	M	42 min
Informant 8	Employed	International projects	≈ 4 years	M	43 min
Informant 9	Retired	Domestic projects	≈ 4 years	M	40 min
Informant 10	Retired	International projects	≈ 4 years	M	48 min

Informant 11	Employed	Domestic projects	≈ 8 years	M	32 min
Informant 12	Employed	International projects	≈ 7 years	F	60 min
Informant 13	Employed	International projects	≈ 5 years	M	50 min
Informant 14	Employed	International projects	≈ 8 years	M	53 min

Figure 1. Interviews: List of anonymized interviewees

#### 4.2.5. Thematic data analysis

To analyze data collected from the interviews, I used thematic analysis, which is seen by some researchers as a foundation method for qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78) and focuses on identifying, organizing, and interpreting themes in textual data (King & Brooks, 2018, p. 2). Themes are defined as “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question” (ibid., p. 2). Thematic analysis was suitable for the present study because it allowed me to examine the extensive and detailed data set produced by the interviews, and, further, identify and highlight the overall themes and subthemes that emerged during the study. It was done to explore and, later, communicate to a wider audience how skills-based volunteers perceive their roles and the increased professionalization of NPOs (ibid., p. 3).

King and Brooks (2018, p. 2) underline that thematic analysis is not a single method but rather includes many – though often quite similar – forms and styles. Accordingly, this study adopted and followed the six-phase procedural guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Yet, these guidelines are not strict rules and required flexibility taking into account the study’s dataset and the research questions. Moreover, analysis is not a linear but rather a recursive process and requires time to think and reflect i.e., I moved back and forth through the phases instead of from one phase to another (ibid., p. 86).

The first phase of my analysis was *becoming familiar with the data* (ibid., p. 87). I entered this phase with some prior knowledge of interview data and some initial analytic thought as I was the one collecting the data. Later during this period, I transcribed the interviews and then combined them into one document on Google Docs. Further, I read the document one time

while listening to original audio recordings and then once again while making notes about emerging patterns in the text.

The second phase was *generating initial codes* (ibid., p. 88). Unlike themes that refer to broader units of analysis and a further outcome of coding (Saldaña, 2009, p. 13), codes are narrow features or labels that seem interesting to the researcher. Therefore, the objective of coding is to label and group the data and not to identify themes (King & Brooks, 2018, p. 3). During the initial coding stage, I adopted a hybrid coding approach. That is to say, a combination of deductive approach (using some of a priori codes that were driven by previous literature and compiled before analysis) with the inductive coding approach (when themes were developed from the data). Hence, I started with some a priori codes e.g., “professionalization” (and further “professionalization” > “bureaucratization”, “professionalization” > “level of expertise”, etc.) and added new codes based on the data e.g., “students” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 47).

The a priori codes were guided by previous research. In particular, codes for the nonprofit professionalization processes such as “rationalization”, “bureaucratization”, and “marketization” were based on the definitions of these practices provided by McAllum (2018, p. 539) while the code of occupational professionalism (labeled by “level of expertise”) was adopted from Ganesh and McAllum (2012, p. 155). However, I did not use any preexisting codebooks or code sets, as none of the previous literature I studied provided such. Moreover, as the present study is of exploratory nature and investigates research questions that have not previously been studied in-depth, a sole focus on predefined coding frames would not be suitable (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 8). Therefore, this study primarily adopts inductive-oriented and data-driven coding. In other words, the majority of codes were generated by me, based on the data collected during the interviews.

The coding was done manually using the comment tool on Google Docs. Accordingly, while carefully reading the compiled text of all the interviews, I highlighted relevant data extracts and commented on them with appropriate short labels. Compared to computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), manual coding has its advantages and concerns. On the one hand, the CAQDAS application has the potential to improve the coherence of actions undertaken by the researcher and increase transparency throughout the analysis. Moreover, CAQDAS eases working with large sets of data and improves data protection (Niedbalski & Słezak, 2022, p. 1116). On the other hand, the CAQDAS

application is associated with concerns about the researcher's disengagement with the process of analysis, the sense of "absolution of responsibility" for the tasks of coding, and risks of creating too many categories (ibid., p. 1117). Further, it was pointed out that CAQDAS use does not imply an automatic improvement of research quality and, while sometimes it adds legitimacy and credibility, CAQDAS is only organizational support for a method. Thus, CAQDAS might be harmful to novice researchers as they might excessively rely on software whereas lacking sufficient knowledge of the used methodology (MacMillan & Koenig, 2004, p. 180). In addition, while eventually, the CAQDAS application tends to save the researcher's time, it is time-consuming to become familiar with the software and learn its functionalities, and ways of implementation (Niedbalski & Słęzak, 2022, p. 1119).

After initially coding and collating all the interview transcripts, I moved to the third phase, *searching for themes*. During this phase, I began to rank and categorize different codes into potential overarching themes and sub-themes within them (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). Thus, I created separate documents with preliminary names of themes and added their relevant interview quotes from the joined document. The fourth phase was to *review themes* on two levels. First, by re-reading all the collated interview extracts for each theme, I checked whether the chosen extracts fit their respective candidate themes and whether they form a coherent pattern. Second, by reviewing the entire data set, I looked at how individual themes fit the data set (ibid., p. 91).

The fifth phase was *defining and naming themes*. This phase involved "defining and refining" themes (ibid., p. 92) i.e., reviewing each theme separately and in relation to each other in order to find clear definitions and names of the themes as well as organize them in a coherent narrative with regard to the research questions. The final phase was *producing the report*, a written analysis of the study's data, providing sufficient evidence of the themes within the data, and making arguments in relation to the research questions (ibid., p. 93).

Thematic analysis has many advantages such as flexibility, accessibility to researchers with little or no expertise in qualitative research as well as the accessibility of results to the educated general public (ibid., p. 97). Moreover, thematic analysis allows for exploring the perspectives of different research informants in large data sets, underlining similarities and differences, and summarizing key features (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). However, there are some critical points and concerns about the method present in the literature. One such concern is the proceduralism of the method, i.e., some qualitative researchers find the method

rather mechanistic and illustrative, with no sufficient interpretive depth (King & Brooks, 2018, p. 15). Thus, throughout the data analysis, I kept this critique in mind and treated Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process as guidelines and not a prescription.

Being a descriptive method, thematic analysis has limited ability to interpret findings and, thus, should be used within a theoretical framework to strengthen analytic claims (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97). Another concern is the fragmentation of accounts and the loss of context, in particular, interactional context in interviews. I strived to overcome this possible methodological shortcoming by not looking at and interpreting each section of transcripts in a vacuum but by understanding each informant's account as a whole (King & Brooks, 2018, p. 16). Finally, compared to other methods (e.g., content analysis), thematic analysis does not allow researchers to make claims about language use and functionality of talk (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

#### **4.2.6. Ethical considerations and data protection**

Research ethics is the key criterion when evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Kirkebak & Gosovic, 2020, p. 67). It is argued that ethics "constitute a universal end goal of qualitative quality itself" (Tracy, 2010, p. 846). As this study was based on interactions with human participants through conducting interviews, it was guided by four main ethical principles focusing on respect, informed consent, and the protection of personal information. First, *impose no harm* and respect the participant's intrinsic human dignity. All the respondents were informed about the study's aim and how the interview data will be used. They were also notified about their rights to refuse to reply to any particular question and withdraw their consent at any time. Thus, informed consent was obtained from each participant, and all the interviewees voluntarily agreed and were not coerced into participating in the study (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 253).

Second, I reflected upon different considerations related to *relationship-based ethics* implying respect, reciprocity, and reflections on power differences. These are particularly relevant for ethnographic research and will be further described below. Third, *disclosure of research intent* should take place before or after the interview. Advantages of explaining the research intent before the interview (as I have done) include building a sense of trust and clarity between the interviewee and the interviewer, while disadvantages might influence and cloud the interviewee's answer (ibid., p. 253).

The fourth ethical principle is the *right to privacy and confidentiality* including protecting the identities of the participants, anonymizing collected data, and keeping all collected data securely (ibid., p. 254). Therefore, the processing of any personal data (i.e., data that could be directly or indirectly linked to a specific individual) collected during the study complies with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Hence, all personal data collected was only used for the purposes of this study and was not shared with third parties. To ensure privacy protection, the key personally identifiable information such as participants' names was removed and the stored data underwent an anonymization process (Södertörn University, 2022, p. 11). The participants in the study could withdraw the consent and request correction of their personal data. After submission of the thesis, the data was partly archived and partly erased (ibid., p. 11-12). To minimize the risk of deductive disclosure (revealing informants' identities through personal details that others know about them), I asked two members of the organization staff to read an earlier draft of this thesis to see whether they could identify volunteers. Based on their feedback, I decided to exclude from the paper the exact age of the informants as it was indicated as a strong identifiable characteristic.

Additional ethical considerations were connected to the ethnographic nature of this study. According to the reflexive framework developed by Kirkebak and Gosovic (2020), there are five ethical questions the researcher should think carefully about when conducting ethnographic research in organizational settings. The framework is designed to help the researcher to understand social and financial implications and their possible impact on the research findings and representation of informants and events (ibid., p. 67).

The first question is, "How am I entangled?", meaning structure of relationship with the researched organization such as formal agreements. I entered the organization four months prior to beginning the study. While I had a legal contract as an employee of the organization, there was no formal agreement (neither written nor oral) between me and EWB-SWE regarding the scope, content, or limits of this thesis. The organization (or any other party) did not fund this research and did not request non-disclosure or publication approval (ibid., p. 69).

The second question is, "With whom am I entangled?" Prior to and while conducting this study, I inevitably became close to the lives of some of my informants, not just professional parts but personal as well. There are people in the organization who helped this study happen,



to whom I am grateful, and whose opinions I value. Hence, one challenge of ethnographic research is to establish rapport with informants, while maintaining a critical, analytical distance (ibid., p. 71). The third question is, “What is the nature of the gifts that I receive?” There were both tangible and intangible benefits that facilitated loyalty toward the organization under study. Tangible gifts included salary, as well as work trips and dinners with colleagues paid for by the organization. However, much more valuable for the study were intangible gifts such as access to people’s time, internal documents, as well as events and activities taking place in the organization (ibid., p. 72). I always felt welcomed to participate in any EWB-SWE activities and I received any necessary access without delays.

The fourth question is, “How do I reciprocate?” The nature of ethnographic research is reciprocal. Accordingly, the topic of this study is both relevant from an academic perspective and useful for the organization. It was, therefore, important to constantly reflect on whether I direct my study towards questions that are interesting for the organization but do not necessarily have an academic interest, as well as whether I avoid some relevant questions and/or controversial content because they might show the organization in an unfavorable light (ibid., p. 74). The tangible and intangible benefits received from the organization and the consequent loyalty influenced my emotional engagement with the field. While generally emotional and mental disengagement is needed for critical thinking, balanced emotional engagement increases the quality of written representations of informants and their experiences. In particular, it is done by thoroughly looking at an entire data set about each informant and selecting data extract to illustrate patterns, hence, avoiding cherry-picking (ibid., p. 74).

The final question is, “For how long am I entangled?” Though my formal employment in the organization ends soon after submitting this thesis, I am interested in maintaining contact with the organization and possibly returning to it in the future as a volunteer or employee. While conducting the study, I was often conscious that the study’s informants, other volunteers, the organization’s staff, as well as other people affiliated with EWB-SWE whom I am acquainted with will read this text. Therefore, I was aware to detect self-censorship and reflect upon arguments and reasons for what I include and exclude from my analysis (ibid., p. 75).

## 5. Presentation of findings

*This section presents and describes empirical findings collected through semi-structured interviews with skills-based volunteers at the organization. The section starts with my observations and reflections accumulated being a part-time employee at the organization.*

---

### 5.1. Observations and reflections

Before presenting and describing the findings generated by the interviews, I would like to reflect on my personal experience with the organization in terms of professionalization. By the time I started working on this thesis, I had been engaged in Engineers Without Borders Sweden for almost five months. The topic of this study emerged from my conversations with the secretary general and the head of international projects in the organization. As EWB-SWE relies heavily on its volunteers in engineering and management roles, the initial tentative practical questions were, “How should the organization balance becoming more professional while retaining its primary reliance on skill-based volunteers?” and “To what extent a volunteer organization can be professionalized?” Thus, the overall topic at first derived from “gaps in the solutions to concrete problems” (Visconti, 2010, p. 30) and then was focused on and modified by gaps in academic literature.

Before starting working on the thesis, I cannot recall thinking about the organization as either professional or unprofessional. However, there were two characteristics (as I learned later, two markers of professionalization) I have reflected upon early on. First, even before joining the organization, I noted its communications and accountability efforts: a neat logo (developed in collaboration with a consulting company ALTEN), a structured website design, regular and consistent social media activity<sup>7</sup>, and yearly reports (issued since 2019). Second, within my first six months in the organization, EWB-SWE hired two full-time members of staff (head of international projects and head of communications) and two part-time employees with temporary contracts (myself included). Hence, the staff team doubled in size.

Since the beginning of 2022, the organization has been working on the development of the EWB-SWE Strategy 2023-2027, first strategic document of such scale in its 15 years history. The initial draft was proposed by the organization’s full-time staff in collaboration with at that time chairperson and was presented to the board on February 14th, 2022. The draft

---

<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing this section (July 18th, 2022), EWB-SWE has 8679 followers on LinkedIn, 7592 followers on Facebook, and 1084 followers on Instagram.

included four tentative strategic directions: (1) we are a professional volunteer organization, (2) we do more/growth (expand our work), (3) we know our impact/impact model/we ensure that we create impact, and (4) partnerships (efficient, impactful, complimentary). The draft also included a SWOT matrix, a technique for identifying and analyzing an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In particular, one of the stated strengths was "our qualified volunteers", while one of the identified weaknesses was "not enough professional in our work (engineering, organizational and development)."

Gradually, the strategic directions and further objectives included in each direction were modified and clarified. The work included multiple sessions with the organization's staff and board (including a dedicated strategy planning weekend in Gothenburg in April 2022) together with selected volunteers. The current strategy<sup>8</sup> includes the main aim of "*Increased social impact for the communities we engage with*" described in the following way:

We aim to improve the social impact of our work. We want to ensure that our financial resources as well as the hours invested by our volunteers, staff and partners are used as efficient as possible and for the greatest possible benefit of those impacted by our work. Consequently, all our strategic directions aim to elevate our social impact.

The main aim is further broken into four strategic directions (not in order of priority): (1) reach our full potential as a volunteer-based organization, (2) streamline our work through focused efforts, (3) engage in impactful collaborations, and (4) accelerate sustainable growth. Each direction further included four to six objectives. Accordingly, the first direction dedicated to the organization's volunteers included the following objectives (again, of equal priority):

1. Empower our board with a strategic role while elevating the role of our volunteers in our leadership and governance structure.
2. Extend our office to include core functions leading and coordinating the work of our volunteers.
3. Utilize the uniqueness and expertise of our volunteers.
4. Strengthening our volunteering capacity to contribute positively towards humanitarian engineering by investing in our volunteers.
5. Ensure a rewarding volunteer journey and nurture a strong feeling of teamwork, and commitment toward EWB-SWE.
6. Further increase our level of professionalism within project management, engineering, and development cooperation.

---

<sup>8</sup> At the time of writing (July 2022), the strategy is not 100 percent determined in terms of exact wording but no major changes are expected.

The above strategy was presented at the Annual Meeting on May 7th, 2022. Subsequently, each objective will receive a more defined (and likely measurable) target. This work is planned for autumn 2022.

Hence, my participatory observation of Engineers Without Borders Sweden shows that the organization prioritizes professionalization in terms of efficiency, strategic planning, and accountability. The organization strives to continue its reliance on volunteers to operate and perform core (engineering) tasks and assignments. At the same time, the organization seeks to increase volunteers' knowledge, expertise, and skills within project management, engineering, and development cooperation, i.e. grow the level of occupational professionalism in these areas.

Below I present findings collected during interviews with EWB-SWE skills-based volunteers. The findings are divided into six groups: (1) the organization's changes towards professionalization; (2) reasons expressed by the volunteers for the organization to operate professionally; (3) challenges to professionalize the organization; (4) risks the volunteer see if the organization is focused on professionalization too much; (5) how the respondents compare their regular jobs with volunteering as well as what similarities, differences, and synergies the respondents experience between the two; and (6) how the informants manage their volunteering temporally, spatially, and mentally.

## **5.2. Interview findings**

### **5.2.1. Changes towards professionalization**

The length of the informants' involvement in the organization ranged from three to nine years (i.e., six years on average) and, with an exception of one person, all study participants described that Engineers Without Borders Sweden has changed significantly since they have joined the organization. They described that the level of overall professionalism has risen over the years.

In the interview invitation email (see Appendix I) and further presenting my study during interviews, I explained to the informants what I mean by nonprofit professionalization based on previous research. Yet, the understanding of what professionalization was somewhat different among volunteers. Hence, some respondents discussed organizational or managerial professionalism i.e, a more structured way of working displayed by the availability of various project guidelines, more standardized documentation, increasing strategic focus, and focus on

identifying and measuring the NPO's impact. Other respondents connected professionalization to the share of professionals or working engineers in the organization and the occupational expertise of these volunteers.

Generally, the NPO's professionalization is perceived by the informants as a positive change and "the right way":

I would say that the organization was not very professional when I joined six years ago. But it's getting more and more professional now, and I think that is a good sign that we are going the right way. (Informant 1)

One interviewee pointed out that a certain level of professionalization is inevitable to ensure internal communication as an organization grows and recruits more people:

I think it has become more professional because we have grown. (...) There were very few people [in the past] and then you can have a meeting and you can discuss and you can do things; just a few people, you know each other. But now we have to be more professional. (Informant 5)

Another informant agreed that the NPO's professionalization and improved organizational learning is a consequence of its growth, "*We are learning all the time from what we do, both good and bad. And that's the kind of part of being professional. Definitely*" (Informant 6).

Accordingly, several respondents indicated that the organization has become more structured, "*The organization wasn't really what it is today, it was not as structured, and as... I think it's better today, I think we've gotten very far*" (Informant 2). "*When I entered, we were a small organization, very very much driven by students. And the way we were working was quite... It was not structured well enough*" (Informant 4).

Though, one interviewee stressed that the organization was not that unstructured even when he joined nine years ago, and it became more structured and organized since then:

I was a bit surprised that it was kind of very organized from the beginning. You couldn't just start a project just like that. You needed to have a good plan, et cetera, et cetera. And even if I thought then that it was quite OK, then it was nothing compared to what we do today. It's much more organized today. (Informant 6)

As a part of the improved structure, respondents mentioned guidelines for projects, processes, and activities that were introduced over the years as well as the way of presenting the organization on the website and in the newsletter:

I've noticed from the news I get and from the website and so on that it's more professionalized. And well, and there are guidelines etcetera which is very good I think. The guidelines for the organization and how we do projects and so on and so on. So, I think that's a good thing [to have guidelines], and it structures the organization in a better way. (Informant 9)

Informant 7 connected professionalism with a share of skilled volunteers *"I would like to believe that it's [the organization] got more professional (...) because there are many committed and good, highly ranked, and experienced people that I have met in the organization"* (Informant 7).

Another respondent reasoned that there are two aspects of professionalization. The first one is the share of professionals (i.e., working engineers versus students) and as it has been relatively stable over the years (approximately,  $\frac{2}{3}$  students and  $\frac{1}{3}$  professionals), therefore, as the respondent stated, this aspect has not changed in the last five years since he joined EWB-SWE. The second aspect of professionalization, in his opinion, is a professional way of working:

...professionalism as a culture or a description of an organization. Then, I would say, it has changed a lot. Like I said when I joined it was... I wouldn't say, it's harsh to say "chaotic", but it was very unorganized, very very unorganized. The Google Drive was... I can't even say *the* Google Drive. It was many Google Drives. It was ridiculous. It was impossible to find people. Just the different chapters were unlinked, pretty much. Of course, there was formally a national board, but just everything was ad hoc. (Informant 13)

Informant 4, who joined the organization three years earlier than Informant 13, stated that the share of working engineers and, therefore, level of expertise has risen over the years:

When I started, it was merely based on amateurs. I wouldn't say bad knowledge, but a low level of knowledge from students trying to find solutions. And very often they found solutions that were obvious to others. But now we have increased that level of competence and level of accuracy in the technology we are using. (Informant 4)

Informant 3 gave an insight that the organization works more strategically compared with a few years back, *"I feel like there are a lot of things going on. Like annual planning. Just sitting down [and discussing] what the goals are for the organization. That's something that we didn't have when I started, there was no process for that"* (Informant 3).

Eleven out of fourteen respondents are fully or partially engaged in international work at the organization and, overall, this part of EWB-SWE is more established. Hence, the majority of

the volunteers noticed a more structured way of working processes in international projects specifically.

Now, on the international side, we have built up, in my regard, a very good structure of how to work internationally with our projects: defining projects, following up on projects, et cetera. Evaluating partnerships, local partners, et cetera. (Informant 4)

In particular, the interviewees pointed out the development of formalized and standardized documentation processes in international projects.

...one good thing that we now have is project guidelines. That all projects should follow a project guideline and we should work in a similar way in all the projects. That's very important, so we know how to report, how to discuss. (...) So we all talk in the same language. (Informant 1)

Another interview talked about The Handbook for International Projects, a 70-page document written in the organization in recent years that summarized the way of working with international projects, *“That's all written down, you can find most answers there and develop more. As new questions arise, you decide what the answer is and put it in there”* (Informant 3).

Introduction of competence groups within five areas of expertise<sup>9</sup> were named as an important factor of professionalization of EWB's international work.

And we've also become much more professional because, in support of international projects, we have now five competence groups where we are engaging competent engineers supporting with technology knowledge of the problem. That's a huge difference compared to what we had from the beginning. (Informant 4)

We have these competence groups that are supporting projects and sort of putting more pressure on the projects to meet certain standards in terms of choosing the right technical solutions, making sure you have the right competence in the groups, making sure we're reviewing projects in the right way, checking that we're the right people to do this. (Informant 2)

Previously, the secretary-general of the organization had an additional responsibility for international projects governance. In October 2021, EWB-SWE hired a full-time employee entirely focused on this work, who was mentioned by several respondents, *“We have a new head of international projects, who is developing further this professional attitude to the organization and that's very good.”* (Informant 8)

---

<sup>9</sup> (1) Sustainable Food Production and Processing, (2) Energy and Waste Management, (3) Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, (4) Digitalization in Education, and (5) Construction.

It is changed in the last few months, I have noticed. (...) My feeling is that it is moving to be managed more professionally since [new head of international projects ] has more time about it, regarding this. That is my feeling, and I think that we have to continue [working professionally] because then we can be more efficient. (Informant 10)

In a very short time, there have been more and more structure and strategic planning. And it's because of [new head of international projects]. (...) But before, when someone had a really good idea on how we could maybe doing thing more time-efficient and higher the quality, there was no one having time to do that (...), since you may just have like six hours a week and you have a lot of other things to do, it doesn't happen. (Informant 12)

In particular, one interviewee stressed that with a head of international projects employed full-time, the organization can focus more on identifying and measuring its impact, "...now, when [new head of international projects] came in and became the head of international projects, we are looking even more into the impact issue, what impact do we give" (Informant 6).

Further, the respondents stated that the organization should continue improving its operations and regular procedures, "*We still have a long way to go to have a good process for projects to start doing and processing and closing of a project. I would say, routines are not there*" (Informant 12).

I believe that we have a good quality, high standard and it's improving (...) But you need to work with the continuous improvements within your organization. You can never lean back and say, "Look, you are very good." You have to always strive for improvement. (Informant 7)

While the absolute majority of respondents undoubtedly recognized that the organization became more professional, one informant was rather skeptical. Accordingly, he expressed that the organization has moved towards bureaucratization but it does not mean it became more professional.

Honestly, I would say, no [the organization has not become more professional]. It's become a lot more bureaucratic though. I think we have a problem with like we want to make it look like we are professional. So we have a lot of these guidelines and regulations and things that we never look at and never implement. So for me, it's like we're... Yeah, I wouldn't say we're doing much more professional stuff right now than we did before. (...) Probably like a small bit but... (Informant 11)

I asked him to elaborate on how in his opinion the actual professionalization should look like in the organization and what the organization does not do to be considered more professionalized. The respondent, who is involved in domestic activities at EWB-SWE, referred to "industry standards" in different aspects of domestic operations e.g., in planning



and executing events for the organization's community and the general public. The respondent stressed that he cannot speak for international work, as it is not his area of engagement. He also touched upon the topic of knowledge transfer which is challenging in a volunteer-based organization that consists of mainly students.

For me, doing it professionally is some kind of industry standards, to live up to something. That's the idea of professionalism. (...) Like what we deliver is quality, right? But then, I'm not sure we always live up to this. (...) Like for lectures and stuff like this, it's mostly students doing it and it's hard to kind of, transfer this knowledge. I'm not sure. Like a professional event planner, I have no idea what they [the event industry] consider a professional event. So on that front, I don't think we got much more professional. (Informant 11)

Ultimately, the respondent shared that he is, in general, rather skeptical of the word "professional", even applying to his paid job. For him, this is an adjective that implies an exceptional quality of work.

...the word "professional" is a bit strange. So, I do research and development, and like we basically play around all day, right? And I get paid for it. So it's a bit strange to call it professional. So for me, being professional is just like high-level research or something like this. That would be professional for me. (Informant 11)

## **5.2.2. Reasons for professionalization**

The informants expressed four main rationale for the NPO to operate professionally: (1) stakeholder expectations and external pressure, (2) safety, (3) seeing results, and (4) more interesting volunteer work.

### ***5.2.2.1. Stakeholder expectations and external pressure***

One of the recurring reasons for professionalization addressed by volunteers were expectations from various stakeholders and external pressure on the organization. In particular, in order to attract financial resources and enable membership in quality control organizations (e.g., Svensk insamlingskontroll and Giva Sverige).

...the expectation of EWB Sweden from others. If you go to partners in Africa that receive things from us or you can go to other organizations that we will work together with, they could be from donors. All these, they have expectations that we should work as a professional team, not just as volunteers." (Informant 10)

We want to be an organization where donors and others can feel trust. And if you want to achieve that, you now have to have a label. The 90-account or another label is Giva Sverige. But they are (...) demanding that we shall have reporting and accounting according to this [their criteria] and we

should measure the impact, et cetera, et cetera. To secure that we are a reliable organization. (Informant 4)

I think it's necessary to professionalize the organization because nowadays it takes so much in order to, say, attract companies to fund you. If some of the bigger companies at least want to sponsor you with certain amounts of money, they want to be able to show that they are spending the money on an organization which is working professional and also that it's [working] in a traceable way. (...) But they also want to be able to show that the organization they are giving money to is, say, an efficient organization. (Informant 9)

Similarly, another volunteer talked about pressure to receive fundings, adding that organizations generally produce better results if they work professionally.

I think also that our donors, our big donors, they want to have professional contact with us. So, we need to be professional. And I think that is something that we need to work on (...) because often you get better output if you work in a professional manner. (Informant 1)

Two respondents expressed that professionalization in the form of quality standards is needed because otherwise reputation of the organization might be harmed.

As an NGO as well as a company or whatever you have your brand and if you do bad stuff and not high quality it will (in the long-term, at least) really have bad effects. So I think more and more as we also grow as an organization, EWB, it will be important to understand this thing and really think what are we doing and do a good job all the time. (Informant 14)

We also have a reputation and we can't be too non-professional, we can't be that because then we lose our reputation. We might send people on a project that doesn't have a meaning or that will not be successful at all, et cetera. (Informant 1)

The Informant 14 explained that professionalization is required in order to continue growing. Especially, to execute bigger projects, and attract more funding.

We need to make sure that we have the competence and then we need to be more professional as an organization. We need to have our statutes in order, different documents, statements on how we work. The organization has to be working fine. And also if we get more responsibility and also if we want to grow and have more money and more funding from big other types (not only private donations or small money from companies), then I think we should or we have to be more professional as an organization because it is expected from us. And then also if we were taking on bigger programs or projects we have to be more professional in that sense that we should do a good job. I think we should always do a good job, even if it's a small project, we should work professionally. (Informant 14)

### **5.2.2.2. Safety**

Multiple times interviewees addressed safety risks for volunteers who work internationally as well as for communities where the organization operates. Therefore, the respondents stated safety as one of the major reasons for working more professionally and for recruiting highly skilled volunteers.

...to work with some of the traveling safety documents. And that's also a way to professionalize, because I think we should. We have a responsibility for our volunteers. They must have appropriate training also and be aware that you should avoid risks more when you are in Kenya or Tanzania than in Sweden. (Informant 5)

I think that sometimes we see that "OK, it's just voluntary." Then you can accept any quality at all. And I think we cannot do that. When we're talking about it, if we're going to construct a house, we cannot just play games because people are gonna live in that house. We're gonna try to make sure people have clean water or something. We should have experts engage in, whatever, construction of a road... We can't just let anyone do that, we need experts. (Informant 14)

Hence, Informant 5 addressed the detrimental risks of neglecting safety and quality standards for beneficiaries in the countries where EWB-SWE runs its international projects:

If things go wrong there, if you have designed a water purification system, the local people, of course, expect that it's a drinking water quality and especially at the school. You have small children that come from very poor families and they don't have clean water at home and they are very malnourished, so if they get bad water and get diarrhea so they could die because they are not strong. (Informant 5)

### **5.2.2.3. Seeing results and impact**

Another argument for professionalization was a need to see results of the NPO's work and necessity to evaluate the organization's impact. As it was expressed by the interviewees, in order to do it, the organization should operate effectively and efficiently.

We have to evaluate what we are doing actually and, I think, learn from the effects of our work, and see that there are good benefits from our projects, good impact. It should be meaningful what we do. (Informant 1)

...if we can make this stock documenting the process more efficient and easier to do, so that it's actually being done, then we have a really really nice way to show how much we're actually accomplishing. (Informant 2)

Perhaps you should not talk about the more professional organization but the more effective organization. That we are using our resources in a good way for the purpose mainly (...) and to be

effective you have to also be professional, but you also have to be an organization that is suited for our purpose. (Informant 4)

One way of being ineffective is a loss of time by addressing each question with each volunteer separately. This problem can be solved with guidelines, as Informant 1 expressed:

I think the worst thing is that you have to spend a lot of time explaining how things should work. If you don't have rules and guidelines, et cetera, for running a project, then you have to explain and investigate a lot for each question. (...). You will save a lot of time if you have a guideline. And if you don't, you will spend a lot of time that you can feel is not very valuable, it's a waste of time. (Informant 1)

#### **5.2.2.4. *More interesting volunteer work***

While some respondents addressed risks of professionalization in terms of recruiting and retaining volunteers, several informants noticed that with a more defined structure and processes, the organization is better equipped to support volunteers and preserve their initial enthusiasm. Hence, one respondent stated, “*Now, most things I do with EWB are very fun because routines are better*” (Informant 12). Two other informants expressed that unprofessionalism is more dangerous in terms of volunteer retention than professionalization.

I'm not worried about it [the organization] running out of volunteers basically. I feel like there are probably some people that are kind of scared away by the organization being like too unprofessional. Who get involved and then realize “Oh, it's just like chaos.” (Informant 3)

...enthusiast is really important, it's necessary that we have it but if you don't work in a professional way, there is a risk that you kill the enthusiasm. If you do it right, professionalization is a way not to kill enthusiasm. (Informant 10)

### **5.2.3. Challenges for professionalization**

I asked the respondents to list challenges and risks they see for EWB-SWE in order to become more professional, as well as to recall examples of unprofessionalism in the organization's history.

#### **5.2.3.1. *Student volunteers***

Before the interviews, I did not inform the participants that I study views on the NPO's professionalization of working and retired volunteers only and not students. It was described neither in my first email inviting them to take part in my study (see Appendix I) nor in my introduction at the beginning of each conversation. However, because more than a half of the organization's volunteers are university students, many respondents instantly connected a

challenge of not being professional enough as well as unwillingness to professionalize to the presence of students at the organization. Accordingly, Informant 14 stated that students tend to take the volunteer work not seriously enough:

We need to be serious with this [volunteer work]. It's not just a funny school project. Sometimes students become unserious, I think. This is actually people's lives we are dealing with, so we have to be serious. Even though we're not paid, this is real stuff we're doing. (...) I think that all the communities deserve the best. So that's why I think it should be taken seriously. I easily become annoyed if people are just thinking that it's like some funny game or just the student trip somewhere to Africa. (Informant 14)

Further, Informant 5 recalled an international project with student volunteers who did not have sufficient knowledge of the project's topic and did not always follow advice.

We had some student groups, very ambitious, that were doing a water purification system in a school. And it showed that the students with a good spirit didn't have education in the area where they were volunteering. (...) They contacted some companies in Sweden and got donated different types of filters to clean the water and then they connected those because they had the filters. But the tricky thing is that it's a very expensive solution, you can't redo it in many other schools, because it's too expensive, and the supply of the filters was from Sweden, which means repair and replacement is not optimal. I mean, it can be [even] impossible. And then a year later, we did another system when we told them [the students] they have to buy orders from a local supplier, which means that then you create a business and you know that there are replacements and guarantees. But still, sometimes they didn't [do it]. (Informant 5)

Students were also criticized for their sometimes short-term thinking:

Professionalism for me isn't just about, "Oh, I'm doing work in some sense." It's about what work you do and how you do it and for what reason. Not to be harsh against students (I was a student myself) but sometimes you just want to do stuff (...) kind of larger organizational thinking and planning does not exist within the head of a student who just wants to do something for one semester. (Informant 13)

The respondents recognized the difficulty to professionalize an organization that consists of so many students. Hence, Informant 11 stated that students require more freedom to test different ideas, so maybe rigid professionalization is not suitable for them. Also, students are not specialists yet. At the same time, Informant 11 recognized a conflict there, because compared to working volunteers, students have the most time to engage in volunteer work.

[The organization] is becoming a bit hierarchical and top-heavy maybe? Which I don't think I like that much. (...) Especially for students. Students kind of want to be a bit free and try stuff. (...) ...when I say "professional", either we say we like have to recruit specific people who have extreme knowledge in certain things. We should probably not be students. But on the other hand, students are the ones with the most time. (Informant 11)

Similarly, Informant 1 suggested balancing the degree of professionalization for student groups, while Informant 10 pointed out that professionalization at the organization is a way for students to practice before entering the job market.

If you involve students in a student group for working with EWB, then you might need to be a little bit more flexible and not require too many standards and professionalism. But some is needed, of course. (Informant 1)

It's [professionalization] a way to support our students' groups to learn more about how a company works. We can do it in a way that they can do their job much more effectively which would be good for them. (Informant 10)

### **5.2.3.2. Working with other volunteers**

Another identified challenge was in general working with other volunteers, students as well as other working professionals. "*A special challenge to lead the project with team members that all of them are volunteers*" (Informant 1). A number of issues were mentioned such as not following through on commitments, high volunteer turnover, sending emails without receiving a response, inefficient meeting management, short-term thinking, and insufficient level of analysis. These issues are relevant for all categories of volunteers, and when listing these challenges, the informants did not specify students. However, based on my participatory observation at the organization, I would say that high volunteer turnover and sometimes not following through on commitments might be particularly relevant for student volunteers.

Accordingly, Informant 7 expressed that working at an NPO with other volunteers is more challenging than in his paid job because volunteers are less likely to fulfill promises and commitments, "*It's a lot more frustrating. Because people don't do what you say. That is the problem. At work, at least they do what you say. But not volunteers.*" (Informant 7). Further, the interviewee explained his view on the challenge and how unreliability of other volunteers interferes with his view on professionalism:

If you work with volunteers, in the less of a former structure, there are many more opinions and you have to like negotiate a lot more. As a project manager, I plan and implement the projects and I could say that, "OK, you are doing this by next Friday." But as a volunteer, "Could you please do that if you have got the time by next Friday?" (...) This means that if you want to make a plan, a cost estimate, or a time schedule, it's a lot more difficult to do that with volunteers. (...) I'm used to delivering results. I set out, "I should do this by next week." I get it done by next week. I mean that's my professionalism. As a volunteer, you don't have those steering..." (Informant 7)

Informants 6 and 8 shared their struggles to build up processes in his team, which is challenging due to high volunteer turnover.

I'm trying to build up a structure of some kind within the group, but it's very difficult when you have to deal with volunteer work and workers. Because since it's voluntary you don't have to do anything, I mean unless you have promised to do it. You don't have to promise to stay for two or three years. You can quit in a week. So we had some changes. Someone joins the group and then skips next week and so on. So it's very difficult to try to build up a structure in a group like that. (Informant 6)

There are constantly people leaving and new ones coming on board. So you don't have this ongoing system as you have in a normal work situation when you had your team groups and they just work. Here you have a constant change of people and also that they do not have the time to answer this week because they're very busy with their own other work. And you have to have patience, and you have to wait. (Informant 8)

A particular source of frustration in communicating with volunteers (which I have experienced too, both working at EWB-SWE and recruiting participants for this study) is sending emails without receiving a response:

I don't like writing emails after emails asking for something and not getting a response. That's very... I don't like that and that happens from time to time. So you need a lot of patience (...) but not too much either, because then everything stops. (Informant 1)

Another challenge of NPO professionalization that volunteers mention is inefficient meeting management:

There are many meetings that sometimes don't lead anywhere, because as a volunteer organization you didn't have the time to prepare well for the meeting. What's the concept would are we going to discuss, why should we come to a decision on what, and why it's important to have that decision now? And sometimes we just discuss, and we discuss, and we discuss. And we have ideas. And then the next meeting we start over. So yeah, we need to have maybe shorter meetings, but there are long meetings sometimes. Not that productive. (Informant 8)

...monthly meetings. They were not good. They were too big, they were too long, they were not interesting. The issue was simply that it was too wide. I didn't see the point in having such wide meetings, and I don't think they gave anything. (Informant 13)

Just like with the case of the students, the occasional inability to think long-term was mentioned concerning all volunteers. Hence, Informant 4 described a story that happened in one of the projects in the past:

There was a small wind power station that we helped to set up in Tanzania. When the first hurricane came, it blew away. This was obvious for a person who understood what is the weather condition in this situation. And when it blew away, there was no one capable of helping them set

up or restructure. I mean, this is not professional. It is not professional to just go down, set up some solar panels, and go back. That is not professional. You have to have a long-term commitment, otherwise, it will not work. And we have some cases of that. (Informant 4)

Informant 5 provided a similar insight:

Sometimes I've seen different volunteers that I would say... Well, they go there [to e.g., Africa] for their own sake or they don't really understand why. They want to do something because they think it's needed and then they do something. They want well but it's not long-term sustainable and it's not respectful also. (Informant 5)

In addition, Informant 14 addressed a rather insufficient level of analysis in some of international projects:

...the organization is really like sometimes, "Let's just do this", too fast without analysis. Or, "Let's take this project from this country and just move it to the other country" without analyzing the context in the new country, for example. Or, "OK, this was a problem", and then, "OK, it was too bad", and "Let's move on", not really see that this was a problem. We need to analyze what happened, what can we do better. (Informant 14)

#### **5.2.4. Risks and concerns of over professionalization**

Throughout the interviews, the respondents discussed their concerns of the NPO becoming too professionalized. These included: professionalization (in particular, administrative work) is too time-consuming, risk of bureaucratization, as well as commercialization and marketization of the nonprofit sector.

One of the main risks of professionalization respondents referred to is that professionalization is time-consuming. It takes time from both employees in the organization and volunteers. Accordingly, employees' attention is divided between professionalization and the organization's purpose and core work:

I see that we are spending too much time on internal work. How shall we work? What kind of report? What kind of routines? And to some extent are missing the main point: our work towards our stakeholders outside the organization, in Sweden or in our countries internationally. (Informant 4)

Volunteers have a very limited amount of time they are able and willing to dedicate to the organization and, as some informants expressed, volunteers should not spend most of their time doing administrative work because it is likely not the reason they joined the organization.



To be buried in administrative work is probably never something you want when you work as a volunteer. (...) Sometimes this administration routines make the process slowing down too much, so it doesn't become so fun and it takes so much time that you get frustrated. (Informant 12)

We have to be professional in some aspects, I think, but we have to be careful not to make too much administration for volunteers because then it's difficult to be our volunteer because normally they want to do something. And if it's too time-consuming to get there, we might lose people. (Informant 5)

If all my time is going into administration, obviously I'm not going to get very much done. (...) I think that's something that we discuss (...) so that we don't lose quality but at the same time it's actually manageable. (...) It's really difficult to sort of strike that balance, I think: quality versus how much time we have to spend. (Informant 2)

If you have a volunteer and they give five hours a week and then you force them to do one or two hours of bureaucratic stuff that they don't find fun or interesting. That's basically like 50 percent or 20 percent of the time, right? (...) If you work and it's one hour out of 40 every week, that's no problem. But it's like one hour out of five or three or whatever, then it gets a lot quicker. (Informant 11)

Informant 7 stated the risk of bureaucratization when the organization has too rigid structure:

If it becomes too bureaucratic, that's a risk. And you get stuck in structures and you can't improvise, I mean you just have to do it this way, you have to follow the instructions. And you've got lots of brain, but no heart. (Informant 7)

Informants 13 and 14 stressed that administration work is included in the process of running a nonprofit organization as well as in the engineering profession. However, in every case the organization has to investigate if this paperwork is indeed required.

It's about what paperwork and for what reason. Is there a rationale behind this paperwork? Is there a reason why we're filling out this paperwork? In some cases, yes, this is very important. Yes, you have to fill out the project chart. Yes, you have to answer all the questions. This is not negotiable. (...) As an extreme, it's not possible to run an NGO just with hugs and kisses and good intentions. That's not possible, there has to be documentation there. (Informant 13)

In one sense, that is part of the job or the volunteer work to do good administration also. I don't know what is a good comparison exactly, but it's just included in the job as an engineer to have to do both of the things. (...) You always have to do some of that: to do a report, to do preparations, and do that in an organized way, and then that has to be done. So that's part of the deal. (...) It's also important to say that we shouldn't create extra bureaucracy and extra work or unnecessary bureaucracy or put extra pressure on things that are not really relevant. And that's the thing, we need to have a balance here. (Informant 14)

Final concerns with professionalization expressed by two volunteers were commercialization and marketization of nonprofit sector. Accordingly, Informant 4 stated that while some

commercial incentives are beneficial for partner organizations in economically developing countries, EWB-SWE should not be driven by such motives.

If you differ between professionalism (...) and commercializing. (...) If you are saying that we are trying to do something based on some kind of commercial base, we want to earn some money, then we have a problem. But there is a difference. I think that having commercial, economical, demands or drivers is good for implementation, but the driver should be at our receivers at our partners in developing countries. It should perhaps not be a driver for us as an organization. (Informant 4)

Informant 13 discussed focus on marketing and communication, which, in his opinion, sometimes feels a bit extensive and done because it has become a standard in the sector.

It's hard to blame the organization, but sometimes a lot of these NGOs, they... What I liked about EWB as I said, it was the less focus on fluff and more focus on doing things. And sometimes with the years, we started going down this rabbit hole of NGOs being in the time. (Informant 13)

The respondent recalled discussions in the organization about what and how to photograph to communicate the organization's work to the public. The respondents underlined several times that such discussions are needed but rather as a natural part of organizational development and not as an external pressure.

Again, I'm not saying that the discussion is wrong, but it was forced. It didn't feel natural. We were having that discussion not because we felt that it was interesting for our organization or necessary, we had it because it was in the time. You were supposed to have it. (Informant 13)

Further, the respondent explained the risk of focusing too much on professionalization and marketization over the core mission of the organization.

The negative side is of course that you lose track of what you're actually doing. Now, what's the point of Engineering Without Borders? It's to support development through engineering and volunteers. That's the main focus and that should always be the lead star in everything we do. But at the end of the day, can we do that more and better with or without this professionalism? And what parts of professionalism should we use to approach that goal as fast and well as we can? (...) Are we moving towards too much to being an NGO X on Facebook with a cool logo doing 30 seconds clips with black children and elephants or are we still focused on what we want to do? (Informant 13)

### **5.2.5. Regular job versus skills-based volunteering**

All the interviewees in this study can be divided into two groups: young engineers (28-33 years old) and senior engineers (55-72 years old). The young engineers (Informants 2-3, and 11-14) joined the organization when they were students. The senior engineers (Informants 1, and 4-10) have substantial working experience and some of them are retired. Age distribution

of the informants is representative for the whole population of EWB-SWE volunteers, as one respondent expressed it, “...*in our organization you have student groups, young engineers, and you have these older guys like me. But in mid-age, when people have children, they don't have so much time for volunteering work*” (Informant 10).

Consequently, the two groups had different initial reasons and expectations for joining the organization. The younger interviewees originally joined mostly to gain “*a bit of practical experience, so you can try things out*” (Informant 3), while more senior respondents had somewhat the following motivation, “*I was looking for something to do at the finish of my career, so to say, and I would like to volunteer for something good (...), when I was going to be retired*” (Informant 6).

I asked respondents to compare their workplace and volunteering at EWB-SWE, and how they are similar or different. The international focus of the organization was named as one of the main factors that were different. Accordingly, Informant 3 told me that his regular job has “a very local focus” and he is attracted by the “international focus” of EWB-SWE, “*There was something missing from my professional life*” (Informant 3). Informant 12, whose regular job is also focused on Sweden, stated that she finds projects at EWB-SWE to be more difficult due to their international orientation:

I get more challenged in the project manager role or coordinating role around the projects we have been doing in EWB than in my job because there's so much more perspective to look at. (...) So it's actually sometimes trickier projects than in my daily work. (Informant 12)

Several interviewees pointed out that involvement in EWB-SWE (especially, its international projects) requires a more holistic perspective compared with a more traditional engineering occupation. Thus, the volunteer should look at all aspects of a given problem, not concentrating only on the technical solution. Accordingly, Informant 3, who joined the organization being a student and continues his engagement as a young professional, explained:

Often as an engineer or something, it feels like this quite clear: there's a problem and there's a solution. You often focus on like a technical solution. I think what I've gotten from my involvement in EWB [is that] it's opened my eyes to that complexity. There's a lot more to it than this just the technical solution to a problem. There are all these social aspects and procedural like starting from the right end, identify the problem properly before you try to work on a solution, and having all the stakeholders involved. That's very like specifically related to the international part of the organization, but it can definitely be applied to my work here [in Sweden] as well. (Informant 3)

Similarly, Informant 1 shared that even though he has an extensive experience in project management working in Sweden and in his volunteering he is using the same skills as in his previous work, his volunteer work can be challenging sometimes:

I'm trying to work very much as I did when I was a project manager in my career. Of course, the projects are very different than the ones that I'm used to in my professional work. (...) It's another continent. We are working with Africans. (...) And it's quite another way of communicating. (Informant 1)

As the majority of respondents were involved in EWB-SWE international work, cross-cultural experience and learnings were named as one of the most important gains from their engagement in the organization:

When you have been working abroad, in this more challenging context, and used to living in places where you don't have so good stuff, or water, or a toilet, or whatever. I think, it does something with the person. It's maturity, or perspective, or respect, or something like this. It gives another maybe a set of values or understanding that I think could be useful in every workplace in one sense to bring this. (Informant 14)

...going down to Africa with a team, with real money, with real equipment, with real people. It's so much more risk-taking behavior to do these things. So for me, I learned a lot about myself, and how to organize a team, how to work in Africa. If I'm gonna be honest, there was a lot of cultural learning that I'm still having a lot of use of. (Informant 13)

Meaning of work and difference of beneficiaries of performed assignments is a related topic. Hence, several respondents addressed that at EWB-SWE, as Informant 12 formulated it, *"If we wouldn't do that, maybe no one had done that. And at work, if I haven't done that job someone else would do it"* (Informant 12).

Other respondents shared their reasons for engaging with the organization and how it contrasted with their job experience in terms of need and value for beneficiaries:

I'm using similar skills but it's very different to work with a development program or project and work in an engineering consultancy firm in Stockholm. (...) I was working, I was purifying sometimes storm water, like microgram levels of water purification in Stockholm city. And on the evenings, I was working making sure people had drinking water at all or having a bathroom to go to. So that was very inspiring to really try to use it for people in need. I'm guessing that's the inspiration for many people engaging in Engineers Without Borders because you can, with your skills, contribute to people that are living in underserved communities. (Informant 14)

The types of questions that we're dealing with are quite different from my job and can feel so much more important. (...) I'm sure that's the case for a lot of engineers, but money is very often the driving factor and sort of in the second or fifth place is the environment. (...) And it can feel a

lot more meaningful to know that you're working towards, you know, building something like water tanks or schools for people who wouldn't have access to those if we weren't there. (Informant 2)

Another aspect that attracts skills-based volunteers to projects at EWB-SWE and that is different compared to their daily job is a degree of flexibility and control over assignments.

You can choose more easily, "OK, I take this role, but I don't take that." You can limit your engagement and say, "OK, I don't want to do this". But when you have the work, you have a manager or a team that's telling you how to do this and this and this. (...) Here I'm freer to do it. Not directly, but after a while say, "OK, I will limit. I can do this but not all that." So you can control how much you're doing. (Informant 10)

I'm able to decide what I spend my time on. And I have like a buffet of things that I can choose between to do and I can really sort of pick the things that I'm passionate about that I think I can really contribute to. And I feel that I can't really do that at work to the same extent. This is where I can really focus on the things that I'm passionate about. (Informant 2)

It's [flexibility] something I don't get that much from my current work. I'm normally just sort of I get orders what to do, "We need this", there's not that much collaboration. At my workplace the structure is already in place, this is how things work. There are lots of laws that we have to follow. There's not that much flexibility as at EWB. (Informant 3)

Now I'm more involved in the birth of the ideas than I was as a professional, but it depends on what kind of profession you have. If you have a profession where you should create new ideas every time, then it's the same. But for me, it's a change. I was more reactive so to say when I was a professional and now I'm more active, proactive. (Informant 6)

The respondents addressed exchange and synergy or skills and experiences that they donate by volunteering and gain from volunteering, "*Sometimes I can use my experience from my job projects to the voluntary work. And sometimes it's the reverse*" (Informant 8). Similarly, Informant 12 stated, "*My role in EWB is to have like the helicopter perspective and (...) I also practice coordinating in my regular job and seeing more perspectives of different projects*" (Informant 12).

Informant 2 reflected that project management competencies she donates to the organization become stronger through volunteering:

Almost all of that time that I've put in through the organization is... I'm getting that back as well. I feel like I'm improving my skills in that area and I'm able to apply that in my job as well. So it's sort of a two-way street in that sense. (Informant 2)

Informant 2 also stated that gradually combining volunteering and employment, she started using similar organization tools. Accordingly, the respondent gave examples of calendars, meeting notes, and different folders on Google Drive:

I have more and more started using the same tools or similar tools in my volunteer work as with my professional work. And more and more sort of found the benefits of how we work in a professional environment and how that helps me in my volunteer work. (Informant 2)

### **5.2.6. Managing time, space, and thoughts**

I have asked the informants how they practically incorporate volunteering in their work and life routines and, consequences, how they manage it temporally, spatially, and mentally. EWB-SWE volunteers operate within different projects and areas of expertise and are based in various places, therefore, the majority of volunteer work is performed remotely.

In terms of time, Informant 6 shared that though he is aiming to have a clearer separation between his EWB-SWE engagement and the rest of his life, so far, it was not so easy, *“I’m learning to deal with it now and I can actually close the computer sometimes and just do something else. Because much of the work is behind the computer screen and keyboard”* (Informant 6).

Informant 14, whose current engagement in EWB-SEW is limited due to his regular work obligations, observed that in the past it was very difficult to have separate time dedicated to volunteering. He usually combined his volunteering with his work staying late in the workplace:

I had a very bad organizing and that resulted that I put a lot of time on volunteering basically. I checked my EWB mail every day and I was quite responsive to it also. So that meant it took a lot of time. It was hard to measure the hours I really spent on it. I also used to do that: I was at work and I did my working hours and then I stayed at work one hour or two after work and just did some EWB stuff. Because I just felt, “OK, now I’m doing this at the end of the day, and then I’m going home.” (Informant 14)

More volunteers addressed difficulties managing their time between volunteering and other obligations. Accordingly, Informants 6 and 11 shared their struggles to clearly separate EWB-SWE engagement from the rest of their lives.

That’s the problem. I have been thinking about that maybe I should spend one or two days a week for this or half days instead of now [when] it’s going around the clock, really. I’m trying to be very quick at responding to reactions and questions. And I know everyone is not, and if I delay it even

more, then the result will come even later. So, I'm trying to respond fast. Which means that it's always something. I have a long list that's constantly ongoing and I'm not that disciplined that I could just use one or two days a week. It's almost every day. I try to keep Sundays free. It's something. (Informant 6)

I have quite a hard time allocating any time apart from meetings. So I usually just take it in between, breaks or whatever at work or when I get home when I have time. So, it's quite hard to do structure in larger projects, I would say. Most time goes to answering emails. Like for most people, I guess. (Informant 11)

On the other hand, Informants 12 and 7 explained that their email management is rather well-structured.

I'm not the kind that as soon as I see an email I answer it. Because it gets too stressful. I will not manage to do it that way. I will not prefer to do it that way. So I try to have it one or two times a week I answer emails. And between those spots, I don't answer because otherwise, I will answer emails every day, because I get emails every day. (Informant 12)

I'm a project manager, so that's my job to be structured because I have to deal with many different types of projects and different types of meetings all the time. So I have to be organized. I mean I have a special email box for my EWB emails so it's easy to see if anything comes in the inbox, to the EWB directory. (Informant 7)

Informants 1 and 2 structure some aspects of their volunteering but not others.

I'm trying to set aside the Mondays for the [volunteer] work. So I don't get disturbed during the week, but you can't avoid meetings like in the evening. EWB professionals [i.e., working volunteers] often can't have a meeting during the day. (...) I would say every week there are one or two meetings in the evening. So it might be a Tuesday evening, a Thursday evening, or whenever. Sometimes also during the weekends. (Informant 1)

I have certain parts [of my volunteering] that are very scheduled. I would say that I generally spend about two to three hours a week. Sometimes more, sometimes less but on average around there. (...) And a lot of my time goes towards sort of meetings that are quite regular. (...) I have certain sets of meetings every month. And beyond that, I would say my work maybe varies more the rest of the time. I would sometimes spend a lot of time on emails or planning for the activities in my group, for instance. (Informant 2)

All employed respondents stated that their regular workplace has possibilities for flexible working hours.

Sometimes I have these two o'clock meetings or four o'clock meetings. (...) In other organizations, you need to wait until 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon to have any external meetings. But for me it's OK, we're a bit more flexible. (Informant 8)

I was lucky to have a very flexible job. So if I said, "Oh, now I took one hour at 10:00 o'clock in the morning to do some EWB stuff", I just stayed one hour later and did my design of what I was

doing or whatever. So that was a good type of job. (...) I even did a deal with my boss during a salary discussion. I said, "Maybe I can get a few hours (...) every month to put in EWB?" (...) My boss OKed to do it. (Informant 14)

Informant 2 explained that her paid work tasks are very similar to her volunteer work. However, so far her workplace does not offer any types of volunteering schemes or programs for employees that would allow her to dedicate some time during office hours to EWB-SWE assignments:

I guess it's also a bit hard to do this type of [volunteer] work because it's very similar to the [paid] work that I'm doing, so it's almost like I'm always sort of working overtime. Since I can't work [volunteer] during my normal hours and that's a little bit of a downside, I think. And I think that's why a lot of people maybe don't do this [volunteer] work. (Informant 2)

The respondents also addressed the mental pressure of volunteer work. Accordingly, talking about the time of his average weekly volunteer engagement, Informant 3 reflected, "*Three to four hours a week. And then a lot of thinking time in between, just spins in your head.*" (Informant 3). He further explained:

I think not just because of the time it takes, but like because of that mental energy. (...) Yeah, but that's also what I like about it. It is like this kind of mental exercise to figure out how could this work. (Informant 3)

Informant 14 expressed his concern that it is often difficult to find a balance of how much time and energy one should spend on volunteer work. The respondent stressed that it is not an issue for EWB-SWE specifically, but for volunteering in general:

I think it's hard to find the limitations of how much to engage. I think it's very easy to just engage too much as a volunteer in general. If you have that type of mindset that I have. You sometimes spend maybe too much time than you shouldn't, and it's better to take a few hours off instead of just volunteer work. (...) It's more about finding balance in life. I think that's always tricky, that's a challenge. (Informant 14)

Similarly, Informant 10 stated that employed volunteers have to balance priorities combining work and volunteering, they should set limits for their engagement in order to avoid too much pressure:

If you have work (...) then the work is first because there I'm paid (...) so in that way, the work has a higher priority. But then, you have to do what you can do, to mix it together. But it can, of course, be a problem if you take too much and don't say "No" because then you can get too much stress. So you have to control. How much are you doing? How much are you taking? (Informant 10)



### 5.3. Summary

The section above presents and describes empirical findings obtained through participatory observation and interviews. The sub-section on observation and reflections highlights the organization's focus on professionalization concerning strategic planning, efficiency, and accountability. The findings collected during interviews with the organization's skills-based volunteers are compiled into six themes and further sub-themes. Below, Figure 2 illustrates an overview of these themes.

#	Theme	Sub-themes
1	Changes towards professionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Organizational growth</li> <li>● Improved structure</li> <li>● Strategic direction</li> <li>● Formalized documentation processes</li> <li>● Paid employees</li> <li>● A share of skilled volunteers</li> </ul>
2	Reasons for professionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stakeholder expectations and external pressure</li> <li>● Safety</li> <li>● Seeing results</li> <li>● More interesting volunteer work</li> </ul>
3	Challenges for professionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unserious attitude</li> <li>- Lack of knowledge</li> <li>- Short-term thinking</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Working with other volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not following through on commitments</li> <li>- High turnover</li> <li>- Emails without response</li> <li>- Inefficient meetings</li> <li>- Short-term thinking</li> <li>- Insufficient level of analysis</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4	Risks and concerns of over professionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Professionalization is time-consuming</li> <li>● Bureaucratization</li> <li>● Commercialization and marketization of NPOs</li> </ul>
5	Regular job versus skills-based volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The international focus of the organization</li> <li>● Need and value for beneficiaries</li> <li>● Flexibility and control over assignments</li> <li>● Synergy or skills</li> </ul>
6	Managing time, space, and thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Struggles/successes to separate work/life and volunteering</li> <li>● Flexible working hours</li> <li>● The mental pressure of volunteer work</li> <li>● Searching for balance</li> </ul>

Figure 2. An overview of the interview findings

## 6. Discussion

*This section reflects on the above described empirical findings and draws upon academic literature presented in the previous research section as well as the boundary work theory presented in the theoretical framework section. The research questions of this study are “How do skills-based volunteers react to the rise of NPO’s professionalization?” and “How do skills-based volunteers navigate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism?” The answers to these two questions are discussed and interpreted below.*

---

### 6.1. Reaction to the rise of the NPO’s professionalization

The finding of this thesis obtained through interviews and participatory observation demonstrate that the nonprofit organization where the study’s informants volunteer is indeed undergoing a process of professionalization. The EWB-SWE’s change towards professionalization generally aligns with the description of NPOs professionalization available in previous literature, in particular with Marberg, Korzilius, and van Kranenburg’s (2019, p. 116) definition.

Accordingly, it is evident that the organization increased its focus on accountability (by e.g., adoption of annual reports, hiring a full-time communication employee); strategic orientation (e.g., annual planning, development of Strategy 2023-2027); structuring its working processes (e.g., in international projects with the introduction of competence groups, partnership assessments, and project evaluations); compiling various documentation (e.g., project guidelines, The Handbook for International Projects); and using business tools (e.g., SWOT analysis).

A type of professionalization that seems to be most prevalent in the organization is rationalization. The focus on rationalization was expressed by a number of informants referring to efficiency, quality enhancements, and greater results: “I think that we have to continue [working professionally] because then we can be more efficient” (Informant 10). “I believe that we have a good quality, high standard and it’s improving” (Informant 7). “Often you get better output if you work in a professional manner” (Informant 1). The focus on efficiency is also visible in the description of the main strategic aim for the next five years.

The strategic aim to ensure that money and time “are used as efficient as possible and for the greatest possible benefit of those impacted by our work” also suggests pursuing a high social

return on investment and measuring the cost-benefit ratio between inputs and outputs (Hvenmark, 2016, p. 2846). Cost-benefit analysis is named by McAllum (2018, p. 539) as one of the markers of nonprofit marketization, i.e., the influence of the values and logic of the marketplace. Another marker of marketization is the organization's attention to communication and marketing (Sandberg, Elliott, & Petche, 2020). Finally, the organization demonstrates tendencies towards bureaucratization. Informant 11 stated that the organization has become "a lot more bureaucratic." The processes of formalizing and standardizing various documentation are evident. As Informant 1 put it, in order to "talk in the same language", the organization "should work in a similar way in all the projects."

It is important to note that one interviewee's response regarding the NPO's shift towards professionalization differed from the rest of the participants. Accordingly, Informant 11 stated that "we want to make it look like we are professional", however, it sometimes results in "things that we never look at and never implement". This suggests that the organization's legitimation efforts as well as its effort to show its legitimacy might be greater than its actual established legitimacy (Meyer, Buber & Aghamanoukjan, 2013). In other words, this finding might indicate a possibility of decoupling, i.e., the organization claims to adapt to expectations of professionalization, yet it continues with its activities in the same way as before (Åberg, 2013, p. 542).

Some respondents voiced concern regarding the bureaucratization of the organization, "If it becomes too bureaucratic, that's a risk" (Informant 7). In particular, the interviewees stated that administration work might take too much of the volunteer's time, while "to be buried in administrative work is probably never something you want when you work as a volunteer" (Informant 12). Another informant pointed out that if administration work takes one-two hour of a 40-hours working week, it is not a problem. However, if a volunteer dedicates five hours and one-two hours spent to supporting tasks, that can be an issue.

At the same time, a couple of respondents explained that administration work is inevitable for running a formal NPO as well as for performing engineering tasks. Yet, the respondents stressed a need to evaluate carefully each instance of doing administrative work and the reasons behind it in order to "strike that balance". While generally bureaucratic and collectivist practices promote different values, the research shows that they also can complement each other. Thus, some degree of bureaucratization is needed to ensure sufficient structures to support volunteers' efforts and avoid "underorganizing" (Chen, Lune & Queen,

2013, p. 864). As Informant 10 formulated it, “If you don’t work in a professional way, there is a risk that you kill the enthusiasm.” At the same time, mixing bureaucratic and collectivist practices enables to avoid “overorganizing” and excessive coercive control and rigidity in an organization (Chen, Lune & Queen, 2013, p. 864). As Informant 7 expressed this risk, “You get stuck in structures and you can’t improvise.”

The reasons for the NPO’s professionalization provided by volunteers align with the previous literature. In particular, the informants’ concerns regarding safety and health align with principal demands for engineering professions (Douglas, Papadopoulos & Boutelle, 2010, p. 7). Moreover, according to the requirements for future engineers provided by Litchfield and Javernick-Will (2014, p. 3), high ethical standards are equal to professionalism. Thus, the respondents’ concerns derive from their occupational professionalism, connected to engineering codes of ethics (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 155).

The respondents also explained that the organization should professionalize because “it is expected from us” (Informant 14). The expectation of a variety of stakeholders were mentioned such as donors, collaborators, corporate partners, and partner organizations in beneficiary countries. Hence, professionalization is needed to gain their trust, to show that the organization is reliable, thus earning “a label”, i.e., membership in quality control organizations, whereas unprofessionalism might harm the organization’s “brand” and reputation. According to institutionalist explanations of nonprofit professionalization causes, the NPO’s interactions with its environment influence processes of isomorphism and adoption of business-like practices (Hersberger-Langloh, Stühlinger & von Schnurbein, 2021).

One example of isomorphism recalled by Informant 13 was the mimetic adoption of other NPOs’ practices, which he described as “going down this rabbit hole of NGOs being in the time.” The respondent characterized EWB-SWE as an organization with “less focus on fluff and more focus on doing things,” yet, the organization engaged in those activities because they “were supposed to have it.”

Overall, the findings of the present study demonstrate that skills-based volunteers react to the rise of the NPO’s professionalization positively. Accordingly, the informants stated that “we have to be more professional” and when professionalizing the organization “we are going the right way.” This finding contradicts a body of previous literature that argues that volunteers resist professionalization (e.g., Ronel, 2006; Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011). At the same time, this

finding aligns with an earlier finding in Steimel's (2018, p. 139) study, "Overwhelmingly, the skills-based volunteers I interviewed enjoyed professional volunteer work (work that engaged the same skills as their profession/career) in part because it allowed them a space to feel "professional" in their volunteer work."

To interpret this finding, I adopt a boundary work theory approach. Two social domains, "volunteerism" (with the role of a volunteer) and "professionalism" (with the role of a working professional) can be conceptualized as arrayed on the integration-segmentation continuum (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth et al., 2000). Based on the findings in the previous section of the thesis, the informants in this study are more prone to integration than segmentation when the boundaries between two realms are rather permeable (thin/weak) with "professionalism" influencing "volunteerism".

Accordingly, the informants, working professionals, who volunteer with their job-related skills, see volunteering as an activity that complements their current or previous (in the case of retirees) careers. As one of the interviewees stated, "There was something missing from my professional life" (Informant 3). Hence, volunteer engagement often gives the respondents more challenging tasks compared to their employment in Sweden, especially those who are involved in international projects because "there's so much more perspective to look at" (Informant 12). The ability to go beyond technical solutions to a given problem and approach complex challenges of the globalized world is considered to be one of the key requirements of engineering professionalism today (Douglas, Papadopoulos & Boutelle, 2010, p. 6).

Moreover, often volunteering complements the informants' regular work in terms of a sense of significance and value for beneficiaries. As one informant explained, "The types of questions that we're dealing with are quite different from my job and can feel so much more important" (Informant 2). Similarly, another informant confirmed, "...you can, with your skills, contribute to people that are living in underserved communities" (Informant 14). This aligns with the purpose of humanitarian engineering i.e., "the application of engineering knowledge and skills to communities in need" (Leydens & Lucena, 2006, p. 1), which is the key principle of EWB-SWE work (Engineers Without Borders Sweden, 2021, p. 6). Finally, compared to their regular jobs, volunteering provides the respondents with more flexibility and choice over their assignments, "I have like a buffet of things that I can choose" (Informant 2).

All study informants mentioned that their employers allow for flexible working hours. At the same time, their volunteer work has a flexible schedule as well and is performed remotely. Hence, the boundaries between volunteerism and professionalism are not only permeable but also flexible. In addition to boundary permeability and boundary flexibility, role identity contrast defines whether a given pair of roles is segmented or integrated (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 475). The more flexible and permeable the boundaries, the more likely that role identities will influence one another and have lower role contrast. Integrated roles tend to have more similarities between the context that inform each role and between specific values, norms, and interaction styles that constitute each role identity (ibid., p. 476).

The skills-based volunteers in this study generally have low identity contrast between their roles as working professionals and volunteers. Apart from the permeability and flexibility of their boundaries between roles, it can be explained by the nature of their volunteering. Hence, the informants use work-related (occupational and/or organizational) skills when volunteering, consequently, those skills often become central features of their roles. To some extent, the respondents tend to see their volunteering as an extension of their current or previous work and, therefore, approach it similarly. When contrast between role identities is low, the magnitude of tensions and transitions between roles will be low as well (ibid., p. 476). This might be one of the reasons the volunteers perceive the professionalization of the nonprofit organization they are involved in positively.

Role identification, situational strength, and culture are identified by Ashforth et al. (2000) as three factors that influence boundary work. The more an individual identifies with a particular role, the bigger the possibility that this role will influence other roles in this person's life (ibid., p. 483). The respondents of this study are likely to identify themselves with their role as working professionals to a large extent. For example, one of the interviewees stressed, "I'm a project manager, so that's my job to be structured" (Informant 7). Consequently, this professionalism spills over to their role as skills-based volunteers.

My findings also show that the situational strength or context of the nonprofit the informants volunteer for is rather favoring professionalization. In other words, in the context of EWB-SWE, it is appropriate to strive for both organizational and occupational professionalism. The last factor Ashforth et al. (2000) look at is the culture of the society individuals come from. All the interviewees in this study come from Sweden. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Swedish culture has low uncertainty avoidance

(29/100), low power distance (31/100), and low masculinity (5/100) (Hofstede Insights, 2019), and individuals who share these values tend to integrate roles (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 485). Hence, apart from role identification and situational strength, the culture of the country the study informants come from might also influence their integration of roles as working professionals and skills-based volunteers, as well as their perception of nonprofit professionalization.

Boundary work theory states that high integration eases transitioning between roles and, therefore, causes boundary-blurring. Boundary blurring, in turn, often leads to confusion regarding which role identity to enact (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 481). The informants of this study identified boundary blurring between volunteerism and professionalism through both ways of working (“I’m trying to work very much as I did when I was a project manager in my career” (Informant 1); “I have more and more started using the same tools or similar tools in my volunteer work as with my professional work” (Informant 2) as well as through the nature of skills-based assignments (“...it’s very similar to the [paid] work that I’m doing, so it’s almost like I’m always sort of working overtime” (Informant 2). Therefore, I assume that increased professionalization of nonprofits that rely on skills-based volunteers facilitates boundary blurring between volunteers’ paid work and their volunteer work.

## **6.2. Navigating possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism**

As the analysis in the previous subsection shows, overall, the informants’ roles as skills-based volunteers and professionals are rather integrated and their individual boundaries tend to be blurred. Yet, on a day-to-day level, the informants choose both integration and segmentation strategies to negotiate boundaries between their paid work and volunteering. Accordingly, some volunteers shared that they have decided on particular days to work on volunteer tasks (“I’m trying to set aside the Mondays for the [volunteer] work” (Informant 1), allocated times to check emails (“...one or two times a week I answer emails” (Informant 12), and separate organization tools (“I have a special email box for my EWB emails” (Informant 7). However, other interviewees expressed that they often do not have a clear separation between volunteering and the rest of their lives (“I’m not that disciplined that I could just use one or two days a week” (Informant 6). In particular, one volunteer (Informant 14) told me that he used to have a habit of staying in his office after regular work and performing volunteer tasks, thus clustering and integrating work and volunteering in the same space.

The informants sometimes expressed regret about this lack of division (“I have quite a hard time allocating any time apart from meetings” (Informant 11) and stated that “...it’s very easy to just engage too much as a volunteer in general” (Informant 14). At the same time, the volunteers stated that “...you have to control. How much are you doing? How much are you taking?” (Informant 10). Considering that volunteers have flexible working schedules both at their workplaces and at EWB-SWE, as well as they perform volunteering assignments remotely, in general, they have a rather high degree of control of their day-to-day volunteering. Thus, as argued by Cohen et al. (2009) both conscious strategies to integrate or separate are likely to give the volunteers a sense of control, personal agency, and maintaining order.

Discussing the first research question in the subsection above, I mostly focused on nonprofit professionalization, i.e., increasing organizational professionalism. Yet, when the study informants reflected upon professionalization, they repeatedly mentioned occupational professionalism in the organization. Moreover, improved occupational professionalism is stated as one of the objectives in the organizational strategy for the next five years, “Further increase our level of professionalism within project management, engineering, and development cooperation” (EWB-SWE Strategy 2023-2027).

While talking about occupational professionalism, the informants referred to a share of working/retired professionals, indicating that the more “highly ranked and experienced” volunteers engage in the organization, the more professional organization will be. Thus, one of the interviewees stated, “I would like to believe that it’s [the organization] got more professional (...) because there are many committed and good, highly ranked, and experienced people that I have met in the organization” (Informant 7). As one of the informants explained, the proportion of working professionals increased over the years, “When I started, it was merely based on amateurs. I wouldn’t say bad knowledge, but a low level of knowledge from students trying to find solutions.” (Informant 4). Still, last few years this ratio stabilized with approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  of all volunteers being employed and retired professionals and  $\frac{2}{3}$  – being university students.

My findings show that working and retired skills-based volunteers in this study positively react to the rise of nonprofit professionalization, however, they perceive student volunteers as



a likely barrier to this professionalization. Though some informants expressed general frustrations related to interactions with other individual volunteers in the organization, students were addressed specifically as a group of volunteers. Accountingly, the informants referred to issues of student's lack of specific knowledge ("...it showed that the students with a good spirit didn't have education in the area where they were volunteering" (Informant 5), their every so often unserious attitude ("It's not just a funny school project. Sometimes students become unserious, I think" (Informant 14), and short-term thinking due to short-term volunteer commitments ("...kind of larger organizational thinking and planning does not exist within the head of a student who just wants to do something for one semester" (Informant 13).

Thus, the informant's overall assumption is that students lack occupational professionalism and also resist organizational professionalism ("students kind of want to be a bit free and try stuff" (Informant 11). At the same time, students might have more time to invest in volunteering compared to working professionals ("students are the ones with the most time" (Informant 11). Recognizing students as a possible obstacle to the professionalization of the organization, one informant suggested: "to be a little bit more flexible and not require too many standards and professionalism" (Informant 1). Whereas another respondent pointed out that professionalization is "a way to support our students' groups to learn more about how a company works" (Informant 10), i.e., NPO engagement can be an opportunity to introduce students to working life.

One way of analyzing this finding is through the lens of boundary theory looking at organizational identity interfaces. The finding suggests that organizational identity in EWB-SWE might be different for working and retired volunteers compared to student volunteers. Hence, working and retired volunteers in this study strive for professionalization but they perceive that students do not share the same aspirations. On the contrary, they perceive that students resist professionalization. Therefore, it might be similar to the case of dual organizational identity in Kreutzer and Jäger's (2011) study that indicated intra-organizational tensions between volunteer identity (represented by volunteers) and professional identity (represented by paid employees). However, unlike Kreutzer and Jäger's (2011) paper, in the present study not only paid staff but skills-based volunteers support

nonprofit professionalization. Whereas opinions of student volunteers are beyond the scope of this study and are known only through experiences of working and retired volunteers.

As the organizational volunteer identity (presumably represented by student volunteers) tends to be too vast, the informants perceive it as an intrusion that spills over and threatens the organizational professional identity (represented by the informants) (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1328). Previous studies describe such cases as a low level of control that is experienced as a disorder (Cohen et al., 2009). As a response to this conflictual boundary dynamic within (dual) organizational identity, the informants might erect boundaries between them and student volunteers, thus, underlying differences between them and performing demarcation work. As described by Van Bochove et al. (2018), professionals (in their study – paid staff, in this study – skills-based volunteers) tend to refer to differences between them and volunteers (here, student volunteers) in terms of skills and knowledge, status and authority, as well as predictability and reliability. It is possible to speculate that welcoming work (ibid., p. 407) is performed as well with those student volunteers whom the informants find competent and trustworthy. Though plausible, it is purely an assumption that lacks evidence.

From the beginning of its history, EWB-SWE primarily consisted of student volunteers. With growth and professionalization, the organization might currently experience conflict over its identity change (Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011), i.e., tensions between its volunteer and professional identity. In Kreutzer and Jäger's (2011) study accentuating parts of professional identity over the volunteer identity resulted in declining in volunteers' motivation and organizational commitment. Hence, if perceptions of EWB-SWE working and retired volunteers regarding students who resist professionalization are accurate and if the organization will continue professionalizing its operation, they might start losing student volunteers. Previous research discussed different strategies for dealing with dual organizational identities such as “eliminating some identities, exploiting their advantages through compartmentalization or integration, tolerating and enduring the problems of multiple identities, finding a higher level (meta)identity that successfully integrates existing identities, creating an entirely new identity, and downplaying the problems and allowing one or more identities to slowly decay” (ibid., p. 656). From a boundary work perspective, embracing different aspects of identities might lead to more stable boundaries and result in balance (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1331).

## **7. Conclusions**

This ethnographic case study explored how skills-based volunteers react to the rise of NPOs' professionalization and how they navigate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism. Volunteers' reaction to professionalization depends on organizational context and the nature of volunteer work involved (McAllum, 2018, p. 542). The informants in the study perform skills-based tasks and work-related assignments in the nonprofit organization that favors professionalism which is reflected in its development and organizational practices. Accordingly, rationalization, marketization, and bureaucratization are all present in the organization to various extents. The findings and further analysis of this study indicate that skills-based volunteers react to the rise of nonprofit professionalization positively. Generally, the informants are able to transfer their professional know-how (both occupational and organizational professionalism) to the volunteer context. From a boundary theory perspective, the volunteers tend to integrate their roles as professionals and volunteers, which is influenced by permeable and flexible boundaries and low identity contrast (Ashforth et al., 2000). Moreover, role identification as working professionals, organizational context in favor of professionalism, and the culture of Swedish society affect boundary blurring (ibid).

Daily, the volunteers choose tactics of integration as well as separation to negotiate possible tensions between professionalism and volunteerism, and it is likely that both tactics provide them with a sense of control (Cohen et al., 2009). However, on the level of the organization the informants recognize a barrier to professionalize the organization. As over half of all organizational volunteers are students, the informants are concerned that students are sometimes unequipped with sufficient occupational competencies and are unwilling to perform volunteer work in a professional manner. The finding suggests a dual organizational identity with the volunteer identity of students threatening the professional identity of working and retired professionals. The informants might navigate these tensions by performing demarcation work i.e., highlighting differences between themselves and student volunteers (Van Bochove et al., 2018).

### **7.1. Theoretical contributions and practical implications**

The thesis contributes to existing research on the professionalization of the nonprofit sector as well as studies on skills-based volunteering. The topic of skills-based volunteering is understudied and this thesis contributes to filling this gap. First, contrary to the previous

research that argued that volunteers do not want to be professionals and resist NPO's professionalization, this study indicate that it might be different for skills-based volunteers. Accordingly, skills-based volunteers in this study embrace professionalization which, in turn, facilitates boundary blurring between volunteerism and professionalism on individual level. Second, the study suggests that skills-based volunteers perceive student volunteers as an obstacle to professionalization. Hence, they negotiate the tensions between professionalism and volunteerism on the organizational level, by erecting boundaries and performing demarcation work.

The study's findings also have implications for volunteer management practices. Thus, the study offers insights for nonprofit organizations that wish to professionalize their operations while relying on skills-based volunteers. In particular, if the skills-based volunteer workforce in the organization is mixed (e.g., working professionals, retirees, and students), they might experience organizational identity differently, therefore, special considerations might be needed to balance volunteerism and professionalization. However, the data collected by this study is inefficient to conclude whether the organization in which the study informants engage indeed has double identity as interviewing students was beyond the scope of this study.

## **7.2. Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The study has various limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, the study was done with skills-based volunteers engaging in a fairly unique organization. Engineers Without Borders around the world operate differently and have different degrees of reliance on skills-based volunteers. The study findings could be tested in those EWBs (or similar organizations) that have an equivalent level of dependency on skills-based volunteers and comparable professionalization paths. The unit of analysis included only working and retired volunteers, however, to confirm (or contradict) and further explore findings for the second research question, more research is required. Thus, future empirical studies might examine how EWB-SWE student volunteers react to its professionalization to understand whether they resist the professionalization as it appears to employed and retired volunteers and, therefore, whether EWB-SWE has a dual organizational identity. If students indeed resist professionalization, additional investigations are needed to analyze how tensions between them and working volunteers are negotiated.

Second, as a qualitative ethnographic case study, the thesis cannot provide any possibility for statistical generalization. Moreover, due to the specific context of the organization and the fact that male volunteers and volunteers that engage in international projects are overrepresented in the study sample, analytical generalization should be made cautiously. To better understand skills-based volunteers' reaction to professionalization, future studies should include volunteers involved in a wide range of organizational settings (nonprofit, for-profit, public, and social enterprise) and performing a broad spectrum of tasks. In particular, it could be valuable to explore how NPOs' professionalization is perceived by skills-based volunteers that perform tasks requiring specialized education at the vocational rather than university level (e.g., carpenters, seamsters, mechanics).

Finally, the present study viewed nonprofit professionalization in relation to for-profit full-time context and business-like practices and that is how it is commonly viewed. However, I would like to join Ganesh and McAllum (2012, p. 156) and McAllum (2018, p. 559) in their call for future studies that would explore what a potential hybridized "nonprofit" kind of professionalism would look like and, then, what implications of professionalism in a volunteering context would be.

## 8. References

- Åberg, P. (2013). Managing expectations, demands and myths: Swedish study associations caught between civil society, the state and the market. *Voluntas*, 24, 537–558.
- Akemu, O. & Abdelnour, S. (2020). Confronting the digital: Doing ethnography in modern organizational settings. *Organizational Research Methods*, 23(2), 296-321.
- Ashforth, B.E., Kreiner, G.E. & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25, 472–91.
- Beaton, E.E. (2021). Ethnography: Tales of the nonprofit field. *Voluntas*.
- Booth, J. E., Park, K. W. & Glomb, T. M. (2009). Employer-supported volunteering benefits: Gift exchange among employers, employees, and volunteer organizations. *Human Resource Management*, 48(2), 227–249.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Chen, K.K., Lune, H., & Queen, E.L. (2013). How values shape and are shaped by nonprofit and voluntary organizations: The current state of the field. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 42(5), 856-885.
- Ciuk, S., Koning, J. & Kostera, M. (2018). Organizational Ethnographies. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods: History and Traditions* (pp.270–285). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., Ridge, R. D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A. A., Haugen, J. & Miene, P. (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1516-1530.
- Cnaan, R.A., Handy, F. & Wadsworth, M. (1996). Defining who is a volunteer: Conceptual and empirical considerations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 25(3), 364-383.
- Cruz, D. & Meisenbach, R. (2018). Expanding role boundary management theory: How volunteering highlights contextually shifting strategies and collapsing work-life role boundaries. *Human Relations*, 71(2), 182 –205.
- Cohen, L., Duberley, J. & Musson, G. (2009). Work-life balance? An autoethnographic exploration of everyday home-work dynamics. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 18(3), 229–241.
- Côté-Boileau, E., Gaboury, I., Breton, M. & Denis, J-L. (2020). Organizational ethnographic case studies: Toward a new generation in-depth qualitative methodology for health care research? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–17.

Dempsey-Brench, K. & Shantz, A. (2021). Skills-based volunteering: A systematic literature review of the intersection of skills and employee volunteering. *Human Resource Management Review* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2021.100874>

Doctors Without Borders (2022) Available from <https://lakareutangranser.se/en/who-we-are> [Accessed 29th June 2022]

Douglas, D., Papadopoulos, G. & Boutelle, J. (2010). *Citizen Engineer: A Handbook for Socially Responsible Engineering*. Prentice-Hall, One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River.

Dumont, G. (2022). Immersion in organizational ethnography: Four methodological requirements to immerse oneself in the field. *Organizational Research Methods*, 1(18), 1-18.

Dutta, U. (2014). Critical Ethnography. In: *Qualitative Methodology: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Building theory from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550.

Engineers Without Borders Sweden (2021). *Empowering communities in challenging times: Annual report 2020*. Available from <https://www.ewb-swe.org/annual-reports> [Accessed 31st May 2022]

Engineers Without Borders Sweden (2022a). *Strengthening capacity for a sustainable future: Annual report 2021*. Available from <https://www.ewb-swe.org/annual-reports> [Accessed 31st May 2022]

Engineers Without Borders Sweden (2022b). Official website [Internet] Available from <https://www.ewb-swe.org/> [Accessed 31st May 2022]

Engward, H., Goldspink, S., Iancu, M., Kersey, T. & Wood, A. (2022). Togetherness in separation: Practical considerations for doing remote qualitative interviews ethically. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 1–9.

Evetts, J. (2006). The sociology of professional groups. *Current Sociology*, 54(1), 133–143.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

Gaggiotti, H., Kostera, M. & Krzyworzeka, P. (2017). More than a method? Organisational ethnography as a way of imagining the social. *Culture and Organization*, 23(5), 325-340.

Ganesh, S. & McAllum, K. (2012). Volunteering and professionalization: Trends in tension? *Management Communication Quarterly*, 26(1), 152–158.

Helgesson, C.I. (2006). Engineers without borders and their role in humanitarian relief. *IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Magazine*, 25(3), 32-35.

Hersberger-Langloh, S.E., Stühlinger, S. & von Schnurbein, G. (2021). Institutional isomorphism and nonprofit managerialism: For better or worse? *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 31, 461–480.

Hofstede Insights (2019). *Sweden - Hofstede Insights*. [Internet] Hofstede Insights. Available from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/sweden/> [Accessed 1st July 2022]

Hvenmark, J. (2016). Ideology, practice, and process? A review of the concept of managerialism in civil society studies. *Voluntas*, 27, 2833–2859.

Hwang, H. & Powell, W. W. (2009). The rationalization of charity: The influences of professionalism in the nonprofit sector. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54, 268-298.

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A-M., Johnson, M. & Kangasniemi, M. (2016) Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954–2965.

Keevers, L., Treleaven, L., Sykes, C. & Darcy, M. (2012). Made to measure: Taming practices with results-based accountability. *Organization Studies*, 33, 97-120.

King, N. & Brooks, J. (2018). Thematic Analysis in Organisational Research. In Cassell, C., Cunliffe, A.L. & Grandy, G. (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods: Methods and Challenges* (pp. 219–236). London: Sage Publications.

Kirkebak, A. & Gosovic, J. (2020). Gifts, reciprocity and ethically sound ethnographic research: a reflexive framework. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 9(1), 66-79.

Kisfalvi, V. (2006). Subjectivity and emotions as sources of insight in an ethnographic case study: A tale of the field. *M@n@gement*, 9(3), 117-135.

Kreiner, G.E., Hollensbe, E.C. & Sheep, M.L. (2006). On the edge of identity: Boundary dynamics at the interface of individual and organizational identities. *Human Relations*, 59(10), 1315–134.

Kreutzer, K., & Jäger, U. (2011). Volunteering versus managerialism: Conflict over organizational identity in voluntary associations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 40, 634-661.

Leydens, J.A. & Lucena, J.C (2006). *The Problem of Knowledge in Incorporating Humanitarian Ethics in Engineering Education: Barriers and Opportunities*. Paper presented at the 36th Annual Frontiers in Education Conference, San Diego, CA.

Litchfield, K. & Javernick-Will, A. (2014). Investigating gains from EWB-USA involvement. *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice*, 140(1), 1-9.

Litchfield, K. & Javernick-Will, A. (2015). “I am an engineer AND”: A mixed methods study of socially engaged engineers. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 104(4), 393–416.



Läkare utan gränser (2022). *Vanliga frågor om att jobba utomlands*. Available from <https://lakareutangranser.se/jobba-med-oss/vanliga-fragor-faltarbete> [Accessed 13th June 2022].

MacMillan, K. & Koenig, T. (2004). The wow factor: Preconceptions and expectations for data analysis software in qualitative research. *Social Science Computer Review*, 22(2), 179-186.

Maier, F., Meyer, M. & Steinbereithner, M. (2016). Nonprofit organizations becoming business-like: A systematic review. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(1), 64–86.

Marberg, A., Korzilius, H. & van Kranenburg, H. (2019). What is in a theme? Professionalization in nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations research. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 30, 113–131.

McAllum, K. (2018). Volunteers as boundary workers: Negotiating tensions between volunteerism and professionalism in nonprofit organizations. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 32(4), 534–564.

McClements, D. (2020). Engineers Without Borders International. New Engineer. Available from <https://newengineer.com/blog/engineers-without-borders-international-1351938> [Accessed 13th May 2022].

Meyer, M., Buber, R. & Aghamanoukjan, A. (2013). In search of legitimacy: Managerialism and legitimation in civil society organizations. *Voluntas*, 24, 167–193.

Niedbalski, J. & Ślęzak, I. (2022). Encounters with CAQDAS: Advice for beginner users of computer software for qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, 27(4), 1114 - 1132.

Nippert-Eng, C. (1996). Calendars and keys: The classification of “home” and “work”. *Sociological Forum*, 11(3), 563-582.

Noordegraaf, M. (2007). From “pure” to “hybrid” professionalism: Present-day professionalism in ambiguous public domains. *Administration and Society*, 39(6), 761–785.

Nowell L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. & Moules, N.J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1-13.

Passino, K.M. (2009). Educating the humanitarian engineer. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 15(4), 577-600.

Peiffer, M., Villotti, P., Vantilborg, T. & Desmette, D. (2020). Stereotypes of volunteers and nonprofit organizations' professionalization: A two-study article. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 31, 355–372.

Qu, S.Q. & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(3), 238-264.

Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M.A., Sabir, S.S. & Waseem, A. (2019). Case study method: A step-by-step guide for business researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1–13.

Reporters Without Borders (2022). Available from <https://rsf.org/en> [Accessed 29th June 2022]

Robinson, O.C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), 25-41.

Ronel, N. (2006). When good overcomes bad: The impact of volunteers on those they help. *Human Relations*, 59, 1133-1153.

Rulifson, G. & Bielefeldt, A.B. (2019). Evolution of students' varied conceptualizations about socially responsible engineering: A four year longitudinal study. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 25(3), 939-974.

Rönkä, A., Sevõn, E., Malinen, K. & Salonen, E. (2014). An examination of nonresponse in a study on daily family life: I do not have time to participate, but I can tell you something about our life. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 17(3), 197-214.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (3rd ed.) SAGE.

Sandberg, B., Elliott, E. & Petche, S. (2020). Investigating the marketization of the nonprofit sector: A comparative case study of two nonprofit organizations. *Voluntas*, 31, 494–510.

Shantz, A. & Dempsey-Brench, K. (2021). How volunteerism enhances workplace skills. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 62(4), 1–6.

Steimel, S. (2018). Skills-based volunteering as both work and not work: A tension-centered examination of constructions of “volunteer”. *Voluntas*, 29, 133–143.

Stewart, A. (2014). Case Study. *Qualitative Methodology: A Practical Guide* (pp.145–160). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Studer, S. (2016). Volunteer management: Responding to the uniqueness of volunteers. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(4), 688–714.

Södertörn University (2022). *Guidelines for Students Who Process Personal Data at Södertörn University*. Available from <https://www.sh.se/download/18.7342a2981754f1814411f056/1604054623934/GDPR%20Student%20Essays.pdf> [Accessed 26th June 2022]

Tracy, S.J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851.

Turner, D.W. (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754-760.

- Valeau, P.J. (2015). Stages and pathways of development of nonprofit organizations: An integrative model. *Voluntas*, 26, 1894–1919.
- Van Bochove, M., Tonkens, E., Verplanke, L. & Roggeveen, S. (2018). Reconstructing the professional domain: Boundary work of professionals and volunteers in the context of social service reform. *Current Sociology*, 66(3), 392–411.
- Van Maanen, J. (2006). Ethnography then and now. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 1(1), 13-21.
- Van Maanen, J. (2011). Ethnography as work: some rules of engagement. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(1), pp. 218-234.
- Vantilborgh, T., Bidee, J., Pepermans, R., Willems, J., Huybrechts, G., & Jegers, M. (2011). A new deal for NPO governance and management: Implications for volunteers using psychological contract theory. *Voluntas*, 22, 639-657.
- Visconti, L.M. (2010). Ethnographic case study (ECS): Abductive modeling of ethnography and improving the relevance in business marketing research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39, 25–39.
- Watson, T.J. (2011). Ethnography, reality, and truth: The vital need for studies of ‘How things work’ in organizations and management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(1), 202-217.
- Weiss, B.R. (2021). “When you’re here, you’re not a militant feminist”: volunteer professionalization in a rape crisis center. *Theory and Society*, 50, 231–254.
- Welch, C. & Piekkari, R. (2006). Crossing language boundaries: Qualitative interviewing in international business. *Management International Review*, 46(4), 417-437.
- Yin, R. (2010). Analytic Generalization. In Mills, A.J., Durepos, G. & Wiebe, E. (eds), *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*. (pp. 21-23). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Zadkowska, M., Dowgiałło, B., Gajewska, M., Herzberg-Kurasz, M. & Kostecka, M. (2022). The sociological confessional: A reflexive process in the transformation from face-to-face to online interview. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 1–12.

## 9. Appendices

### Appendix I: Interview invitation email

Dear \_\_ ,

I am currently writing a master's thesis in business administration and sustainable development about volunteers at Engineers Without Borders Sweden. In particular, I am exploring how skills-based volunteers (who use work-related knowledge and expertise when volunteering) perceive their volunteer role compared to their current or previous paid work role(s) as well as what they think about the professionalization of non-profit organizations (i.e., more documentation, more formal meetings, more focus on accountability and measurable outcomes).

Would you agree to meet with me for approximately one hour digitally via Zoom or physically in Stockholm sometime soon to talk about your experiences with EWB-SWE? I will have to record our conversation. Your participation is anonymous i.e., your name and identifiable characteristics will not be mentioned in the paper. Also, your personal data will be processed according to [the GDPR guidelines of my university](#).

Best regards,

Mariia Wolf

## Appendix II: Semi-structured interview guide<sup>10</sup>

1. Introduction of the study and opportunity to answer the interviewee's questions.
2. Background questions on the interviewee's age, gender, and the current employment status.
3. How long have you been volunteering with Engineers Without Borders Sweden?
4. How did you get to know about the organization and how did you get in touch?
5. Why have you decided to volunteer at the organization?
6. How would you describe your role at the organization? Do/did you volunteer with EWB-SWE domestically or internationally?
7. How is your volunteering structured practically? Do you have separate days and hours dedicated to volunteering?
8. What were your ideas about volunteering at the organization before joining? Have these perceptions change later? If yes, how?
9. Have your knowledge and understanding of your profession (e.g., engineering) changed since joining the organization? If yes, how?
10. How would you compare professional volunteering to community/social volunteering (e.g., in a soup kitchen)?
11. Which skills do you think you donate when volunteering with EWB-SWE? Which skills do you think you gain when volunteering with EWB-SWE?
12. How are your volunteer tasks and assignments at EWB-SWE similar to or different from what you are doing/did at your regular job?
13. Are there any particular skills or knowledge that you gained engaging with EWB-SWE that you brought back to your regular workplace?
14. How do managers and colleagues at your regular workplace react when they hear about you volunteering at EWB-SWE?
15. How do the assignments you carry out while volunteering reflect on your regular working life and professional reputation?
16. To what extent does your engagement with EWB-SWE compete and to what extent does it complement your professional responsibilities/activities at the regular workplace?
17. How in your opinion the organization has changed since you joined? Does it become more or less professionalized?
18. In your opinion, how does the process of EWB-SWE becoming more professional influence its mission?
19. Are there any negative aspects of professionalization?
20. Could you please list three things that you like most about your volunteering and three things that you like the least?

---

<sup>10</sup> Questions 12-15 were asked only to working volunteers but not to the retired ones.