



AnimoServe: Virtual Non-Profit Coaching for Mission Freelancers (A Quick Thinking Design Project)

Neil Oliver T. Penullar
De La Salle University

Abstract: Universities have been hiring Mission Freelancers, long-term project-based workers to manage curricular and co-curricular social engagement projects of the institution. Despite handling the same responsibilities for several years, their status in the university remains temporary and contract-based. Worse, some of them were let go or not renewed especially during the pandemic. Without job security and representation, they also suffer from delayed remuneration and prolonged contract breaks. To understand their needs better, a group interview was conducted with four (4) former Mission Freelancers at a Philippine Catholic University. The conversation revealed their core need for steady employment, upskilling, and career coaching. A virtual non-profit coaching site was conceptualized to address these needs. AnimoServe is a place where Mission Freelancers receive career coaching and training to help them flourish as they serve the last, the lost, and the least.

Keywords: Mission Freelancers, Non-Profit Coaching, University Social Engagement

Mission Freelancers: An Overview

Ever since 2011, the Philippine Catholic University studied by the author, already employs contracted personnel to handle community organizing and community development work. From that time up to the present, the author has counted around thirty (30) contracted personnel engaged by the office. This figure only includes those that had contracts that lasted six (6) months or more each. For purposes of brevity, the author shall refer to them in this paper as 'Mission Freelancers.' They work for the Mission Office but are freelancers since they don't have tenure and are free to work elsewhere too while engaged with the school.

Out of these thirty (30) contracted personnel, only five were given regular positions to date. Of these five, only one was given a regular, full-time position within the school while the rest serve as part-time teachers in other departments as of the moment. Every time the author gets the opportunity to converse with these mission freelancers, the author always senses a tone of bitterness or resentment in them. This stems from the fact that they were let go despite performing the same service function for more than a year. They have always complained about the disjoint between the mission office's advocacy for decent work and its actual record in managing its human resource. They are

always on their toes not knowing whether they will still be employed at the end of their contracts.

The author found out that this situation was not unique to the school. During gatherings of a broader network of Catholic schools, participants have always discussed the issue of contractualization of personnel within their institutions. This served as the precursor to the inclusion of internal justice, peace, and integrity of creation issues as a dimension in the Reflection Tool developed by their network (LJPC, 2017).

The pandemic has exacerbated this already dire situation. With the Philippine economy contracting to its worst level since 1999, the country also experienced a record-high unemployment rate of 17.7% in April 2020. In December 2021, the unemployment rate slightly increased to 6.6% (Mendoza, 2021; Rivas, 2020).

In the higher education sector, non-teaching positions were seen as most vulnerable due to cost-cutting measures that schools implemented to ensure financial sustainability (Lederman, 2020). Unemployment and furloughs hit student affairs personnel hard especially as some of their jobs may only be done in-campus. This includes residence managers, health services, and other non-academic units of colleges and universities (Anderson, 2020).

In my conversations with friends from other schools and other HEIs, early retirement, forced

The 15th De La Salle University Arts Congress

March 29-31, 2022

leaves and pay cuts were also implemented. Due to their home institution's inability to fully collect tuition and fees, student affairs services (SAS) practitioners in the Philippines faced no work, no pay arrangements and other labor cost-saving schemes. With perceptions that student affairs services may only be provided in the face-to-face setting, SAS practitioners were at a higher risks of being furloughed over teaching personnel (Loyola, 2021).

At the Philippine Catholic School studied, Three (3) plantilla positions remain vacant due to freeze hiring. Three (3) contracted social engagement staff were also not renewed.

As an administrator for a Catholic university too, one may wonder why the author is deeply invested in this issue. Seeing the broader management-related concerns, the author should even be expected to be supportive of cost-efficient labor practices currently implemented by private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), especially during a pandemic. However, the author cares so much about this concern since he has also served as a Mission Freelancer immediately before his stint at the university. Before serving DLSU, the author worked as a social engagement consultant for a government agency. During his brief stint, the author also experienced firsthand problems and concerns related to job insecurity. Consultants and other project-based workers were always on the edge at the end of each fiscal year fearing unemployment. They also had bouts of delayed salaries and had to borrow money to sustain their family's needs. At one point, the author did not receive two months' worth of pay on time. Considered by legislators as the top violator of anti-labor contractualization policies, the Philippine government has 600,000 contractual employees as of August 2020 (Romero, 2018; Perez-Rubio, 2021).

Having experienced it himself, the author does not want other contracted personnel to suffer too, hence, the author is dedicating this quick-thinking design project to the Mission Freelancers of the Philippine Catholic School.

The Lasallian Social Development Reflection Tool

A Reflection Tool on the Lasallian Social Development Principles was developed by the Lasallian Justice and Peace Commission (LJPC) to

aid Philippine La Sallian schools in measuring progress in the area of social development. The reflection tool operationalizes the Principles of Lasallian Social Development (PLSD) which states that "genuine social development and the pursuit of fullness of life for everyone requires Lasallian institutions to:

- Bring forth awareness and deeper understanding of social realities;
- Effect liberating action; and
- Be in solidarity with progressive elements of the larger community to bring forth a society that is in keeping with God's plan."

(La Salle Provincialate, 2003)

Drawing from the rubric initially proposed by De La Salle University's Center for Social Concern and Action and discussions with social action officers in 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively, the LJPC identified desired results and corresponding enablers to actualize the principles in a Philippine Lasalle School

(Melegrito et al., 2015).

At the minimum, a La Salle school should have the following enablers to pursue its mission:

- A Social Action Office;
- Trained, experienced, and qualified personnel;
- Career development programs for its social action personnel;
- Clear policies and guidelines on involvement of all stakeholders on social development programs;
- A dynamic social development program;
- Resource allocated for social action office and its program on raising awareness (operations budget);
- Integrated curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities; and
- A social formation program for all its stakeholders.

(LJPC, 2017)

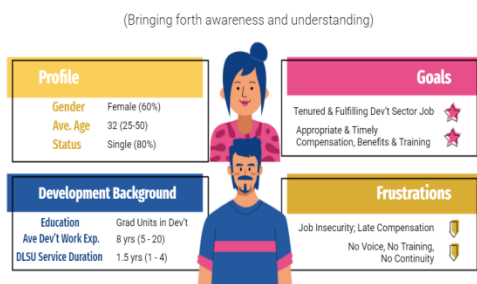
As of the moment, the network is still in the process of institutionalizing the reflection tool and standards by seeking the support of the network's Lay Partners' Council. Several options like hiring part-time faculty members for project-based mission work are currently being discussed.

Drawing from the Principles of Lasallian Social Development and the LJPC Reflection tool, a conversation with Lasallian Mission Freelancers was organized. Guided by the principles of awareness-raising, liberating action and partnership-building, the conversation explored the 2nd enabler in the reflection tool - career development program for Lasallian Social Action Personnel.

A Conversation with Lasallian Mission Freelancers

To update my knowledge about the situation of Mission Freelancers, the author invited four of them for an online group interview. These four mission front-liners were part of the most recent ones separated from the Catholic University. Their profile is summarized in Figure 1 below. The group interview lasted for more than an hour and revolved around their experience, goals, gains, and pains as a Mission Freelancer.

Figure 1. Background of the Mission Freelancers Interviewed



Most of the interview participants were single females aged 32 and above. They are graduates of community development, social work, and other social engagement-related courses. Some have graduate units in community development. Before being hired by the school, they have already been working in the development sector for an average of eight years. They stayed with the

university for an average of 1.5 years with the longest-serving one staying for 4 years.

Their Goals, Gains, and Pains

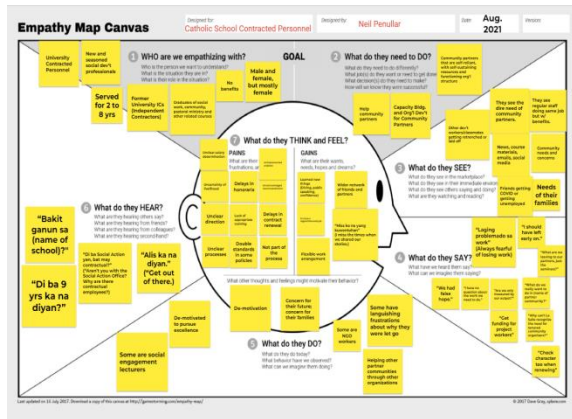
The participants shared their desire of helping partner communities become self-reliant, self-sustaining, and with functional organizational structures. They want them to receive capacity building and organizational development activities. As they look at their other peers in the development sector, they see some of them getting unemployed or getting infected by COVID-19 during this season. They see the dire need of the community, yet also understand that their families need their support as well. They envy tenured colleagues who perform the same function as theirs.

During their stay at the Catholic university, they are always fearful about losing their jobs. They also experienced delayed salary releases and loss of income during prolonged contract breaks. With a high turnover rate among Mission Freelancers, community partners had to deal with a new set of staff every so often. This resulted in a lack of continuity of initiatives implemented for them. They also lamented that partners merely received seminars and training from the office. Since some of them had their contracts renewed yearly for several instances, they were looking forward to being regularized. Unfortunately, they were not.

As a result of experiencing this for several years, some of them felt demotivated in the long run. The quality of their work declined as time went by. Their friends, families, and colleagues elsewhere kept asking them why they were still not given regular status in the university. Some felt regretful of passing off better opportunities elsewhere just to continue serving in the mission. Some grappled with the disjoint between the social development principles espoused by the university and their actual experience as staff members of the institution.

These goals, pains, gains and experiences are summarized through the empathy map in the next page.

Figure 2. Empathy Map of the Mission Freelancers



They felt that their suggestions and recommendations on partner development were not given consideration. They long for appropriate training and professional development while serving as contracted personnel.

Reflecting on the guiding principles of the Catholic School and their situation, the situation of Mission Freelancers was not aligned with the pursuit of 'fullness of life.' Prolonged contractualization for tasks directly related to the core business (e.g. partner preparation for curricular courses like NSTP and Service-Learning), is contrary to labor law and inconsistent with the Catholic Social Teaching on Labor Rights and Responsibilities. These principles ensure job security and decent work for all (Labor Code of the Philippines, 1974; USCCB, 2020).

Three core needs emerged from the conversation with them. These include steady employment, upskilling, and career coaching.

Figure 3. Core Needs of Mission Freelancers



Steady Employment

From the conversations with the four mission freelancers, the author found out that one of them worked for the Philippine Catholic School for eight (8) straight years. It was her first job straight out of college. Given her length of service in the office, the position she handled should have been made regular already. Yet, she was let go in the middle of the pandemic last 2020. While the office was able to lobby for financial assistance for her separation, this would not be enough to support her needs especially as she has a medical condition. She would have to use the assistance to fund her search for another job or project.

As mentioned, most of the Mission Freelancers were single, and unmarried females. They also had responsibilities as breadwinners of their families. They need steady employment because they have fixed monthly needs and expenses to pay. If they are able to get a tenured job or a continuing project engagement, these needs would be met.

Upskilling

Their situation would also be a lot better if they are able to acquire new skills and credentials while completing their project-based engagement with the university. While serving community partners, their portfolio would be greatly enhanced if they could finish a certificate course, diploma, or even a graduate degree in social work, development, and other related fields. Upon completion of these training programs, they would have better chances of getting a full-time job in the university or in other development agencies. It might even qualify them to

teach part-time in the institution. In this season of recession and cost-cutting measures, acquiring higher-level credentials would give Mission Freelancers an advantage over competitors being considered for any tenured position.

Career Coaching

Unlike faculty members and other professionals serving in the university, Mission Freelancers are not protected or represented by the union or employees association. As external service providers, they are left to discuss and negotiate contract terms with the institution. Mission Freelancers also have sincere desires to serve and have a lasting positive impact on community partners. They are trained to seek first the welfare of those they serve. While this virtue is very admirable and essential in public service professions, Mission Freelancers also need to plan and manage their portfolios well. They should fully know their rights and responsibilities when entering into a contracted work with any organization. They should know how to bargain and negotiate contract terms and remuneration. They should know how to present their strengths and capabilities well.

Unfortunately, among the thirty (30) Mission Freelancers, the author has encountered barely 10% are empowered enough to assert and represent their interests with the institution. While the author do not desire that they think of themselves first before community partners, the author would like them to manage their ‘talent’ well. In addition to excellent work, they also need to master human resource policies and contracts. They also need to confidently represent themselves within and outside the institution. This would help them expand their network and acquire new projects and clients even while serving the institution.

What can work?

Looking at the needs described in the previous section and the Social Development Principles of the Catholic School, two solutions are possible. The first solution entails policy advocacy work and lobbying. In partnership with progressive elements of the broader society, social engagement unit should help advocate for the passage of an anti-contractualization law in the country. It may be recalled that outgoing President Duterte vetoed the Security of Tenure Bill in 2019 citing that the bill “unduly broadens the scope and definition of

prohibited labor-only contracting, effectively prescribing forms of contractualization that are not particularly unfavorable to the employees involved (Corrales, 2019).” President-elect Bongbong Marcos Jr. meanwhile promised to pass a fine-tuned and enhanced version of the bill. He however echoes his predecessor’s view that some circumstances like seasonal work demand should not be included in the prohibition on labor contracting (Manila Standard, 2022; Philstar, 2022). Business groups also assert that passing the bill would result to higher unemployment rates since companies might resort to automation or re-designing work processes due to higher labor costs as a result of the prohibition on all types of contracting (PBG-JFC, 2019). The university should mobilize its public intellectuals to find solutions or policy proposals to address contractualization in a way that ensures sustainability for the institution.

Internally, the office should continue its active pursuit of creating tenured positions for its mission freelancers. The social engagement unit should strategize and find other effective ways to help the institution’s human resource council recognize that community organizing and mission work is essential both for curricular and co-curricular social engagement. Creation of more fulltime or part-time positions for mission freelancers would also help a lot.

Since this policy advocacy is already ongoing, another solution is proposed for this Quick Thinking Design Project. This solution is called “AnimoServe: Virtual Non-Profit Coaching for Mission Freelancers.”

Figure 4. The Principles of Lasallian Social Dev’t & the Mission Freelancer’s Needs



AnimoServe: Serve and Flourish

AnimoServe is a virtual learning and support community for Mission Freelancers. It is a place where Mission Freelancers receive career coaching and training to help them flourish as they serve the last, the lost, and the least. The virtual learning hub may be developed through the university's Learning Management System, AnimoSpace, Google Classroom, or Microsoft Teams.

The online learning and collaboration space would be a repository of relevant laws and policies on contractualization and project-based work. Online training courses will also be provided to upskill Mission Freelancers. They will learn about labor law, career planning, negotiation, and other professional development skills. Upon completion of the certification training, they will have endorsements and referrals within the Lasallian Mission group and other non-profit networks.

Faculty members and other development specialists would also be invited to serve as mentors of our Mission Freelancers. One-on-one consultations would be conducted to help provide guidance and direction in the Mission Freelancers' service careers. Mentors will in turn be given social engagement/volunteering certificates which they could use for promotion, permanency, and incentive purposes.

The AnimoServe online hub will also host Mission Fora and Mission Fairs where service opportunities may be presented. Mission Freelancers may also pitch their ideas and projects to other development champions and institutions. The Catholic School's Human Resource Office should also prioritize the creation and hiring of full-time positions based on the data that may be gathered from AnimoServe.

Figure 5. AnimoServe Desktop and Mobile Hub



References

- Farnell, T., Matijević, A. S., & Schmidt, N. Š. (2021, March 17). *The impact of COVID-19 on higher education: A review of emerging evidence: Analytical report*. Publications Office of the EU; European Union. https://op.europa.eu/publication/manifestation_identifier/PUB_NC0220607ENN
- ADB. (2020). *The COVID-19 Impact on Philippine Business*: Asian Development Bank. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/spr200214-2>
- Anderson, G. (2020, August 20). *Student affairs staff challenged by pandemic demands*. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/08/20/student-affairs-staff-challenged-pandemic-demands>
- Atrakouti, A. (2020, June 30). *3 funding concerns for civil society during this pandemic*. CIVICUS. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/blog/4472-3-funding-concerns-for-civil-society-during-this-pandemic>
- Austin-Smith, B. (2020, December 18). *"The impact of the pandemic on academic workers and work - The Canadian experience"*, by Brenda Austin-Smith. Education International. <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/23647:the-impact-of-the-pandemic-on-academic-workers-and-work-the-canadian-experience-by-brenda-austin-smith>
- CAF America. (2020). Report shows global impact of pandemic on charitable sector. *Nonprofit*

(RE)IMAGINING THE ARTS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

The 15th De La Salle University Arts Congress
March 29-31, 2022



- Business Advisor*, 2020(369), 7–7.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nba.30779>
- Corrales, N. (2019, July 26). Duterte vetoes security of tenure bill. *INQUIRER.Net*.
<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1146482/duterte-vetoes-security-of-tenure-bill>
- La Salle Provincialate. (2003). *Principles of Lasallian Social Development*. Lasallian Partners Council.
<http://lasallianpartnerscouncil.org/lgp/principles-of-lasallian-social-devt>
- La Salle Provincialate. (2009, February). *Guiding Principles of the Philippine Lasallian Family*. DLSU; La Salle Provincialate.
<https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/guiding-principles-2nd-edition.pdf>
- Labor Code of the Philippines, (1974).
<https://blr.dole.gov.ph/2014/12/11/preliminary-title/>
- Lederman, D. (2020, July 10). *COVID-19's forceful financial hit: A survey of business officers*. Inside Higher Ed.
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/survey/covid-19s-forceful-financial-hit-survey-business-officers>
- Loyola, L. (2021). Stories and Experiences in the Time of Pandemic: Online Conversations of Filipino Student Affairs and Services Practitioners. *The Southeast Asian Conference on Education 2021*.
https://papers.iafor.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/seace2021/SEACE2021_59994.pdf
- LJPC. (2017, March). *Reflection Tool on the Lasallian Social Development Principles*. DLSU; (unpublished).
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bxfTysB1uKDGNwOSQHHjYqe2EngqSpmI/view?usp=sharing>
- Magsambol, B. (2020, April 27). Over 400,000 private school employees affected by lockdown – group. *Rappler*.
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/private-schools-affected-coronavirus-pandemic>
- Malaguit, R. (2020, September 14). Helping Hand: Philippine charities struggle in the time of COVID-19. *Yahoo News*.
<https://ph.news.yahoo.com/helping-hand-philippine-charities-struggle-051925160.html>
- Manila Standard. (2022, May 2). Marcos vows to ‘fine-tune’ vetoed endo bill, open to 4-day workweek. *Manila Standard*.
<https://manilastandard.net/news/314225307/marcos-vows-to-fine-tune-vetoed-endo-bill-open-to-4-day-workweek.html>
- Melegrito, Ma. L. M., Penullar, N. O., Apuli, M. C., Guanzon, M., Rosal, J., Balderama, M., & Lingatong, S., Jr. (2015). Social development rubric for Philippine Lasallian Schools. Philippine Lasallian Justice and Peace Commission, National Assembly Proceedings.
- Mendoza, R. U. (2021, August 2). The Philippine economy under the pandemic: From Asian tiger to sick man again? *Brookings*.
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/02/the-philippine-economy-under-the-pandemic-from-asian-tiger-to-sick-man-again/>
- OECD. (2020, December 11). *Focus on the global economy*. OECD.
<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/themes/global-economy>
- Ofreneo, R. E. (2022, May 2). BusinessMirror. BusinessMirror.
<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2022/05/02/ending-the-endless-debate-on-endo/>
- Perez-Rubio, B. (2021, April 29). Gov't urged to find way to regularize thousands of contractual state workers. *Philstar.Com*.
<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/04/29/2094649/govt-urged-find-way-regularize-thousands-contractual-state-workers>
- PBG-JFC. (2019, July 16). Joint Press Statement: Business Groups Position on Security of Tenure Bill. JCCIPI.
https://www.jccipi.com.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/07162019_05.PRES-S-STATEMENT-Business-Groups-Position-on-Security-of-Tenure-Bill.pdf

(RE)IMAGINING THE ARTS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

The 15th De La Salle University Arts Congress

March 29-31, 2022



Philstar. (2022, March 21). Marcos on “endo”: The reality is some jobs are seasonal. Philstar.Com.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/03/21/2168869/marcos-endo-reality-some-jobs-are-seasonal>

Rivas, R. (2020, June 5). PH unemployment at all-time high with 7.3 million jobless in April 2020. *Rappler*.

<https://www.rappler.com/business/unemployment-rate-philippines-april-2020>

Romero, P. (2018, February 3). Government top ‘endo’ violator — senators. Philstar.Com.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/02/03/1784066/government-top-endo-violator-senators>

Salamon, L., & Newhouse, C. (2018, June). *The 2020 Nonprofit Employment Report*. Nonprofit Economic Data Bulletin No. 48.; Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies.

<http://ccss.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2020/06/2020-Nonprofit-Employment-Report-FINAL-6.2020.pdf>

The Manila Times. (2021, March 8). ‘Private schools hit hard by pandemic.’ *The Manila Times*.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/03/08/news/private-schools-hit-hard-by-pandemic/848204>

USCCB. (2020). *The dignity of work and the rights of workers*. USCCB.

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/the-dignity-of-work-and-the-rights-of-worker>