

MOTIVATING THE VOLUNTEER WORKER

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Work is a psychological contract between the employee and the organization. In this contract the employee exchanges his *contributions* (in the form of work behavior) for *inducements* which satisfy his need or wants. Money is exchanged for time at work, loyalty is exchanged for security, opportunities for challenging work are exchanged for high productivity and creative effort in service of organizational goals, acceptance of responsibility is exchanged for status, as well as combinations of these factors and others. It is essential that organizations understand those factors that motivate people and act as behavioral engineers in constructing opportunities within the organization that will insure the contributions of their workers. This analysis is especially important in the motivation of volunteer workers.

Most organizations mistakenly view the volunteer worker in a similar manner as they do their paid workers. They forget that organizations and businesses use utilitarian forms of inducements as the primary basis for motivation. The worker exchanges his contributions primarily for the inducements of salary, medical care, and pension benefits. The organization's approach to the worker, or the structure of the work experience, is based on the fact that the worker's loyalty and productivity can, to a great extent, be controlled by monetary inducements provided by management. The utilitarian basis for work motivation is not applicable to volunteer workers. They are paid no money and receive no pension. Organizations will fail to attract volunteers, or they will fail to get much effort from volunteers, if they persist in structuring the work experience in the same ways as they have traditionally done for their paid employees. To effectively use volunteer workers the organization must rethink its traditional practices and redesign them in line with the type of inducements that are applicable to volunteer workers.

The basis of the motivation of volunteers is not utilitarian but it is normative or moralistic or idealistic. Volunteer workers want to confirm their self-image of being a "good person", or "contributing to a worthy cause", or "helping others". This is why the volunteer comes to the organization initially to volunteer his services, and this will provide his motivation for staying with the organization. The organization must provide work experiences, as well as emphasize at every point in the operation, the importance of the volunteer's contributions to the goals of the organization. The volunteer must be made to feel in the work that he is doing, and in his general treatment by the organization, that his contributions are important. The most frequent complaint of volunteers is that they are seen as "extras" and relegated to short-term menial tasks. If this complaint is

valid then it is clear that organizations have not taken into account the inducements that motivate volunteers and that they have been unwilling to create work opportunities which provide these inducements.

An essential first step in the use of volunteer workers is careful planning on the part of the organization. Too many organizations claim to need volunteer workers but when they get them they don't know what to do with them. The staff should first decide where volunteers can make contributions to the organization. Next, design jobs in these areas. Make sure these jobs are such that the worker can feel he is making an important contribution. While organizational needs and jobs vary considerably there are a variety of principles that can be used as helpful guides.

The job itself is a very important determiner of motivation. One factor found to be very important is how broad or narrow the job design is. This is usually referred to as *job enlargement or job simplification* (or whole versus parts). The typical assembly line in the factory has simplified the job design of each worker to its minimum such that each worker puts a part on the product. These jobs are not very motivating and are not to be recommended for the volunteers. Jobs should be enlarged so they encompass some whole unit, preferably with each worker making some whole or finished product. For example, one service organization wanted to run a publicity campaign for a program they were sponsoring. They wanted volunteers to put hand bills in the mail boxes in the target neighborhood. The response of the volunteers was not too encouraging and so they redesigned the job by asking a group of volunteers to plan the total publicity for this event. The volunteers responded by planning and executing a successful campaign which included the distribution of hand bills. Doing a part of the campaign (particularly the boring part) was not motivating. Handling the whole campaign, including the boring parts, was interesting and challenging.

It is sometimes difficult to know exactly how far a job should be expanded to maximize motivation. It is somewhat easier in jobs in which some easily observable product is produced. For example, putting together an entire carburetor is whole unit while putting in one screw on a carburetor (as it passes on the assembly line) is not a whole unit. A worker can have pride in workmanship in assembling an entire carburetor but not for putting in one screw. In organizations that deal in human services the definition of a whole unit of work is not as evident. Perhaps the best rule of thumb is to look at the work itself and to try and separate it into some logical units that have a starting point and a completion point. These units should be broad enough such that the worker can feel that he has made a meaningful contribution to whatever is the organization's goal. Volunteer workers very much want to make a meaningful contribution to the organization and the jobs should be structured so that they feel they are doing such.

The *value of the work* to the organization should be emphasized. The worker should be made to feel he is contributing. In many cases this

simply involves telling the worker how his work fits in with the organization's goals. For example, one school uses volunteers to run a mimeograph machine. Initially they simply handed the volunteer a stack of stencils and told her how many copies were to be run. Motivation increased when they explained to the worker that these stencils were lesson assignments for the students. They explained how important it was for the education of the children to have daily work papers on which the children could learn writing and arithmetic. The value of the mimeographing was enhanced because the worker now felt that she was performing an important task that was contributing to the education of the children.

There are many recent studies in industry that show the importance of *shared decision-making*. Workers who share in decisions that are relevant to the jobs tend to become more committed to these decisions. The decisions become their decisions and not something that is forced upon them. Some organizations have small units of workers meet and discuss their problems, and plan their work. The technique seems to be effective in that they develop into a more cohesive work unit; they seem to take more pride in their work as it is their own plan or design; and they are more committed to the job and the decision. This can be used with volunteers by meeting with them, telling them the problem or the goal to be accomplished, and eliciting their decisions as to how the goal can be accomplished.

Novelty, or frequent rotation in jobs, tends to be an effective inducement particularly if many of the tasks are boring. This was first noticed on assembly lines in which workers would frequently exchange jobs with other workers apparently to combat the boredom of performing a simple repetitious task. Novelty is now used more extensively as a planned part of the job design. One corporation organized some of their units into six person groups and had the groups meet each morning to decide which tasks each person would perform that day. This combined shared decision making with novelty and over the last 14 months productivity has steadily climbed and absenteeism has decreased to almost zero. Similar results were found in a organization that makes extensive use of volunteers for typing, reproducing documents, and filing. A group of volunteers would meet and decide who would do what that day. They frequently rotated jobs during the day and maintained a high level of motivation and interest in the organization.

Rotation is not always effective. For example some jobs may necessitate sustained effort at the same task. Two organizations that use volunteer tutors for slow learners found that the tutor has to stick with the same child over long periods of time. The rotation of tutors caused a high degree of frustration for both tutors and children. The same was found for an organization who used volunteer "companion therapists" for autistic children. Novelty, in terms of changing tutors and children, was not effective here. However one of these organizations found that if the tutor-child pair changed activities occasionally they both become less bored.

One of the most powerful inducements to work is its *social rewards* (or *affiliative rewards*) and the work situation should be constructed so as to maximize these. A task done with others seems to be better than doing the task alone. A organization that used a volunteer (usually an elderly woman) to sort mail and collate daily reports had some difficulty getting the woman to show up on a regular basis. This problem was solved by having women work in pairs. The social contact provided an inducement for an otherwise boring task which kept the volunteers coming back daily. Putting people together of the same age and the same sex seems to work best. People of the same age and sex have shared interests and problems that form the basis for good companionship. The important point here is that the job design should be structured such that the volunteers can talk with other people or can work cooperatively with other people.

Coffee breaks and lunch breaks should be arranged so the volunteer goes with fellow workers or with friends in the same organization. (There's nothing as lonely as taking a coffee break alone). Arrange starting times and quitting times to coincide with that of friends. If there is attractive shopping nearby, make the hours flexible so that friends can spend a couple of hours window shopping together.

Some organizations plan recreational activities for their volunteer employees. One organization has occasional lunches and fashion shows for the women volunteers. Another plans occasional trips or shows for the volunteers which they use to show their appreciation to the volunteer worker, but which also provides the opportunity for social contact.

Identification with the organization should be developed. Rather than have the organization as some incidental part of the volunteer's life, arrange conditions so the volunteer can develop a strong identity with the organization and its goals. There are a variety of techniques that can be utilized. If the organization has a newsletter make sure the volunteers receive it. You might have a regular column in the newsletter on the activities of volunteers. Don't forget to cite their names in this column. If there is a staff lunchroom and staff restrooms, make sure the volunteers can use these. Let them use the staff parking lot, and any other privileges given to the paid employees. There are other techniques that are used in some organizations, e. g., all paid employees in hospitals wear uniforms or coats of some sort and many hospitals have uniforms (coats) for the volunteers. This identifies them as part of the organization and helps them identify with the organization.

There are a variety of other important considerations to maintain the volunteer's contribution in the work situation which will only be discussed briefly here. *Clarity of expectations* is important. The worker should know exactly what is expected of him. This is especially true of the volunteer worker. Volunteers see themselves as "outsiders" to the organization and it is important to specify exactly what their role is in the organization. The *degree of supervision* for volunteers is similar to that of other workers. If the task is rather easy and repetitious most workers

prefer a loose supervision. But if the work is unfamiliar or if it has important consequences, most workers prefer a tighter supervision because they have a fear of making a mistake. *Adequate grievance procedures* are especially important with volunteer workers. Most complaints and problems are easily settled if the workers have someone who will listen to the problem and who also has some authority to initiate action on the problem. All volunteer workers should have some such person to go to and this person should also take the initiative in frequently talking with the volunteers to see if they have problems.

While we have been discussing general principles that motivate workers, it should also be noted that there are differences in the needs and desires of people. For example, there are people who prefer to work alone and who don't want social contacts. There are also people who want a simplified job not an expanded job. And there are those who do not want to share in the decision-making. Occasionally volunteers will come to an organization and state that they are willing to donate a couple of hours per week if they are given a simple job to do that does not involve any thinking or responsibility. Some volunteers want a regular schedule of work with specified hours while others may only want to work occasionally. An organization that uses volunteers must take these individual differences into account and must be flexible on work assignments. It is best to interview the volunteer workers and find out what skills they have, what job preferences they have, and what type of schedule they would like. Then let the worker (shared decision-making) decide how much time he wants to spend and how he wants to spend it from the alternatives you can provide.

One word of caution is to involve your paid workers in planning the work of the volunteers. If the paid workers are a part of the planning process (shared decision making) as to when and where to use volunteers, this will eliminate a lot of potential job conflict and they will be more willing to take responsibility for aiding the volunteer on the job.

Before closing this brief summary on the motivation of volunteer workers, it must be emphasized that an effective organization is not something that just happens. It is a result of careful planning consisting of job design, evaluation of the effectiveness of the operation of that work area, re-design of job descriptions when necessary, and again, evaluation of that work area. This same planning should be applied to volunteers. First find out where in the organization you can use volunteer services. Next, design the jobs keeping in mind both the inducements that motivate volunteers, and the type of volunteer that is available. Then evaluate the work of the volunteers to find out where they are effective and where they are not. Finally, redesign the job to preserve the effective components and to correct the inadequacies. There are numerous people who very much want to make a contribution to society; the real question is whether or not your organization is willing to adapt to allow them to make their contribution.