

## Volunteers Speak Out: Motivations for Volunteering

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### INTRODUCTION

Volunteering, the act of giving voluntarily of one's time and talents to serve the community, neither earns money nor does it, in many instances, provide significant prestige. Nonetheless, it has a powerful appeal to the population at large. In 2002, a total of 59 million people in communities all over the United States volunteered their services (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). In recent times, private voluntary involvement coined the "volunteer solution," is increasingly encouraged, particularly through government-related programs (Petras and Polychroniou, 1998; US Department of State, 2002). Compensating for changes in public policy, lawmakers are moving more and more responsibility for America's social problems away from the public sector and the private sector to a third sector, labeled the "independent sector," that is composed of nonprofit agencies (Bradley, 2000; Wilson and Musick, 1997). In an effort to overcome fiscal constraints, citizen volunteers, who function as an extension of paid staff, often represent the majority of workers, as exemplified in the federally authorized Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (Harris-Wehling, Feasley and Estes, 1995; Netting, Huber and Kautz, 1995), and in hospice care programs mandated by the Medicare Reimbursement Act (Kovacs and Black, 1999).

Although volunteer experiences are generally valued as complementing personal devel-

opment and enriching overall life-satisfaction (Wilson, 2000), "the truth is that there is little understanding of why people volunteer" (Fischer, Mueller and Cooper, 1991:186). Pursuing the psychosocial view that human action is motive-driven (Clary et al., 1998), numerous research studies have addressed motivational forces that compel individuals to seek and engage in volunteer activities. Specific motives for volunteering have been presented by means of individual perspectives (Pushkar, Reis and Morros, 2002; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Henderson, 1981) as well as in multiple factor models: the Two-Factor Model (Frisch and Gerrard, 1981), Four-Factor Model (Batson, Ahmad and Tsang, 2002), and Six-Factor Model (Clary and Snyder, 1999). Describing quadruple motivational forces, the Four-Factor Model focuses on egoism as a motivation for improving one's personal well-being, altruism for improving the well-being of another person, collectivism for improving the well-being of a group, and principlism as a motivation for supporting essential moral beliefs. The Two-Factor Model includes altruism, concerns for others, and egoism, concerns for self. The Six-Factor Model uses a Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) to illustrate six similar functions served by volunteering: values, for acting on humanitarian beliefs like compassion for others; understanding, for gaining new knowledge and skills through direct and hands-on experience; enhance-

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ment, for psychological self-growth and development; career, for acquiring career-related experience; social, for increasing one's social relationships; and protective, for overcoming one's personal problems.

Focus on the impact of external incentives has added the element of reinforcement to intrinsic motivation (Arnold, 1976; Nathanson and Eggleton, 1993). Similarly, fulfillment and non-fulfillment of motivation-inspired needs have been recognized as determining factors for individuals' positive and negative perceptions of their volunteer activities (Clary et al., 1998, Omoto, Snyder and Martino, 2000; Kiviniemi, Snyder and Omoto, 2002). Given the various aspects of motivational impact on volunteering, individuals are driven into volunteer involvement not by a single, but a multitude of needs and reasons, all purposed towards one goal — a sense of self-gratification. (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Kovacs and Black, 1999).

This study seeks to examine volunteers' perceptions of their role in terms of underlying motives, both primary and secondary, and to demonstrate the relevance of motivational incentives in determining volunteers' overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with service results. Applying Batson, Ahmad and Tsang's (2002) Four-Factor Model, the authors aim to illustrate individuals' motivational impact on perceived positive and negative volunteering outcomes. Given the asymmetrical relationships between paid professionals/staff and unpaid volunteers (Netting, Huber and Kautz, 1995), perceptions of lived volunteering experiences greatly affect how volunteer service programs are planned and implemented. Yet, few studies have sought volunteers' perspectives of their role and effectiveness (Ostwald, Runge, Lees and Patterson, 2003). This paper proposes that a better understanding of the relationship between individuals' motivation-induced reasons for volunteering, and their role perceptions, is needed to ensure

satisfactory volunteering outcomes as well as volunteer service endurance.

## METHODS

The paper draws on data from a statewide mail survey conducted in Texas in 1998-1999. A total of 642 certified volunteer ombudsmen (CVOs) were identified as active in 28 regional offices throughout Texas. Surveys were mailed to the home addresses of all 642 CVOs. They were provided with self-addressed, postage-paid return envelopes; CVOs were requested to return their surveys directly to the University of Texas-Houston Center on Aging for analysis and were guaranteed confidentiality of their answers. A reminder postcard was sent two weeks later. The return totaled 361 completed, usable CVO surveys, for a response rate of 56 percent.

The survey was adapted from questions used in two previous national surveys (The National Center for State Long Term Care Ombudsman Resources, 1989; Stevens, 1989). It was tested for clarity and revised, based on comments of 10 CVOs. The survey included questions on demographics, activities, effectiveness, and barriers to effectiveness. CVOs were asked to rate their effectiveness on a Likert scale. The findings based on these forced option questions are reported elsewhere (Ostwald et al., 2003). The survey also included two open-ended questions that allowed ombudsmen to comment on their role in terms of underlying motives and overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the results of their service. This article is based on those open-ended responses.

Initially, open-ended responses were organized according to motivations. Subsequently, using Batson's et al. Four-Factor Model as primary motivational grounds for volunteer involvement, responses were analyzed in terms of expressed primary and secondary motivational factors. Finally, volunteers' per-

ceptions of their motivation-driven, goal-oriented service outcomes were identified and classified as either positive or negative. Views that were consistently found across surveys, regardless of individual characteristics, represented broad consensus and are reported here.

## RESULTS

The 361 CVOs who completed the survey were primarily white women with a mean age of 65 years (range, 25 - 86 yrs) with some postsecondary education. Fifty-eight percent were retired, 52 participants (14.8%) had previously been administrators and health or social service professionals. The mean length of service time was 4.8 years (range: a few months to 28 yrs). No data was available on non-respondents.

Applying the framework of the Four-Factor Model (Batson et al.), analysis of CVOs' expressed motivations for engaging in volunteer activities with nursing home (NH) residents uncovered the following patterns.

CVOs conveyed the first primary motivational force, classified by Batson et al. as egoism, with the desire for self-fulfillment and the need to improve one's personal well-being. Associated secondary motivations included gaining new knowledge and broadening one's understanding of life, as well as feeling needed, appreciated, welcomed, useful, and productive. In addition, volunteering enhanced CVOs' self-esteem and provided opportunities for gaining self-enrichment by earning recognition and success. CVOs also found self-distraction while redirecting life's focus away from personal stress and tension, to discover renewed meaning in living.

The second primary motivational force, identified by Batson et al. as altruism, was CVOs' desire to improve the well-being of another person by bringing joy and hope into people's lives. Expressed associated secondary motivations included the desire to help and protect others; to instill a sense of confidence, trust and hope in others, as well as to lend a listening ear and understanding to others; or simply to just be there for another person. Thus, these CVOs aspired to make institutional life more tolerable and more easily manageable for individual residents.

Others were driven to volunteer their service and time by a third primary motivation, referred to by Batson et al. as collectivism. These CVOs focused on improving the level of care for the residents as a group. They saw themselves as the eyes and ears on site by bringing a community presence into the NH and letting residents know someone cares. They also concentrated on serving as advocates for the elderly to make change happen, and on functioning as a necessary link in the communication chain for residents and staff. These volunteers were motivated to go beyond bringing hope and joy to individual residents, they wanted to change the system so all NH residents would receive good care, and to let NH residents know they had not been forgotten.

The Batson's fourth primary motivation, labeled principlism, inspired those individuals to engage in volunteer work who saw their mission in promoting essential moral values like justice, equality, safety, as well as ethical behavior, and in improving overall care standards to protect the residents from harm. These CVOs were concerned with such issues as providing quality resident care, treating the elderly with dignity, and placing the residents above industry profits instead of viewing them as commodity. As CVOs, they also saw themselves making a contribution to their community and went all-out to promote respect for the ombudsman role, despite frequently experiencing the sense of performing like a "toothless tiger" because of the lack of power associated with the CVO position.

In summary, CVOs' comments indicated that most volunteers are inspired by more than one motivational factor, thus aspiring to achieve positive outcomes for themselves, for the individual residents, as well as for the larger group (i.e. the elderly), and to meet higher care standards. The actual outcomes of their volunteer service, however, were not always positive. Given the problems facing the NH industry, CVOs' responses appropriately revealed that volunteers frequently did not have the impact they would have liked in order to achieve desired outcomes. Specifically, CVOs perceived their service outcomes as both positive and negative for all four prima-

ry motivational categories: egoism (self-orientation) — feeling a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction versus experiencing stress and tension; altruism (other-orientation) — feeling effective in providing comfort versus seeing no benefits to residents from volunteering efforts; collectivism (group-orientation) — making an impact by being the eyes and ears on site versus feeling powerless in pursuing a proactive role to ensure change; principism (value-orientation) — feeling influential in enhancing residents' well-being versus feeling dejected by corporate focus on profit at the cost of quality resident care.

## DISCUSSION

Using Batson's et al. Four-Factor Model, the present study was designed: a) to examine the relationship between individuals' primary and secondary motivation-induced reasons for volunteering, as well as subsequent perceptions of their volunteer role; and b) to identify volunteers' positive or negative perceptions of their motivation-driven, goal-oriented service outcomes.

Analysis of volunteer responses revealed that participating CVOs were motivated to engage in volunteer activity with NH residents by various combinations of the four primary motives (egoism, altruism, collectivism, and principism), and associated underlying secondary motivational components. This indicates that CVOs were inspired to make a difference for the benefit of either individual NH residents, NH residents as a group, or society as a whole, and concurrently desired to reap some gain for themselves, while striving toward a complementing outcome recognized in the literature as "a rewarding experience" (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1991:281) to satisfy unique personal needs. Thus, this study provides support for the findings of others, that volunteers are compelled into action not by a single, but by a combination of motivational factors whose synergetic energy drives them to give of themselves and, simultaneously, take back for themselves some kind of reward or satisfaction (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Fischer, Mueller and Cooper, 1991; Clary and Snyder, 1999; Kovacs and Black, 1999).

Given the uniformity of CVO assignments, CVOs may be carrying out the same volunteering task (e.g. Visiting with NH residents) quite similarly, yet, as reflected in their self-reported statements, their underlying personal motivational forces may well differ significantly:

- pleasure-seeking: *I enjoy visiting residents, talking with them and their families.*
- self-satisfaction: *What a thrill to help someone resolve a problem.*
- self-indulgence: *Maybe today the music will be on and I'll get to dance with one of the men again.*

This manifestation of unfurling motivational dynamics in volunteer behavior, identified in the literature as "the core propositions of volunteerism," (Clary et al., 1998:1517), is compatible with other research findings that motivations to volunteer, multidimensional by nature and not mutually exclusive (Okun, Barr and Herzog, 1998), are aroused for different reasons and purposed to satisfy different needs in different people (Fischer, Mueller and Cooper, 1991; Omoto and Snyder, 1995). Acknowledging the manipulative impact of the different motivational forces at work, volunteers' role perceptions appear to be formed according to the extent in which personal motive-induced volunteering expectations are realized. As exposed in CVOs' self-reported responses, the decisive indicator in their role perception was either a feeling of success and accomplishment, or failure and disappointment.

- success: *I enjoy my role as a CVO very much. It has been rewarding and educational.*
- failure: *My CVO role is frustrating because one sees incompetence in management or various other jobs and is powerless to do anything about it.*

Hence, a sense of goal attainment or non-attainment, described by Clary et al. (1998:1525) as "the match between an individual's motivational goals and the fulfillment of those goals," seems to influence markedly how individuals perceive their role as volunteers.

In a similar way, motivations to engage in volunteer activity also affect individuals' perceptions, both positive and negative, of their service outcomes including received self-benefits. CVOs

described such self-goals as the feeling of being needed and appreciated, being useful and productive, as well as making one's life more meaningful. Coming as community representatives from outside the institutional structure to monitor the quality of resident care, provides CVOs with the opportunity to make a potentially positive impact on the institutional setting. Yet, as self-reported CVO comments exemplify, imparting such a community presence produced two kinds of psychological outcomes — those provoking positive, self-fulfilling satisfying feelings versus those resulting in negative, self-disappointing frustrating sensations.

- positive: *Being the eyes and ears on site. Feeling accepted and seeing results.*
- negative: *Seeing no beneficial outcomes. Feeling powerless and unproductive.*

Complementing CVOs' primary and secondary motivation-induced volunteering objectives with volunteer tasks, relevant to individuals' job preference, seems vital to fostering self-fulfilling volunteering results. Many CVOs settled on volunteering for redirecting life's focus away from personal stress and tension, making the need for placing individuals "in their preferred job types" (Pushkar, Reis and Morros, 2002:155) especially critical in order to achieve volunteering outcomes that are just right for finding renewed personal balance.

With volunteers' individually unique motivational interplay of "giving" and "receiving" directly impacting job performances, it is not surprising, as illustrated in CVOs' survey responses, that positive experiential perceptions are not only associated with higher levels of successful volunteering outcomes, but are also indicative of lasting service commitments. In contrast, negative experiential perceptions, brought on by disappointment in

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work outcomes, tend to provoke untimely service terminations.

- long-term: *My work as CVO is very interesting and I wish to continue it. I really love it.*
- short-term: *I plan to resign from the Volunteer Ombudsman Program because I feel the work that is done is not appreciated.*

Described by Cantor (1994:241) as "situation to person" and "person to situation" match, past findings point to the same modus operandi: relevance of received benefits to motivational goals affects service satisfaction as well as service endurance (Okun and Snyder, 1995; Clary et al., 1998; Pushkar, Reis and Morros, 2002).

## IMPLICATIONS TO PRACTICE

Although specific to the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Volunteer Program, CVOs have many issues and concerns in common with volunteers in general. This study has demonstrated that, on the whole, motivation to volunteer is a multidimensional concept made up of separate, yet interconnected meaningful parts. These findings may give some constructive indications for quality management of volunteers by any volunteer service organization or group. The following implications are intended to serve as guidelines toward this endeavor

- 1) Identifying volunteers' personal aspirations: establish an in-depth interview procedure that would seek out individuals' unique reasons for volunteering; understand and be responsive to individuals' motivational incentives and specific needs; recognize individuals' self-benefit expectations.
- 2) Placing volunteers in preferred job types: take into account individuals' specific skills and expertise to make most appropriate job assignments.
- 3) Examining volunteers' role perceptions: request individuals' self reported accounts of success and failure; evaluate the extent at which individuals' personal expectations are realized; assess individuals' fulfillment of motivational goals.

- 4) Being aware of volunteers' length of service: understand that individuals' lasting service commitments reflect positive volunteering outcomes; recognize that untimely service terminations tend to be induced by negative service experiences; nurture individuals' motivational interplay of 'giving' and 'receiving' to promote volunteering satisfaction and to encourage service endurance.
- 5) Enhancing volunteer recruitment efforts: highlight the dualistic benefits (self-oriented and other/society-oriented) of volunteerism.

Incorporating these guidelines into existing volunteer management strategies, volunteer organizations and groups may expect to boost volunteers' overall in-service contentment, energy, and staying power.

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