Understanding What Motivates Volunteering in People

Mahesh Chaddha1 and R.S. Rai2
1 Talent Development, Consulting Practice, TCS, Noida.
2 Amity International Business School, Amity University, Noida

The main objective of this paper is to study the existing conceptual models of volunteer motivation, the way these have been adopted for use on those people who help and work for others without any gains, monetary or otherwise.

This paper summarizes conceptual models as well as multiple dimensions of volunteer motivation evolved through various research studies conducted in the past. The review of past studies provides list of dimensions considered in empirical studies by researchers for different sectors using volunteer services. The study considers volunteering as a multidimensional construct where the following dimensions have been proposed: Recognition, Self-esteem, Social, Values, Understanding, Protective, and Career Development. In future an empirical study can be performed to test the reliability and validity of these dimensions in any specific community of Indian people.

Key Words: Volunteer, Motivation, Skills, Social Volunteering, Skill Building

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is an activity that is done for the benefit of others who are not related and often not even known to the person. It is a selfless service and the person undertaking volunteering do not expect any monetary gains (Executive, 2004) and (ZAPPALÀ, 2000).

It is not simple to know or understand what motivates a person to do any work (Esmond J. J., 2001), therefore it makes it even more important to understand what motivates a volunteer so that this understanding could be used in reaching out and reaping in as well as retaining volunteers (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992) and (Esmond J., 2001).

(Executive, 2004) While there are some valid overt reasons to justify why people volunteer, it provides them a way to remain physically and mentally fit, especially post retirement. But the inner, more subtle and important reasons behind volunteering are difficult to gauge and researching them is paramount to understanding the underlying reasons for their behavior (Esmond, Judy; Dunlop, Patrick, 2004).

Objective

As stated earlier, the main objective of this paper is to study the existing conceptual models of volunteer motivation, the way these have been adopted for use on those people who help and work for others without any gains, monetary or otherwise. This paper covers the efforts put by researchers in arriving at voluntary motivation models found applicable to volunteers in the past.

As we notice volunteering is fairly common when it comes to serving persons adversely affected by natural calamities. However society would benefit immensely from volunteering by way of betterment of quality of human life through efforts directed towards skill development of unemployed and under-employed persons. It would be helpful to make use of the knowledge, experience and skills of volunteers to help the nonprofit to strengthen their efforts in the area of skill building.

Skill building can tremendously gain from Volunteering and even governments should promote such participation from its well-placed citizens. Skill building conveniently lends itself to online e-volunteering where many of the learning activities can be done online with teacher participation without having to travel. In this a teacher makes use of internet while operating from home that is connected to the student through the internet. Volunteers could help our poor schools in India so that they could run better. The schools offer many opportunities to volunteers by way of interaction with students as additional faculty, imparting knowledge of other languages and cultures, as well as fill the shortfall in teaching staff.

Even though it may be difficult for volunteers to find time because of their preoccupation with personal engagements, but volunteering brings immense benefits to the volunteers too. It would also provide them an opportunity to make new friends, learn new things, and in old age slow down mental aging process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Volunteering

(United Nations, 2011) Volunteering is action done voluntarily out of free will, without the need to have any contractual or legal stipulations. While social obligations, cultural values, personal values, or peer pressure may influence a volunteer decision, but the decision to volunteer is still a free choice. Exceptions to volunteering are military duty performed as an alternative to community service or services rendered by criminal offenders while in custody. Volunteering is always done for the benefit of others, for no pecuniary benefit and out of one’s own free will.

The United Nations has an all-encompassing definition of volunteering which includes various acts including acts of kindness such as helping to individuals such as caring for persons who are sick, providing of help in school work to children in neighborhood, or helping a stranger with food and lodging. In addition to offering free time, United Nations also recognizes activities that require extending skills or even expending of energy without any remuneration which are also considered acts of volunteering. Such acts of kindness support societies, enhance level of wellbeing, and such facts have been established in various surveys (United Nations, 2011). (United Nations, 2011) While Volunteerism is free and volunteers are not paid for, but in volunteering under formal setting, it helps to invest in infrastructure required to support volunteers, this makes volunteering much more effective. It may pay if we run volunteer facilitation centres that do management of volunteers in terms of providing training and recognition of their contribution. The organisations should frame policies and frameworks conducive for volunteers to contribute and the facilitation centres may support as well as manage costs pertaining to stipends, travel, meals, etc. for their volunteers.

(Australia, 2015) Volunteering can be defined as spending time without any monetary gains for the benefit of the society. Civic society at large gets participation of volunteers for the good of people. Volunteering could cover diverse activities in the service of society. These could be conducted by employees of an organization in a formal way wherein an organization donates its employee time in the service of the society. Volunteering done by individuals on their own constitutes the bulk of volunteering.
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While volunteering does good to society, at the same time it also provides significant benefits to volunteers in return. Therefore, society needs to showcase the benefits that volunteers may get even if these benefits are not monetary in nature. Further, even though volunteers do not expect any monetary gains but out of pocket expense reimbursement is a legitimate support to volunteers. Also it is a good practice to recognize and reward them for the selfless work done by volunteers. While there is a material or financial aspect being introduced here as a good practice, the initiatives done by the volunteers still qualify as volunteering (Australia, 2015).

The latest definition of Volunteering by Australia Volunteering, formerly known as the Australian Council for Volunteering (ACV), is a broader concept of volunteering in which it is legitimate to provide a stipend, honorarium, or similar payment as a recognition for the professional or voluntary services provided. As per Australian Taxation Office rulings, such payments do not disqualify the recipients from being categorized as volunteers (Australia, 2015).

Motivation Models

Since over 40 years, researchers have been engaged in discovering what could motivate volunteering. This section summarizes conceptual models as well as multiple dimensions of volunteer motivation. As shown in Table 1, the review of past studies provides a comprehensive understanding of dimensions considered in empirical studies by researchers for different sectors that have used volunteer services:

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The Two and Three Factor Models

Around 30 years back a large number of researches were organized using two and three motivational aspects. Many researchers argued that two or three reasons motivated people to volunteer (Otomo, A.M., & Snyder, M., 1995) (Jenner, L.A.; Finkelstein, M.A., 1998).

Extrinsic and intrinsic factors

(Herzberg, 1966) Motivational theory developed by Herzberg proposed motivator-hygiene theory which is two factor theory according to which people who do paid work are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Hygiene and motivation are the two factors that influence human. Hygiene factors pertain to the working environment and are extrinsic in nature e.g., security, policies of the company, and working conditions, and these cover safety and psychological needs described in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Hygiene factors influence on one’s motivation would be negative if found absent. Factors such as self-actualization, esteem and belonging as defined by Maslow are conditions that are intrinsic factors, required in a job for feeling satisfaction, accomplishment, recognition and achievement.

There are a set of factors that could demotivate and lead to volunteer dissatisfaction such as the company policy, supervision, work conditions, etc. and these are examples of hygiene factors. The other set of factors, if not offered, do not lead to dissatisfaction, but their presence would have a positive impact on volunteer motivation. Examples of such factors are the nature of the work itself, responsibility, growth, recognition, etc. Therefore, if we are expecting persons to achieve high performance, we need to cater to these two factors to get them motivated. Presence of a set of factors would motivate people, and at the same time absence of another set of factors can make them disappointed and disinterested (Herzberg, 1966).

(Grignon, 1978) Grignon leveraged the work of Herzberg, and further deducted that benefits conceived from volunteering were firstly personal followed by social as well as economical. Whereas, old persons saw one type of benefits and the others saw different types of benefits. While the former found social benefits as the most applicable benefits, the others however found work experience as the benefit applicable most of the times.

Altruistic and egoistic factors

(Horton-Smith, 1981) Various approaches are used to measure volunteer motivations, however the typical way to deal with it in our literature has been the study of two aspects viz., altruistic vis-a-vis egoistic. In 1981, Horton-Smith, Frisch and Gerrard developed models that factored in altruistic aspect which is feeling of goodness when helping others and egoistic aspect that are kind of benefits which are more tangible. This two-factor model had two different factors, namely egoistic motives which are tangible rewards, and the other factor being altruistic motives which represented rewards that were intangible such as feeling good through...
helping others. In 1985, Gillespie and King conducted research whose outcomes were more or less in line with the motivation factors that agreed with the earlier research (Gillespie & King, 1985).

Altruistic and egoistic were two motivational factors identified by Blanchard, Rostant and Finn (1995) when they researched on 700 university students and later Esmond (2000) researched on over 100 university students (Blanchard, A.; Rostant, J.; Finn, L., 1995).

Warburton (1997) also concluded that altruistic and egoistic were the two motivational factors when they conducted their research on volunteers having the age of 65 years and above.

**Multi-factor models**

In the nineteen nineties, various researchers came up with multifactor models for the study of motivational factors applicable to volunteering.

In a model developed by Clary, Snyder and their colleagues (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992), they started with functional analysis and went on to developing their models based on theories of people’s attitudes, earlier developed by Katz (Katz, 1964) and Smith, Brunet and White (Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956).

(Vellekoop-Baldock, 1990) Vellekoop-Baldock established through a study that there were multiple motives for volunteering and number one among them was altruism, and the other motives in reducing order of dominance were social interaction followed by personal growth and work skills.

While studying volunteering in view of functional analysis used in motivation theory, researchers concluded that one’s feelings, thoughts and actions were important factors while working for social goals (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).

Snyder and Omoto studied HIV/AIDS volunteers and used the concepts of social psychology, and analyzed the personalities of persons involved (Snyder & Omoto, 1990). Clary and Snyder (Clary & Snyder, 1991) and later Clary, Snyder and Ridge (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992) carried out empirical research and came up with six most important functions as follows:

- **Values**: Individual’s values influence and guide an organization’s overall value system
- **Understanding**: Satisfaction of one’s learning desire
- **Career**: Opportunity to get job opportunities through networking
- **Social**: Tendency to emulate significant others
- **Esteem**: It increases one’s self-esteem in one’s eyes
- **Protective**: Helps one in getting over one’s negative feelings

(Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992) Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) was constituted using the above 6 functions each supported by five statements using a 7-point Likert scale. The study used volunteers numbering 1,000 from various types of organizations as well as five hundred students from various universities, constituting empirical evidence considered fairly large. For more than 10 years Clary, Snyder and their team members conducted a number of research studies based on the VFI which is a model that uses many factors of volunteer.

(Fischer & Schaffer, 1993) Volunteer commitment depends heavily on the commodity between the value systems with the organization they work for, which gives rise to time commitment as well as shows a long-term continuity of the volunteering activity.

It is important that organizations seeking voluntary services should constantly communicate and positively reinforce with the volunteers by sharing how the services are benefiting various stake holders of the volunteering initiatives. In many cases, it has been observed that volunteers have no information on how their efforts are helping organization at a bigger level (Esmond, J. 2001).

Reciprocity was not studied in research by Clary, Snyder and their colleagues. However, Reciprocity is the core belief of a person volunteering who believes in ‘God would do well to me if I do well to others’.

Similarly Recognition was not studied in research by Clary, Snyder and their colleagues. Recognition is giving acknowledgement for the skills and contribution made by a volunteer. Organization should appreciate and reward volunteers as a way of recognizing their contribution. In case volunteers are not recognized, they have tendency to leave the organization (Esmond, J. 2001; Australia, 2015) (McCury & Lynch, 1994; Vineyard, 1991).

In addition to three motivations that were on the top of the list, Snyder and team identified Self Esteem and Understanding as two more motivation (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).

Younger volunteers were more found to be motivated by Career Development compared to older volunteers even though this motivator was perceived as weak in general across all the age groups (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).

While the Volunteer Motivation Model (VMM) was tested on a few volunteer groups, the motivations arrived at corroborated with what was determined by Clary, Snyder et al. but Reciprocity and Recognition were new motives that lent the model a good support in understanding volunteer motivations (Esmond, J. 2004).

It was found in many researches that some motivations were always ranked higher than others, even though the exact order varied from person to person and group to group depending upon the kind of work they did and their demographic profiles.

**More Studies on Motivation of Volunteer**

In short, the researchers conducted earlier have categorized motivation of volunteers in three types of models, namely, (a) two or three factor models; (b) models that are one-dimensional; or (c) models that use many factors. Researches that followed hereafter have used one of the above three models.

Trudeau and Devlin used a model that was one-dimensional (Trudeau, K.J. Devlin, A.S., 1996). Caan and Goldberg Glen developed Motivation to Volunteer (MTV) scale and used it on over 120 undergraduates, which covered motivation factors such as gender as well as extra-introversion and social anxiety (Caan & Goldberg Glen, 1991).

Zweigenhaft, Armstrong and Quintis studied the effectiveness of Fitch’s (1987) 20-item Community Service Involvement Survey in the motivation of 98 hospital volunteers using a three-factor model (Zweigenhaft, R.L; Armstrong, J. Quintis, F. 1996).


(Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998; Okun, Barr & Herzog concluded in their research on old age volunteers that their multi-factor motivation model had received qualified support whereas other two models i.e. one or two factor model and one-dimensional model could not be established to have got any substantial support through their research.

(Chapman, J.G, Morley, R. 1999) Chapman and Morley conducted research on 85 college students by combining the VFI and the Crowne and Marlowe social desirability scale to study the motives and changed motive levels after they had performed volunteering service (Crowne, D.P.; Marlowe. D., 1960).

In a study of the motivation of medical students of various genders, while comparing with other
volunteers, the use of VFI was established to be of high reliability and validity by Switzer, Stukas and Baker (Switzer, Stukas, & Baker, 1999).

In a study of motivational aspects of volunteers it was found that a range of motives were applicable starting from helping others to meeting other persons by Baum, Modra, Bush, Cox, Cooke & Potter (Baum et al., 1999).

Volunteering among baby boomer generation and their motivation as well as the need to engage in volunteering were the subjects of a study with a large number of researches conducted by Esmond (2001, 2002, and 2004).

Lucas & Williams, N. (2000) Lucas and Williams used the VFI model after suitable modifications, and found it to be quite reliable when it was used to study the motivation and satisfaction levels of over 50 volunteers in New South Wales working in the area of Policing.

(Wang, 2001) Wang concluded in a study on over 900 prospective volunteers for the Sydney 2000 Olympics that there was a fairly good level of evidence to establish one dimensional motivational model. The research used 20 item motivational scale on the basis of the study of the previous research. Most significant 5 motivations identified were altruistic value personal development community concern ego-enhancement and social adjustment.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF VOLUNTEER MOTIVATION DIMENSIONS

(McEwin, M. Jacobson-D’Arcy, L. 2002) McEwin and Jacobson-D’Arcy (2002). In another research later by Judy Esmond in 2004, the above Volunteer Motivation Model (VMM) was used on different volunteers in various organizations in Western Australia. The research was conducted in 5 stages. The VMM was improvises at each stage to enhance its capability to accurately forecast. In the second stage of the study, the focus was shifted from measuring attitude towards volunteering to motivation to volunteer. This was done on the premise that almost everybody had the attitude of helping others, but it was felt that instead one should measure the motivation to volunteer. This was done by tweaking the items used in the second pilot study (Esmond, J. 2004).

Shortcomings in the Past Research
First of all, the survey forms were circulated to the volunteers and these were to be filled by the volunteers themselves; some of them may have had inhibitions in disclosing their true motives. Some participants may have given responses in a manner that fell in line with what was generally expected from people rather than their true self, even though the survey was anonymous and questions were framed in a very neutral fashion (Esmond J., 2004).

Secondly, the Volunteer Motivation Model (VMM) was researched on volunteers who were exclusively from metropolitan areas of Perth in Australia. The model has not been tested in India or other countries. Therefore, before the model could be used on other population, some more research needs to be carried out to validate the model (Esmond J, 2004).

Thirdly, an overwhelming fraction of the participants were female volunteers. Even though this may have been due to the fact that the population may have had a very large share of women, but the model needs to be tested on more men in a large number of organizations for more validation of the model (Esmond, J. 2004).

Fourthly, very few participants were new to the organizations, and in further research, we need to include more new volunteers for better model validation.

Finally, Motivation scale values are absolute figures, and we may have to compare each scale value relative to the other participants rather than rank the scores of an individual with respect to its own score values. Before the model is used in real situations, the scores of various scales should be compared with the scores of others in a similar demography, so as to determine what motivational factors are really important to volunteers; e.g. if a very large number of participants have their Career development Score lower than that of a new participant, and their Value scale score may be much higher than that of the new participant, and only because the new participant’s score on Career development is lower than its Value score, we cannot conclude that the new participant is less motivated by Career development and more by Values. Hence it would be wrong to conclude that the volunteer in focus is less interested in Career Development than in Values in comparison to the other participants. This volunteer could in fact be more motivated by Career Development than by Values. Therefore, it is recommended that we need to conduct future research and store its data to formulate norms for the demographic clusters of volunteers (Esmond, J. 2004).
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- Values - whereby one places emphasis on helping others as part of one’s belief (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).
- Reciprocity - whereby one believes that if you do good to others, God will do good to you.
- Recognition - wherein one gets motivated by the recognition accorded to one’s contribution and capabilities.
- Understanding - wherein volunteering offers skill building and experience in areas that are usually not available and helps in learning more about the world around an individual, and volunteer gets to learn more about the world (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).
- Self-Esteem - wherein one’s own esteem and worth goes up in one’s own eyes.
- Reactivity wherein one volunteers to minimize sufferings of others in the areas in which one experienced such sufferings in the past.
- Social - wherein one emulates the behavior of others seen as significant by the group to which one belongs (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).
- Protective - wherein one feels a reduction in negativity about oneself which may be due to some guilt or other personal problem (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).
- Social Interaction - wherein one sees a chance of socializing with others and an opportunity to expand one’s social circle.
- Career Development - wherein experience gained and networking with others can lead to new employment opportunities.

In most of the cases, the survey questions were revised by adding at the beginning “I volunteer because…” Further some of the questions were modified in terms of wording. Wherever the correlation amongst items of a dimension was significant, those items were kept in the instrument. The scores against each of the above ten dimensions enabled ranking of the motivations applicable for each individual as well as an overview of the motivations for volunteering.

The demographic variables that showed strong correlation with various dimensions of the Volunteer Motivation Model (VMM) were age and retirement. However, these demographic variables were negatively correlated to Career Development dimension. The old volunteers and retirees were less motivated to develop their career and the volunteer motivation for younger persons was to build on career opportunities for them. Recognition, Personal Growth in addition to Social dimension had high correlation with age, therefore indicating that persons who were younger were more motivated with these factors. The other demographic variables did not show any perceptible correlation with the dimensions used in the Volunteer Motivation Model (VMM).

Also, on the whole, particularly for persons who were not from lower income levels, Career Development was a week motivator, while persons in lower income levels reported career development to be a strong motivator. However on overall basis, the score on Career Development was lower than the half mark on the dimension.

Further, persons in the lowest income group found Personal Growth to be a strong motivator while this was not the case with persons from other income groups.

Non-retirees were more motivated by Career Development than Retirees, and the later were more motivated by Social Interaction in comparison to participants who had not yet retired. Further, if the family members were also volunteers, then the participants were more motivated by Social Interaction. Otherwise there were no significant differences in various demographic groups for the volunteer motivations.

Recognition and Social Interaction dimensions did not have significant differences across all income levels, except for incomes that were at lower levels whose motivation on these two dimensions was strong. Also both the dimensions did not show any strong correlation with each other.

The above was also true for Reactivity as well as Self-Esteem. There were no significant differences on these two dimensions across different income levels, except for incomes that were at lower levels which indicated strong motivation on these dimensions. Also these two dimensions did not exhibit any strong correlation.

The rest of the motivational factors did not show any correlation with income levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The review of past studies provides list of dimensions considered in empirical studies by researchers for different sectors using volunteer services. Volunteering is considered as a multidimensional construct where the following dimensions have been proposed - Recognition, Social Interaction, Reciprocity, Reactivity, Self-Esteem, Social, Values, Understanding, Protective, and Career Development. In future an empirical study can be performed to test the reliability and validity of these dimensions in any specific community of Indian people.

By and large, all the research conducted in the area of volunteering, in the past has been restricted to US and Australia. Before we could use the Volunteer Motivation Model (VMM) for any predictive behavior among Indian people to identify who could be a volunteer in future, a very large number of research studies will have to be carried out spanning across a long period before any inference can be drawn on people’s propensity to volunteer in future. However, till such time as longitudinal research data is in place as a result of the effort of many future researches, the model provides a very good profile of participants on motivational dimensions, and this model could be used to make more appropriate messaging to attract, motivate and retain volunteers.

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BRIEF PROFILE OF THE AUTHORS

Mahesh Chadha is currently the Global Head of Talent Development for Consulting Practice at TCS. He is pursuing Ph.D. and his thesis topic is 'Understanding motivational needs of retiring and retired professionals with IT and IIM educational background for their participation in Govt. of India initiatives in the area of Skill Development'. He has done Electrical Engineering from IIT, Delhi and PGDBM from IIM, Ahmedabad. He has experience spanning over three decades out which the last 15 years have been with Tata Group companies in various strategic roles in the area of employee learning and development.