

Understanding the Commitment and Motivation of Episodic Volunteers for a Large Sporting Event

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Abstract

Research indicates that volunteers are a critical part of staging a successful short-term and/or annual sporting event. Thus, understanding factors impacting volunteers' commitment and motivation is essential. The purpose of this paper was to uncover the importance of the factors that contribute to volunteer commitment and motivation of episodic volunteers at a large sporting event. The researchers used a convenience sample of 255 volunteers at a large professional women's golf event. The results revealed a four-factor structure of both volunteer commitment and motivation. The authors suggest that context-specific factors related to volunteer commitment and motivation exist and should be considered by event managers of volunteer resources.

Key Words:

episodic, volunteers, commitment, motivation, sporting events

Introduction

Recruiting and retaining volunteers, as well as managing their contribution to events and programs, are of paramount concern to administrators in many diverse contexts. Large-scale sporting events are one such context, since volunteers are critical to the staging of annual, short-term sporting events. Such volunteers are termed episodic since they involve volunteer opportunities for short durations of service, usually three

to four months or less (Edwards, 2005; Macduff, 1991). The Olympic Games, world championships, and professional events utilize thousands of episodic volunteers in order to deliver competitions and stage events (Ralston, Downward, & Lumsdon, 2004). Similarly, smaller communities running local events also rely heavily on episodic volunteers to plan, organize, and host activities (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). Thus, volunteer-supported sporting

events are an effective context for analyzing why individuals contribute time and expertise as volunteers. Research in this area would help administrators and managers of volunteer resources maximize volunteer contributions (Green & Chalip, 2004).

Building on definitions from the volunteer management literature (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006; Ramirez-Valles, 2006), for this study the authors considered “volunteer” as work undertaken by an individual who is unpaid, of his/her own free will within a designated voluntary position, in an effort to assist with the delivery of a sporting event. Understanding sources of volunteer commitment and motivation is critical for managers of volunteers within organizations and episodic special events. Further, understanding such dimensions of volunteer behavior can assist administrators and managers of volunteer resources in recruiting, retaining, and managing volunteers. These factors are perhaps even more important for large episodic events requiring sport-specific knowledge and large numbers of volunteers (Fairley, Kellett, & Green, 2007).

Review of Related Literature

Commitment

Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) addressed the issue of organizational commitment by developing an understanding of “what” an individual was committed to: the organization, the cause, or the community supporting the cause. Catano, Pond, and Kelloway (2001) compared volunteers in different organizations to determine the importance of context in understanding volunteer commitment. Their findings suggested that psychological involvement (i.e., the volunteer’s belief in the importance of the activity) impacted volunteer commitment in different ways across divergent contexts,

such as medical and management fields. In a study exploring volunteers of a large sporting event, MacLean and Hamm (2007) found that volunteer commitment was related to sport-specific factors of the particular event (e.g., sense of pride associated with being involved with the sport, love for the sport, etc.) emphasizing the importance of context in recruiting and retaining volunteers for particular events.

Motivation

While significant attention has been devoted to understanding volunteer motivation, there appears to be little consensus regarding volunteer motives both within and outside the sport event context (Cuskelly et al., 2006). More often, researchers have concluded that volunteers are attracted to different organizations for diverse reasons (Cuskelly & Harrington, 1997; Hager & Brudney, 2004; Harrison, 1995) and that motivation is both complex and multifaceted (Winniford, Carpenter, & Grider, 1997). Factors such as social recognition or contact, group needs, empowerment, helping others, and expectations of personal benefit have been consistently identified in the literature as volunteer motives (Doherty, 2003; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Harrison, 1995; Hibbert, Piacentini, & Dajani, 2003; Unger, 1991). In the context of a large sporting event, MacLean and Hamm (2007) found that volunteer motivation was primarily associated with a desire to be part of the community and to enhance community profile. Similarly, in Doherty’s (2003) research examining volunteers at the 2001 Alliance London *Jeux du Canada* Games, the most significant reason for volunteering was contributing to the community; however Doherty also found that the second most important reason for volunteering was personal enrichment.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore the commitment and motivation of volunteers at a large episodic sport event. The population for the study was more than 1,000 volunteers at the 2006 CN Canadian Women's Open, a large, annual professional women's golf event governed by a not-for-profit sport organization and hosted annually at different locations across Canada. A convenience sampling approach (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006) was used in which 400 surveys were distributed in person; a response rate of 64% was achieved ($n = 255$) with no follow-up with non-respondents.

Measures

The revised MacLean and Hamm (2007) survey of commitment and motivation for volunteers at large sporting events was distributed at the orientation meetings prior to the commencement of the championship. Each volunteer was provided a print copy of the survey which collected information regarding his/her: (a) commitment, (b) motivation, and (c) demographics. In order to measure commitment, a slightly modified version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday et al., 1982) was used, where each survey item was tailored to represent the Canadian Women's Open Golf Championship. The questionnaire employed 45 items and measured responses on a 7-point Likert-type scale from "least important (1)" to "most important (7)." Examples of items included: I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the sport of golf be successful and my community really inspires the very best in me in the way of volunteer performance. Acceptable levels of both reliability and validity for the OCQ have been established in the literature (Aryee, Wyatt, & Min, 1990; Leong, Huang,

& Hsu, 2003) and were established to be $\alpha = 0.82$ and $.70$, respectively, by Mowday et al. (1982).

Accompanying the commitment items, a form of the Strigas and Jackson (2003) motivation survey was used comprising 40 items, each measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from "not important at all (1)" to "extremely important (5)." Examples of items included: I wanted to help make the event a success and volunteering makes me feel better about myself. The scale has been shown to be internally valid and reports reliability scores of $\alpha = .93$ in studies involving sporting event volunteers (i.e. Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998). Demographic information was also collected, which included gender, age, marital status, employment status, and income.

The reliability of the quantitative survey instrument was examined by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Acceptable reliability coefficients ranging from $.81$ to $.92$ in the commitment scale and $.61$ to $.89$ in the motivation scale were revealed. The findings of internal consistency demonstrate the reliability of the implemented survey instrument (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were compiled to provide a profile of the volunteers at this specific sporting event. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was calculated to extract survey items that most concisely described commitment and motivation factors pertaining to the volunteer activities of the sample group (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). Once these factors were determined, descriptive statistics for each factor were analyzed to uncover the hierarchy of item ratings.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Participants

Demographic	N	%
Age		
19-25 years	7	2.9
26-35 years	6	2.6
36-45 years	26	10.1
46-55 years	87	34.0
56-65 years	84	32.9
>66 years	38	14.7
Missing	7	2.9
Gender		
Male	113	44.3
Female	130	50.9
Missing	12	4.8
Employment		
Employed Part Time	26	10.3
Employed Full Time	177	69.3
Unemployed	22	8.6
Retired	8	3.3
Self-Employed	14	5.0
Consultant	1	0.4
Missing	7	3.1
Marital Status		
Single	36	12.5
Married	104	40.8
Divorced	3	1.1
Common Law	99	39.0
Widow	8	3.3
Missing	8	3.3
Income		
<\$35,000	12	4.6
\$35,000 - \$50,000	26	10.3
\$51,000 - \$75,000	58	22.8
\$76,000 - \$100,000	36	14.0
>\$100,000	88	34.4
Missing	35	13.8

Results

Demographics and Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the volunteers at the 2006 CN Canadian Women's Open is presented in Table 1. In general, volunteers were female (50.9%), aged 46 to 65 years (66.9%),

married/common law (79.8%), full time employed (69.3%), making an average of \$76,000 plus per year (48.4%).

Each participant was asked to rate the importance of the items within the survey in relation to their commitment and motivation for volunteering at the 2006 CN

Canadian Women's Open. The mean values and standard deviations for those findings are shown in Table 2. Specifically, the highest rated commitment items were: *commitment to exerting effort as a volunteer to help the sport of golf be successful* (M = 5.74; S.D. = 1.36) and *commitment to achieving a sense of community pride through the volunteer role* (M = 5.63; S.D. = 1.38). Conversely, the lowest rated commitment items were: *caring for the fate of sports in general* (M = 4.84; S.D. = 1.69) and *caring for the fate of the community* (M = 4.71; S.D. = 1.77). Similarly, the highest rated motivation items were: *volunteering to help make the event a success* (M = 4.54; S.D. = 0.81) and *volunteering in order to interact with others* (M = 3.88; S.D. = 1.05). The lowest rated motivation items were: *volunteering to feel less lonely* (M = 1.61; S.D. = 1.08) and *volunteering to slow down the pace of the volunteer's life* (M = 1.59; 1.02).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The results of the factor analyses revealed four factors associated with large event sport volunteers for each of the commitment and motivation models. The number of factors identified was deemed appropriate by: a) identifying the number of factors from previous literature; and b) including factors with the appropriate level of statistical significance as determined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2006). For volunteer commitment, four distinct factors accounted for 63.9% of the variance in the item responses and were identified as commitment to: "enhancing the sport and/or community," "sport of golf," "volunteerism," and "community pride." Item factor loadings are noted in Table 3. Of particular interest is the factor "enhancing the sport and/or community", which

included several of the top rated commitment items (see Tables 2 and 3).

The "enhancement of sport and/or the community" factor included any item that referred to a commitment to improving sport in the community. The "sport of golf" factor provided a number of items that demonstrated the importance of the sport of golf (specifically) to the participants. "Volunteerism" emphasized the commitment of these volunteers to the act of volunteerism itself, which includes a desire to provide service as a volunteer in any capacity. Finally, the "community pride" factor was categorized by the desire of the volunteers to promote their community through their volunteer efforts.

Four factors were also noted for volunteer motivation, which together explained 61.4% of the variance in the item responses. These were labeled as "leisure," "purposive," "egoistic," and "external influences." Item factor loadings for the motivation items are shown in Table 4. Specifically, the motivation factor "purposive" contained a number of the items that were rated as the most important motivators by the sample of volunteers (see Tables 2 and 4).

Labeled by the definitions provided by Strigas and Jackson (2003), "leisure" represents motives related to the individual's need for various leisure choices; "purposive", involves motives related to the desire of the volunteers to benefit the end state of the sport event through their volunteer actions; "egoistic" represents motivations that include an individual's need for self esteem, self enhancement, and self development; and "external influences" assesses the extent to which the volunteers are engaged in volunteer activities that are influenced by motives related to factors outside of the volunteer's immediate control (e.g., significant other's involvement).

Table 2
Commitment and Motivation Items

Items	Mean	S.D.
Commitment		
I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the sport of golf be successful	5.74	1.36
My community really inspires the very best in me in the way of volunteer performance	5.63	1.38
I am extremely glad that I chose my community to volunteer for over others I was considering at the time I joined	5.63	1.36
I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help sports, in general, be successful	5.63	1.38
I find that my values and the values of golf are very similar	5.61	1.44
Sports really inspire the very best in me in the way of volunteer performance	5.59	1.36
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this Women's Open	5.58	1.49
I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help my community be successful"	5.52	1.35
For me this is the best of all possible communities for which to volunteer	5.52	1.32
I find that my values and the values of sport are very similar	5.45	1.44
I am extremely glad that I chose sports to volunteer for over other activities I was considering at the time I joined	5.37	1.45
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering	5.32	1.49
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering for golf championships	5.27	1.60
I am proud to tell others that I am part of my community	5.27	1.48
I speak of my community to my friends as a great one to volunteer for	5.23	1.49
For me sports are the best of all possible activities for which to volunteer	5.21	1.49
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering for this Women's Open	5.17	1.56
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering for my community	4.96	1.61
I really care about the fate of sports in general	4.84	1.69
I really care about the fate of my community	4.71	1.77
Motivation		
I wanted to help make the event a success	4.54	0.81
I wanted to interact with others	3.88	1.05
I wanted to put something back into the community	3.87	1.17
Volunteering activities energize me	3.83	1.10

Table 2 (*continued*)

Factor	Mean	S.D.
Volunteering makes me feel better about myself	3.56	1.19
Volunteering for this golf championship enables the organizational committee to provide more services for less money	3.55	1.40
I wanted to work with people from different age groups and/or backgrounds	3.24	1.37
Golf championships mirror our national heritage, image, and values	3.01	1.30
I wanted to challenge my abilities	2.99	1.42
I wanted to discover new interests	2.96	1.45
I wanted to improve my skills and abilities	2.66	1.43
I wanted to gain a feeling of belonging	2.07	1.27
I wanted to get away from the responsibilities of my everyday life	1.96	1.29
I want to continue a family tradition of volunteering in sporting events	1.88	1.34
I wanted to relieve the stress and the tension of everyday life	1.74	1.17
Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles	1.67	1.15
By volunteering, I feel less lonely	1.61	1.08
I wanted to slow down the pace of my life	1.59	1.02

Discussion and Implications for Volunteer Administrators

The results suggest that a four factor model of commitment (see Table 3) and a four factor model of motivation (see Table 4) regarding large sport event episodic volunteers are both reliable and valid for the study convenience sample within this setting. The focus of this paper will now shift to a discussion of the results in comparison to previous research and will subsequently suggest future implications for both scholars and practitioners.

Fairley et al. (2007) acknowledged that the commitment and motivation factors of large event volunteers yield an interesting and different lens for examination compared with other contexts of volunteerism. Similarly, work by MacLean and Hamm (2007) suggested that large sporting events, such as golf's Canadian Women's Open, which is hosted in a different city each year, require context-specific models of volunteer motivation and commitment. As suggested

by Fairley et al. and supported by the current study, large event volunteers have specific needs and desires, and must be understood and examined as a unique sub-group.

The results indicated that the lowest commitment items were "caring for the fate of sports in general" and "caring for the fate of the community" compared to the highest rated items "helping golf be successful" and "community pride". Perhaps these latter two commitment factors are considered more immediate and observable by volunteers, as opposed to being committed to the "fate of something", which could be perceived to be long-term and unobservable. As such, practitioners are encouraged to make activities and experiences immediately relevant to volunteers, positively impacting the volunteers' commitment and, in turn, retention. Specifically, it is suggested that administrators and managers of volunteer resources and large sport event coordinators should develop strategies that highlight volunteers' direct contributions to the event

and the community, and implement these strategies prior to, during, and after the volunteers' involvement. For example, during the volunteer orientation period, a volunteer newsletter could be circulated which outlines the specific impact that each general volunteer role has on ensuring the success of the event. If these newsletters were updated with pictures and stories about the impact of the volunteers and circulated again towards the end of the event, each volunteer would be able to explicitly see how their actions have contributed to the success of the sport event.

In addition, in order to address these volunteers' commitment to their community, sport event managers could enlist the aid of "community champions" to promote the benefits of volunteering and how it enhances community pride. These "champions" could encourage those who are passionate about sport and involved in sport as participants to extend their involvement and take on roles as volunteers.

The results also suggest that episodic volunteers at sport events are motivated by "making the event a success and interacting with others", rather than linking solely to motivators related to personal needs. Thus, practitioners should focus on motivating volunteers by identifying how their efforts directly benefit others and exploiting items of motivation reflected in the "purposive" factor results of this study. For example, volunteer administrators can link specific volunteer roles to the fulfillment of the goals and objectives of the event. During volunteer orientation, rather than simply giving each volunteer a description of their volunteer duties, administrators could use role description materials to ensure that volunteers are aware of how their role fits into the larger event goals. Volunteer committee chairs could then be required to ensure that these goals were promoted,

monitored, and evaluated throughout the event. This would provide volunteers with a purpose, which, as the current results suggest, is an important motivator for large event volunteers. Further, administrators should ensure that all role descriptions include sufficient opportunity for volunteers to interact with others.

Sport practitioners can also use the results of this research to effectively target and recruit potential episodic volunteers. For example, both "purposive" and "leisure" factor items were significant motivators for this sample. The purposive factor suggests that volunteering activity enables people to be involved in giving back to their communities while having meaningful interaction with others. Organizers of other large sport events should promote the positive, interactive environment of the event and attempt to provide a volunteer experience that connects peoples' desire to serve their communities with their desires to use their volunteer experience to achieve self-fulfillment. For example, organizers can promote the social benefits of volunteering by having activities that focus on recognition and social interaction such as volunteer appreciation receptions or dinners. Ensuring that the resources are available to properly encourage, support, and communicate with volunteers will reinforce their motivation and commitment to continue volunteering. To serve the "leisure" motivation, sport event organizers such as those organizing golf tournaments, should also emphasize the volunteer experience as a leisure pursuit by allowing people to select tasks that are appealing in terms of type (e.g., how closely the role is connected to the game of golf) and amount of time required, as well as ensuring that tasks which allow for partnering with friends are included.

Table 3
Exploratory Factor Analysis – Commitment

Factor	Factor Loadings
Factor 1: <u>Enhancing the sport and/or community</u>	
I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help my community be successful.	.77
I speak of my community to my friends as a great one to volunteer for.	.81
I am extremely glad that I chose sports to volunteer for over other activities I was considering at the time I joined.	.77
For me sports are the best of all possible activities for which to volunteer.	.76
I am proud to tell others that I am part of my community.	.72
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering for my community.	.72
Sports really inspire the very best in me in the way of volunteer performance.	.73
I really care about the fate of sports in general.	.55
Factor 2: <u>Sport of golf</u>	
I find that my values and the values of golf are very similar.	.72
I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the sport of golf be successful.	.65
I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help sports, in general, be successful.	.73
I find that my values and the values of sport are very similar.	.72
Factor 3: <u>Volunteerism</u>	
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering.	.73
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering for this Women's Open.	.87
I would accept almost any type of volunteer assignment in order to keep volunteering for golf championships.	.70
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this Women's Open.	.64
Factor 4: <u>Community Pride</u>	
I am extremely glad that I chose my community to volunteer for over others I was considering at the time I joined.	.82
I really care about the fate of my community.	.60
For me this is the best of all possible communities for which to volunteer.	.85
My community really inspires the very best in me in the way of volunteer performance.	.81

Table 4
Exploratory Factor Analysis – Motivation

Factor	Factor Loadings
Factor 1: <u>Leisure</u>	
I wanted to slow down the pace of my life.	.83
Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.	.83
I wanted to relieve the stress and the tension of everyday life.	.87
I wanted to get away from the responsibilities of my everyday life.	.78
I wanted to gain a feeling of belonging.	.65
By volunteering, I feel less lonely.	.65
Factor 2: <u>Purposive</u>	
Volunteering activities energize me.	.71
I wanted to interact with others.	.75
I wanted to put something back into the community.	.63
I wanted to work with people from different age groups and/or backgrounds.	.68
Volunteering for this golf championship enables the organizational committee to provide more services for less money.	.53
I wanted to help make the event a success.	.56
Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.	.59
Factor 3: <u>Egoistic</u>	
I wanted to improve my skills and abilities.	.78
I wanted to challenge my abilities.	.77
I wanted to discover new interests.	.69
Factor 4: <u>External Influences</u>	
Golf championships mirror our national heritage, image, and values.	.69
I am genuinely concerned about the particular championship I am serving.	.85
I wanted to continue a family tradition of volunteering in sporting events.	.46

The results suggest that volunteer commitment at the 2006 CN Canadian Women’s Open is represented by the following factors: “enhancement of sport and/or community, sport of golf, volunteerism, and community pride”. In addition, it was found that motivation is represented by “leisure, purposive, egoistic, and external influences”. The eight factor

structure of volunteer commitment and motivation fills a gap in the literature by providing specific factors related to large event episodic volunteering for future examination in similar sport, and potentially non-sport, settings. The survey results should now be replicated in other non-sport contexts that require large numbers of episodic volunteers, such as community

festivals and events such as World Youth Day. Meanwhile, practitioners are further encouraged to use these research results to develop meaningful strategies for management and retention of volunteers at large events.

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