

A Functional Approach to Senior Volunteer and Non-volunteer Motivations

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Abstract

Understanding volunteer motivation has been widely recognized by both researchers and administrators as a valuable component of management of volunteers. This paper utilized the multifactor functional approach derived from theories on attitudes to examine the motivations of active seniors that volunteer and those that did not volunteer. In general, the results supported the use of the multifactor functional approach (using the Volunteer Function Inventory scale) with seniors involved in human service organizations. Findings suggested several considerations for volunteer administrators to promote volunteerism among current volunteers and those with a desire to volunteer.

Key Words:

volunteers, motivations, seniors, non-volunteers

Introduction

There are 79 million baby boomers in America today, the youngest of which are turning 60 next year (Points of Light Foundation, 2004). A large portion of the baby boomer generation has already begun to retire or is planning to retire in the next couple of years. One of the most common activities for retirees is volunteerism. Approximately 50 percent of American adults volunteer their time in nonprofit organizations with an estimated \$150 billion worth of services being provided annually (Silverberg, Ellis & Whitworth, 2002). The rate is less for those age 65 or older, but still results in nearly one fourth of all adults having volunteered once in 2005 (Department of Labor, 2005). It is clearly evident that volunteer programs provide benefits to individuals and organizations across the country.

Understanding volunteer motivation has been widely recognized by both researchers and administrators as a valuable component of volunteer management (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Harrison, 1995). In examining who volunteers, many investigators found a positive correlation between the likelihood of formal volunteering and the demographic variables of education or income (Chambre, 1993; Fischer, Mueller, & Cooper, 1991; Fischer & Schaffer, 1993), and a white collar/professional employment background (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993; Herzog & Morgan, 1993). With regard to employment status, adults employed part-time were more likely to volunteer than full-time workers or the unemployed (Fischer et al., 1991; Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). Similarly, church members had a greater likelihood of organizational volunteering than non-members (Fischer et al., 1991; Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). Some studies showed that highly motivated volunteers serve longer than volunteers who do not

have their needs met through service (Omoto & Snyder, 1995).

Gender is a strong predictor of volunteerism; women are more likely to volunteer than men (Caldwell & Andereck, 1994; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Trudeau & Devlin, 1996). In studies involving parks and recreation and human service oriented programs, the prevalence of women in volunteer groups ranges from a high of 78 percent (Fitch, 1987) to a low of 52 percent (Backman, Wicks & Silverberg, 1997). Similar to gender, annual household income appears to assist in the understanding of the types of organizations for which one volunteers. Studies of collegiate volunteers (Fitch, 1987) and members of recreation-related voluntary associations, affiliated for example with zoos, museums, and environmental concerns (Bigley, Fesenmaier & Roehl, 1994; Caldwell & Andereck, 1994), reported that high socioeconomic status (i.e., income) is a common and predictive variable explaining participation. Bigley et al., (1994) revealed that over 60 percent of volunteers had annual household incomes exceeding \$40,000.

In regards to age and volunteers, empirical studies have revealed generally an upward trend in the proportion of seniors who volunteer (Chambre, 1993). This upward trend has been attributed to the rising affluence and educational levels of the aged (Chambre, 1993), as well as an emerging "busy ethic" that encourages adults to age well by staying active and involved with family, home maintenance, and volunteer organizations (Ekerdt, 1986). Although there are more proportionally older volunteers, the amount of time contributed to volunteer organizations (by people of comparable socioeconomic status) has remained stable (Fischer et al., 1991; Herzog & House, 1991; Herzog & Morgan, 1993). On average, older adults have volunteered between 70-80 hours of their

time annually, or roughly six hours per month (Herzog & House, 1991; Herzog & Morgan, 1993). In fact, fewer than 10 percent of the aged have contributed as many as 10 hours per week, or the equivalent of a quarter-time job (Fischer et al., 1991; Worthy & Ventura-Merkel, 1982), but it is this small percentage of active elder volunteers that has accounted for most of the hours volunteered (Morgan, 1986).

Many studies examined and categorized the motivational objectives of individuals who donate their services to various organizations. One of the major motives for volunteering is giving something worthwhile to society. Helping others and benefiting society (altruistic motive) are consistent reasons why individuals volunteer (Brudney, 1993; Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998). Other motives include sharpening or stretching one's job skills, testing new careers, or building a resume (Gillespie & King, 1985).

David McClelland (McClelland, 1972; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953) pioneered workplace motivation and particularly need-based achievement motivation theories and models in the field of organizational behavior. The three types of motivational need were identified as achievement motivation, authority/power motivation, and affiliation motivation (McClelland, 1988). Much of McClelland's work is the foundation of the current understanding of workplace interactions and the desire to achieve as a basic human motivation. McClelland (1972; 1988) found that achievement motivated people have certain characteristics in common, including: the capacity to set high personal but obtainable goals, the concern for personal achievement rather than the reward of success, and the desire for job-relevant feedback (how well am I doing?) rather than for attitudinal feedback (how well do you like me?). Related to the affiliation

motivation or the desire for friendly relationships and interactions with other people, Wilson (1976) found that this motivation connected directly to the recruitment and retention of volunteers in a quality program.

Of the few theories explaining the motivations for planned helping or volunteering, a functional (psychological) approach was viewed as one of the predominant research strategies in current literature on motivation (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). One particular study (Okun, Barr & Herzog, 1998) focused on determining the best approach to measure volunteer motivations of seniors. The researchers (Okun et al., 1998) found that the multifactor functional approach derived from theories on attitudes showed the most promise in understanding volunteer motivations. Another study (Stergios & Carruthers, 2003) investigated the motivations of volunteers serving in intergenerational programs that benefit older adults and youth who participate. The motivations of older adult volunteers in this study were consistent with and further validated the use of the functional approach.

Multifactor Functional Approach

Clary et al.'s (1998) functional analysis extends previous research on the breadth of volunteers' motivations (Clary & Snyder, 1991) and builds on the work of functional theorists (e.g., Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner & White, 1956) who argued that the same beliefs, attitudes, and actions could serve different psychological factors for different individuals. The Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI) scale developed by Clary et al. (1998) proposes six different factors that exist in unique degrees of interest for each individual. Volunteerism may serve (a) a *value factor*, by allowing one to express altruistic and humanitarian values; (b) an *understanding factor*, by offering learning

experiences; (c) a *social factor*, by providing opportunities for social interaction and approval; (d) a *career factor*, by providing career-beneficial experiences; (e) a *protective factor*, by offering escape from negative feelings of self, such as guilt over one's good fortune relative to others'; and (f) an *enhancement factor*, by promoting positive feelings of self.

Perhaps the most significant implication of this functional approach is that individuals can be persuaded to volunteer through appeals to relevant psychological factors. Past research on functional theories of attitudes has supported the hypothesis that matching message content to audience motivations facilitates persuasion. DeBono (1987) found that individuals with primarily a social orientation experienced more attitude change after exposure to a message addressing that factor than after exposure to a message addressing the value factor. Individuals for whom attitudes serve primarily a value's factor were more influenced by a value message than a social message. Another study (Snyder, 1974) used a self-monitoring scale to identify social and value factors in the act of volunteering. This work and others (Snyder, 1974; Snyder & DeBono, 1989) revealed the importance of matching a motivational strategy to the individual's attitude resulted in persuasive messages that were effective in generating volunteers.

Consequently, understanding the motives of different volunteers will provide volunteer managers the opportunity to effectively promote opportunities and design volunteer positions that fulfill the interests of potential volunteers. Wymer (2002) suggests that effective market segmentation will improve the efficacy of volunteer administrator research to inform decision-making and understanding of voluntary behavior because a more focused research facilitates the understanding and applying of

results. A variety of methods are suggested to segment the volunteer pool, but typically it reflects demographic characteristics that define a recognizable market niche. Older individuals are an extremely valuable volunteer pool and further clarification of motivations and demographic characteristics of volunteers compared to non-volunteers would be beneficial. Unfortunately, no matter how effective the use of the functional approach to volunteer management, there are barriers that prevent individuals from volunteering. As individuals grow older, the rate of volunteerism is less likely to be influenced by health reasons. For each increase in age of one year, the odds of a person volunteering decrease slightly (Choi, 2003). Other barriers are a lack of time, lack of transportation, disabilities, and lack of financial sustainability. For these reasons a substantial number of those serving through formal senior volunteer programs discontinue within one year (Stevens, 1991). This underscores the need for more research on seniors that do and do not volunteer. The purpose of this study was to determine through a functional approach if there are motivational differences between older adults that volunteer or those that do not but might be motivated to volunteer.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the functional motivations of seniors that volunteer and those that do not. The researcher administered the instrument in two different locations. One location was a senior center that captured primarily non-volunteers, and the second was a local social service agency. A modified version of the Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI) scale by Clary et al. (1998) which has been used extensively by a variety of researchers have established the reliability (.82 to .85 alpha reliability) of the VFI scale (Clary et al.,

1998; Okun et al., 1998; Snyder & Cantor, 1998; Welker, 2001). The motivational factor dimension of *career* was eliminated to reflect the senior sample reducing the VFI scale to five factor dimensions. After the modifications, the survey included 20 questions using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *not at all important* to (7) *extremely important*. In order to separate the volunteers from non-volunteers, the survey instructions stated, "If you have done volunteer work before or are currently doing volunteer work, please indicate how important each of the following possible reasons for volunteering is for you. If you have not been a volunteer before, please indicate how important each of the following reasons for volunteering would be for you." The researcher's pilot tested the instrument with a selected group of seniors to determine the length of the overall presentation and survey, and to adjust and clarify the survey questions. Data were coded and analyzed using the SPSS for Windows version 12.0. Frequency distributions were initially calculated for the demographic variables.

Results

A total of 216 responses were used for this analysis (see Table 1). The sample was truncated (respondents 49 years of age and younger were excluded from the social service agency sample) to include only respondents between the ages of 51-79. This is based on the expanded view of mature adults (50 years of age and older) that volunteer for a variety of programs as seniors (Points of Light Foundation, 2004). Of the total respondents, 60 % were female with an average age of 68 years old. A large portion of the sample was White (92%), and retired from employment (81%) with a majority having completed a high school education. There were some differences between the two samples, most notably the social service agency volunteers tended to be slightly more affluent with a median income of \$50,000 (computed from a fixed response question of household income categories starting at \$15,000 or less up to \$105,000 or more at intervals of \$15,000), and slightly more educated. Otherwise, the samples were remarkably similar with over 80 % of the respondents retired and over 90 % White.

Table I
Respondent Profile

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Social Service</u>		
	<u>Senior Center</u> N=121	<u>Agency</u> N=95	<u>Total</u> N=216
Average age (SD)	68.5 (7.06)	67.2 (7.43)	67.9 (7.24)
Percent male (n)	31% (38)	52%	40% (87)
Percent female (n)	69% (83)	48%	60% (129)
Percent white	93%	90%	92%
Percent retired	83%	82%	82%
Median income	\$30,000	\$50,000	N/A
College degree	33%	40%	35%
Percent volunteer (n)	27% (36)	73% (95)	61% (131)
Percent nonvolunteer (n)	100% (85)	--	39% (85)

A principal axis factor method with oblique rotation was used on the 20 Likert-type scale items of the modified VFI scale of five factor dimensions to develop the motivational dimensions for volunteers and non-volunteers. Initially, three factors with Eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1.0 were identified, and they explained 58.5 percent of the variance in the original data set. Since the modified scale contained five theoretical factor dimensions (the career motivational dimension was eliminated previously for lack of relevance to a senior sample), additional analysis was conducted specifying five and then four factor solutions. A cutoff point of 0.4 for the factor loadings (Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999) was used in the factor analysis to include items in subsequent interpretation of identified factors. With the five factor solution, the items clustered according to theoretical expectations except the enhancement factor items were relatively weak (i.e., two of the four have factor loadings below .40). A review of the "scree test" of the eigenvalues of the correlation matrix were computed and plotted (Cattell, 1966) which seemed to suggest a four factor solution. With the final four factor solution the three understanding and four enhancement scale items combined to create a single robust scale with all factor loadings above .40. The items in the values and social factors loaded according to expectations for these distinct factor loadings. All items except one in the protective factor dimension loaded appropriately. That one item which stated "volunteering helps me feel better" was dropped from the analysis because of a factor loading below .40. In addition, an eigenvalue of .92 for the fourth factor and the accompanying scree test suggested a final four factor solution. Table 2 displays the dimensions, item descriptions, four factor loadings (social, values, enhancement, protective), and item means for the

sample of senior non-volunteers. The alpha reliability coefficients ranged from .844 to .894 for the four motivational factors which is consistent with Clary et al. (1998) results.

The four factor solution for the senior volunteer sample produced results that loaded in similar fashion except for the initial factor loading of the understanding/enhancement motivation factor in place of the social motivation factor for the non-volunteer sample. The factor loadings for values and protective motivations loaded in the second and fourth position, respectively. This particular factor analysis of the senior volunteers with its slight variations was not included, but can be obtained from the authors.

Analysis was conducted to determine if volunteers differed from non-volunteers across the four motivational factor dimensions (see Table 3). Results from this analysis support the hypothesis that motivations to volunteer appear to differ from those that are actively volunteering and those that do not. Non-volunteers' responses indicated that enhancement/understanding and protective motivational factor dimension items were different than the volunteering sample. The analysis did not support the contention that the motivational dimensions of value and social differed from senior volunteers and non-volunteers. This suggests that values and social motivations are expressed by both volunteers and non-volunteers. This result was somewhat confirmed in a study of traditional college-age, students volunteer project (Papadakis, Griffin, & Frater, 2004). The difference between volunteers and non-volunteers was found for the enhancement/understanding motivation in this younger college age sample which confirms the findings in this study of seniors. The lack of support for the protective motivation to volunteer might be due to the college-age demographics of this sample of respondents.

Table 2
Results of Factor Analysis of Nonvolunteers

Dimension	Item Description	Factor Loading (N=85)				Communality	Item Mean
		1	2	3	4		
Social	Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service.	.851				.845	4.11
	My friends volunteer.	.847				.823	
	People I know share an interest in community service.	.658				.671	
	By volunteering I feel less lonely.	.651				.673	
	People I'm close to want me to volunteer.	.621				.625	
	Volunteering is a way to make new friends.	.605				.792	
Values	I feel compassion toward people in need.		.848			.721	5.02
	I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.		.748			.802	
	I feel it is important to help others.		.735			.847	
	I am concerned about the group I am serving.		.664			.790	
Enhancement	Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.			.822		.842	4.75
	Volunteering helps me feel better.			.641		.755	
	I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.			.608		.596	
	Volunteering increases my self-esteem.			.605		.708	
Protective	Volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands-on experience.	.558				.879	4.09
	Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.						
	Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems.	.789				.857	
		.751				.811	
	Eigenvalue	4.42	3.93	3.36	2.46		
	Variance Explained	22.07	19.65	17.05	12.30 **		
	Reliability Coefficient	0.87	0.89	0.88	0.84		

*mean scores on a seven-point scale ranging from (1) not at all important to (7) extremely important.

**total variance explained = 71.07

Table 3
Comparison of Volunteers and Nonvolunteers

Motivations	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Volunteers N=131		Nonvolunteers N=85	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Values	0.18	210	5.00	0.97	5.11	0.78
Social	-1.14	214	4.0	1.18	4.12	1.16
Enhancement/ Understanding	2.09*	213	4.64	1.01	4.93	0.94
Protective	2.62**	206	3.63	1.34	4.14	1.42

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study supported the use of the multifactor functional approach with seniors that volunteer in human service organizations. The anticipated five factor solution was not robust in this sample, although the scale did reveal some structural integrity when a five factor solution was analyzed, but the factor loadings were not sufficient. A four factor solution, which combined the understanding and enhancement dimensions, was used in the analysis. The understanding and enhancement dimensions are conceptually very similar (i.e., learning and growing) and suggest a desire for volunteer experiences that enrich the volunteer by providing opportunities to learn new things and to grow psychologically. This motivation to continue the life-long learning process was found to be still a significant factor for individuals in their non-work/retired period of their lives (Henderson, 1983).

The altruistic motivational dimension defined as concern for others (*values*) appeared to be salient reason for both volunteers and non-volunteers to become involved. This is supported by research for the population at-large (Clary et al., 1998), and in the case of senior volunteers (Okun &

Schultz, 2003; Stergios & Carruthers, 2003) and more specifically with older Red Cross volunteers (Gillespie & King, 1985). In addition, the social motive was also found to be a solid predictor of senior volunteers and non-volunteers based on the motivation to increase social interactions, interpersonal relationships, and friendships which supports the work of McClelland (1972; 1988). This suggests that messages to recruit and retain volunteers should communicate clearly how volunteer opportunities create climates that provide volunteers the chance to help others and build positive interpersonal relationships with peers (Henderson, 1983; Vineyard, 1991).

The two motivational dimensions for the non-volunteer seniors produced different results which were related to egotistical motivations. In other words, non-volunteers were much more likely to express a desire to volunteer so they could grow and learn (enhancement and understanding) as well as for protective motivations that suggest a desire to volunteer as a mechanism to feel better about one-self. For instance, one of the questions stated "volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles." These individuals recognized the altruistic motives

of helping others, but also perceived volunteering as a way to help themselves.

These findings suggest that the multi-factor functional analysis (VFI scale) can be a valuable tool for understanding the motivational processes of volunteerism and planned helping. To the extent that relevant motivations can be accurately identified, promotion of the service of volunteers can be adapted accordingly to maximize persuasion (Clary et al., 1998; Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Miene, & Haugen, 1994), match the volunteer with the appropriate tasks and responsibilities (Rubin & Thorelli, 1984), enhance longevity of volunteer service (Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Stallings, 1996), match rewards and recognition to volunteer needs (Vineyard, 1989), and improve recruitment and retention of senior volunteers in a variety of program areas (Okun & Schultz, 2003; Stergios & Carruthers, 2003). This strategy, along with other research on functionalism in general, reflects a re-emergence of interest in motivation as a personality and social psychology construct; one that has practical significance in addressing certain problems of inaction.

According to McClelland's theory (1972; 1988), the dominant motivational forces (affiliation, achievement or authority/power) impacting volunteer behavior, expectancies and meaningful incentives to the individual will have a significant influence on the most appropriate volunteer opportunity. If these behavioral factors are taken into account in developing, recruiting, and assigning volunteers, both the organization and the volunteer will benefit. Volunteers primarily motivated by achievement have a desire for excellence and take pride in their outcomes. These individuals are goal oriented and effective at tackling problems facing many nonprofit organizations. An affiliation motive influences a person to be most concerned about relationships with

others, other people's feelings, and how they can be of help. A person for whom the power motive is dominant is characterized by needs for prestige and status and positions of influence. A simple questionnaire used in the volunteer application process has been able to identify individual's hierarchy of motives which might facilitate the optimum placement of volunteers within an organization (Watts & Edwards, 1983).

The complexity of the social psychological influences on volunteer behavior substantiates the dynamic view of the continuum of overlapping and evolving forces. Backman et al. (1997) proposed a continuum of volunteer motives between altruistic and egotistical functions. They further developed the egotistical side of the continuum by suggesting that these individuals volunteer so that they (or family members) benefit directly from programs and services. Silverberg, Backman and Backman (2000) found users and participants of parks and recreation services and programs that receive direct benefits (co-production) were more likely to volunteer, and suggested more research is needed on the relationship of egotistical motives and co-production. Ultimately, the researchers (Silverberg et al., 2000) suggest that those with the most intense connection to the organization feel most willing to contribute their time and services and that might be based on the satisfaction of the psychological need for achievement, influence over others and social affiliation (McClelland, 1988).

In summary, the multifactor functional approach to understanding the senior volunteer is further substantiated. However, the findings of this study are limited to those seniors that participated in two sites that were included in the study. Despite the limitations, managers of volunteers who understand the social psychological motives

sought by seniors will be better equipped to provide experiences that satisfy the altruistic and egotistical functions of current volunteers and those that have the potential to volunteer. This will result in recruitment and retention strategies that are effective in meeting the needs of the organization and the seniors who are willing to volunteer to support and benefit future generations.

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