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A Systematic Approach for Volunteer Assignment and Retention

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(Editor-generated) Abstract

The authors describe a detailed process using various occupational resources in the placement of volunteers in an organization. Specific focus is placed on the matching of volunteer skills and abilities and the requirements of the volunteer position.

(Editor-generated) Key Words:

volunteer placement, Dictionary of Occupational Titles, volunteer retention

As directors of volunteer services can expect greater responsibility and recognition in the future (Alderman, 1983), the effective utilization of personnel is certain to be a challenge to anyone whose job includes the recruitment and assignment of volunteers. After job descriptions have been developed in an agency, volunteers must be recruited and selected to fulfill the specific tasks of work assignments. Henderson (1983) stresses the importance of matching the volunteer's abilities and skills with the organization's tasks. In analyzing the scope of tasks in the organization, tasks may be assigned according to function, in other words, tasks to be performed (a) with people, (b) with things, and (c) with data. Categories of volunteers can then be related to those tasks (Lauffer & Gorodezky, 1977). For example, home visits and initial interviews are examples of tasks performed with people; repairing wheelchairs and designing brochures relate to tasks performed with things; and evaluating the effectiveness of the service program is an example of a task performed with data (Lauffer & Gorodezky, 1977).

Consideration must be given to designing work assignments for volunteers

that divide responsibilities into manageable and interesting combinations of tasks (Naylor, 1973). Naylor further stresses than an often occurring mistake made with volunteers is underplacement. Assigning very capable people to trivial responsibilities or experienced individuals to routine tasks in an unrelated area results in individuals becoming dissatisfied with their volunteer activities. Instead of starting at the bottom, a volunteer should be placed appropriately from the beginning to make immediate use of the training and experience the individual brings to the agency (Naylor, 1973). Roepke (1983) offers support for this approach in a study reporting that when volunteers are assigned to task force groups utilizing special skills to respond to specific needs, they reported higher levels of satisfaction. These individuals consistently reported that their volunteer efforts were meeting their expectations, providing a good feeling about themselves, and offering an opportunity to feel fulfilled.

Individuals tend to volunteer with certain kinds of expectations that provide a motivational climate for the person (Henderson, 1983). Volunteers with a salaried work history often relate

expectations in a volunteer role to work values held in their past or continuing work experiences. For example, a retired individual who had high recognition needs in his or her work history, may well need a volunteer role that will produce admiration from others and continued recognition for accomplishments in his or her life. The identification of expectations usually occurs in the screening process and orientation session. If expectations based on personal goals and past work values are not identified in the beginning, the expected motivational climate may not develop for the new volunteer.

The purpose of this article is to present the director of volunteer services a systematic approach for effective utilization and retention of volunteers. This approach is based on the skills and abilities volunteers develop through work and life experiences and, also, expectations derived from values and personal goals to provide an appropriate motivational climate for the prospective volunteer.

Job Analysis Resources

Saxon and Roberts (1983) presented a discussion on the effective utilization of an individual's past work in relation to future job alternatives based on a transferable skills and abilities profile. By obtaining a work history from each volunteer and also considering his or her past hobbies, recreational activities, and past volunteer positions, the same concept may be applied to the selection and assignment of volunteer workers. According to Saxon and Roberts, an in-depth work history should include, at least, the following information for each job:

- Job title
- Description of work performed (including processes, and materials)
- Length of employment
- The factors most and least liked by the individual

Once this information is collected, a skills and abilities profile can be constructed using resource materials. These resource materials include the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)* (U.S. Department of Labor, 1977); *Guide for Occupational Exploration (GOE)* (U.S. Department of Labor, 1979); and *Selected Characteristics of Occupations Defined in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (SCO)* (U.S. Department of Labor, 1981).

The *DOT* is based on more than 75,000 on-site analyses and contains approximately 20,000 jobs from the work world. The *DOT* presents a systematic description of each job and lists the level of worker involvement concerning data, people, and things for each job. The job data in the *DOT* is presented in six basic parts for each job description.

- The Occupational Code Number
- The Occupational Title
- The Industry Designation
- Alternate Titles (if any)
- The Body of the Definition
 - Lead statements
 - Task elements statements
 - "May" items
- Undefined Related Titles (if any)

The levels concerning work involvement with data, people, and things are described numerically by the middle three of the nine digit occupational code (Table 1).

A major benefit of the *DOT* is in determining worker transferable potential into alternative jobs. Meanwhile, the *GOE* organizes and places each job into one of 12 interest areas with further division into 66 work groups, describing the skills and abilities needed to perform jobs within each work group. The *GOE* provides information under five headings:

1. What kind of work would you do?
2. What skills and abilities do you need for this kind of work?
3. How do you know if you would like or could learn to do this kind of work?

4. How can you prepare for and enter this kind of work?
5. What else should you consider about these jobs?

A specific four-digit code identifies each work group. Jobs included within a work group in the *GOE* “are of the same general type of work and require the same adaptabilities and capabilities of the worker” (p. 1).

The *SCO* provides specific information concerning physical demands (e.g., strengths, worker movement of objects and self); environmental conditions (e.g., location of the job, temperature, hazards, dust); mathematical and language development (e.g., functioning levels in reading, writing, speaking and mathematics); and specific vocational preparation (the amount of time required to become an average worker in that position).

After the new volunteer is interviewed and a work history obtained, these resource materials may be used. It should be noted that the resource materials have instructions in each book for complete use and that only part of the total information available is used in this approach.

Specific Steps in Using Resource Materials

Each job listed in the volunteer’s personal work history is located in the *DOT*. This is accomplished by looking up each job in the “Alphabetical Index of Occupational Titles” beginning on page 965. A nine digit occupational code is given for each job and is then used to locate the job and is then used to locate the actual job description in the body of the *DOT*. Jobs in the body of the *DOT* are presented in numerical order. When locating a specific job in the *DOT*, the industry designation as well as the job definition must be carefully compared to the volunteer’s verbal report. Selecting a correct

job title in an inappropriate industry will result in the construction for a false profile for the volunteer.

Jobs may also be located within the *DOT* using the “Occupational Titles Arranged by Industry Designation” beginning on page 1157. Industry designations are presented alphabetically with alphabetical listings of occupational titles included under each.

In the *GOE*, the job title is located in the “Alphabetic Arrangement of Occupations,” beginning on page 336. In addition to the nine digit occupational code, which may be used to verify that it is the same job as in the *DOT*, a six-digit *GOE* code is listed. The first two digits of the *GOE* code identify interest areas and the second two digits categorize the job into work groups. Skills and abilities are presented for each of the 66 work groups. After the volunteer’s job has been located in the appropriate work group, the presented skills and abilities are compared to the volunteer’s description of his/her work to determine the appropriate ones.

The *SCO* indicates the length of time required to complete the specific vocational preparation period. Once an individual has been trained for this length of time, it is assumed that the skills and abilities required on that job are present.

The following is a summary of specific steps in identifying a volunteer’s skills and abilities through vocational resource materials:

- Locate job title and nine-digit occupational code and verify job description in *DOT*.
- Locate the six-digit code and determine appropriate skills and abilities in *GOE*.
- Verify completion of specific vocational preparation period in *SCO*.

Work Values

Since volunteers are “workers,” work values appear to be important considerations in the utilization and retention of these individuals. According to Super (1970), work values are “those attributes or qualities we consider intrinsically desirable and which people seek in the activities in which they engage “ (p. 4). A volunteer’s work values reflect individual needs and satisfaction of these needs provide important motivation to maintain a work assignment. Since many volunteers have an established work history, certain work values have been established by individuals who, through volunteer activities, will continue to strive for satisfaction of these needs. In other cases, individuals will strive to satisfy intrinsic needs through volunteer activities that cannot be satisfied in their present paid employment.

Certain personal values have been identified through research that relates to major dimensions of a person’s domain (Knapp & Knapp, 1978). These value dimensions include investigative, practical, independent, leadership, orderliness, recognition, aesthetic, and social. The following is a summary of the above value dimensions as reflected and measured by the Career Orientation Placement and Evaluation Survey (Knapp & Knapp, 1978):

1. Investigative: This dimension is characterized by the values of intellectual curiosity and the challenge of solving a complex task. Individuals scoring on this scale value concrete and well-defined ideas that generate observable results of their efforts.
2. Practical: Appreciation of reality-based, practical and efficient ways of doing things and maintaining environmental property are primary values in this dimension. Low scorers on this scale look to others to

- take care of property and maintain things in good working order.
3. Independent: This dimension reflects a need for independence from rules and regulations and the freedom to be self-directed by social obligations. Persons with low scores on this scale value supervised activities that involve clear directions and regulations.
4. Leadership: Supervising, decision-making, and group direction are valued functions on this dimension. High scorers on this scale seek levels of importance and positions of leadership while low scorers value activities in which they can participate without having to direct others.
5. Orderliness: Characteristics of this dimension include keeping things orderly and meeting expectations of the work assignment. Individuals with low scores on this scale value activities in which they can take things as they come an assignments that do not require a great deal of structure and orderliness.
6. Recognition: Individuals who seek recognition and the admiration of others, value being well known, and need to be looked up to by other people, score high on this dimensional scale. Low scorer’s value private activities and do not seek high levels of recognition.
7. Aesthetic: Artistic appreciation, emotional sensitivity, and enjoyment of music and the arts are valued functions on this scale. Persons who score low on this scale value activities that do not focus on artistic qualities or primary use of senses and intuition.
8. Social: Working with people, helping others through services,

meeting and getting to know people are valued by individuals with high scores on this dimension. Persons with low scores seek activities involving material objects, as well as assignments requiring limited contacts with others.

The Career Orientation Placement and Evaluation Survey (COPES) is essentially self-administering and results are displayed on a profile that specifies the volunteer's percentile on each work value (Knapp & Knapp, 1978). Use of the COPES or other similar survey should be discussed with each volunteer as a means of identifying appropriate placement options for the individual.

Selection and Assignment Process

The selection and assignment of volunteers may be viewed as a process of matching skills and abilities to requirements, and work values to job activities. To maximize utilization and retention of volunteers, the director of volunteer services is attempting to assign volunteers to activities that meet each person's expectations and needs and that produce high levels of satisfaction. If skills and abilities also match the activity assignment, the value of the volunteer to the agency will be enhanced and the contribution to the agency will be maximized.

The following is an example of the application of this concept of transferable skills and abilities, work compatibility, and expressed work values. Jane D. is a 62-year-old female who has recently presented herself for volunteer activity in a hospital volunteer program but was not sure of what she could offer. She is now retired but had worked for the past 15 years as a remittance clerk for a local electrical company. Before that job she worked for 20 years as a teacher aide in an elementary school with the first grade. She indicated that these two jobs

were her most significant past work, since she had only held several short-term positions as a "helper" before these jobs. On the job as a remittance clerk, she received payment from customers directly or through the mail, recorded the payment and issued receipts and any change due customers, and explained changes to customers. Jane indicated that she liked meeting different individuals, but disliked the recordkeeping aspect of her job. Her job as a teacher aide included assisting the teacher in the preparation and implementation of classroom projects; reading stories; keeping order in the classroom; and assisting students with various classroom assignments. She enjoyed relating to the students in a helpful role, but disliked the supervisory aspect of her work. Jane stated that she enjoys reading and painting landscapes as her major leisure time activities.

The position of remittance clerk has a *DOT* code of 211.462-034 and a *GOE* code of 07.03.01. The *SCO* lists a specific vocational preparation period for this job of "over 30 days up to and including 3 months" (p. 473). According to the *GOE*, an individual would need the following skills and abilities to perform the job of remittance clerk: "use math to make change; use eyes, hands and fingers at the same time to operate an adding machine calculator, or cash register; deal with the public with tact and courtesy; perform work that is routine and organized" (p. 235).

The position of teacher aide has a *DOT* code of 099.327-101 and a *GOE* code of 11.02.01. The *SCO* lists a vocational preparation period of "over 2 years and up to and including 4 years" (p. 473). According to the *GOE*, the following skills and abilities are needed to perform this job: "understand and use the base principles of effective teaching, develop special skills and knowledge in one or more academic

subjects, develop a good teacher-student relationship” (p. 287). The most complex level of data (2), people (2), and things (2) involvement was obtained by combining jobs. This indicated involvement with analyzing data, instructing people, and operating-controlling things. Jane received payment, issued receipts, and any change due customers, and explained charges (example of analyzing data); she assisted students with various classroom assignments (example of instructing people); and she operated a calculator and cash register (example of operating-controlling things).

On the COPEs, Jane expressed work values that were consistent with her work background and leisure time activities. Value dimensions with high expressions were social (94th percentile) and aesthetic (85th percentile). Orderliness (55th percentile) and recognition (35th percentile) were expressed at a lower level and other values occurred at below the 10th percentile. As a result, Jane expressed a need to work with people and highly values contact with others. From her interest in art, she values artistic activities.

Based on the above analysis, Jane D. was assigned by the director of volunteer services to the discharge desk in the hospital. Her assignment included the discharging of individual patients from their rooms in a wheelchair, obtaining their prescribed drugs from the hospital pharmacy, and checking them through the finance office. Through this assignment, Jane has an opportunity to interact with patients in a helpful role on an ongoing basis. She was also requested to assist in coordinating the annual art auction, a fundraiser for the hospital. In her volunteer assignment, Jane is therefore able to assume a responsible role commensurate with existing skills, abilities and expressed work values that relate to social expression and aesthetic activities.

Conclusion

The ability to involve volunteers effectively and retain these individuals is a primary goal of directors of volunteer services. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives are considered important: (1) match the volunteer’s skills and abilities with the agency’s tasks; (2) relate the assignment to the volunteer’s established work values; and (3) involve the volunteer in activities that respond to personal needs and interest. The extent to which these objectives can be achieved with a volunteer will determine the level of volunteer satisfaction and effective agency utilization of the individual.

A systematic approach was presented here to assist the agency in reaching the above objectives. By analyzing transferable skills and abilities from a past work history or present occupation, the agency can match the volunteer to work assignment at an appropriate level. To be motivated in performing and maintaining a work assignment, the volunteer must be able to satisfy a set of established work values and personal need expectancies. An analysis of these values permits the director of volunteer services to select work assignments that will facilitate the retention of volunteers.

Among the significant management functions of the director of volunteer services is the selection and assignment of volunteer personnel. In order to fully utilize volunteers, they must be assigned at an appropriate level and in order to retain them, need expectancies and values must be met, at least to the satisfaction of the volunteer. When both agency satisfaction and volunteer satisfaction exist at significant levels, effective volunteer utilization and retention are greatly enhanced.

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(Original) Editor's Note (from 1984)

The Editorial Reviewers found this article to be thought-provoking and to present our readers with new resource tools. However, questions were raised as to the feasibility of utilizing such a comprehensive profile procedure for most volunteer programs. Dr. Sawyer and Dr. Saxon have not actually field tested this approach with small to mid-sized volunteer programs. THE JOURNAL therefore encourages our readers to write to us with reaction to the ideas presented here. Examples of ways to adapt these vocational tools would be very helpful. Note also that the *DOT*, *GOE*, and *SCO* can be used in conjunction with an assessment of the "true dollar value" of volunteer work assignments as described by G. Neil Karn in his two-part article in THE JOURNAL, Winter 1982-3 and Spring 1983.

About the Authors

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Table 1

Numbers Associated With Data, People and Things in Worker Involvement (DOT)

Data (4th digit)	People (5th digit)	Things (6th digit)
0 Synthesizing	0 Mentoring	0 Setting up
1 Coordination	1 Negotiating	1 Precision working
2 Analyzing	2 Instructing	2 Operating/Controlling
3 Compiling	3 Supervising	3 Driving/Operating
4 Computing	4 Diverting	4 Manipulating
5 Copying	5 Persuading	5 Tending
6 Comparing	6 Speaking-Signaling	6 Feeding/Off-bearing
	7 Serving	7 Handling
	8 Taking Instruction/Helping	
