

Social Conscience and Self-Interest: A Study of Volunteer Motives in Non-Profits

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Abstract: *This study aims at analyzing the different factors that motivate the volunteers to serve, and the motives that are presumed by managers of non-profits. Altruism itself can be motivated by self-centered motivations. By understanding these motivations, strategies can be formed to achieve higher volunteer engagement, satisfaction and consequently, beneficiary satisfaction.*

Introduction

The aim of a non-profit is existential amelioration of victim groups. Essentially, a non-profit entity strives to make the lives of the unfortunate better. This basic attribute of making lives better through significant contributions emerges from the concept of social justice. Social justice is perceived as equality in the society in terms of availability and access to resources, exercise of rights, and awareness of responsibilities. As an organization comprising of social workers, a non-profit feels the necessity to open the doors of access and opportunity to those who are in the greatest need of it. This sense of responsibility for the problems and injustices of society acts as the base of its social conscience. The collective social conscience of the individual volunteers drives acts of social justice by the non-profit. Thus, the concept of social justice explains the activities of a non-profit organization. (Hall 2000). The facilitators of this social justice are the volunteers of a non-profit organization, also known as non-profit employees. Individuals are attracted to work in non-profit organizations as non-profit jobs challenge the skill of the individual, pushing the individual beyond his/her boundaries to work in an unpredictable environment.

A twin pressure created by modern society today, with the pressure to serve one's own interests on one hand and a growing awareness of societal inequity on the other, challenges an individual. In a quest to meet both pressures, a balancing act emerges where

the individual volunteer finds self-serving points in the act of service.

There are various reasons for individuals to take up the act of volunteering. This study explores a variety of motives which the individual volunteer may employ. There may be external and internal factors that motivate individual volunteers.

The intrinsic rewards that an individual reaps through voluntary work seem to drive commitment to the non-profit. When an individual volunteer is continually aligned to the purpose for which the non-profit exists, and experiences goal congruence in every task accomplished, the non-profit has apparently succeeded in tapping the inbuilt instinct in a volunteer to serve the society. In order for goal congruence to really come about, the work environment and the organizational culture in the non-profit may have an important role to play.

Individual volunteers may also have personal reasons to volunteer. Volunteering leads to personal development of the individual, enabling them to harness the altruism within. The number of people volunteering in their free time has rapidly increased in the past couple of years due to rising awareness of the changing need of the society. According to a report from the UK-based Charities Aid Foundation, Turkmenistan had the highest proportion of people who volunteered their time in 2013, followed by Myanmar (huffingtonpost2013).

Volunteer participation rates are increasing with over a billion people around the world giving their time to help others. In the year 2013, developing economies had the highest jump in volunteering rates, while developed economies looked for paid work due to a downturn in economic conditions. However, the benefits of altruism are significant and are being acknowledged by individuals world over.

Literature Review



Figure 1 Review of Literature-Volunteer Motives

From the perspective of a volunteer, the factors that motivate an individual to do unpaid work may lie in the personality of the individual himself or may lie in the external environment. The self-determination theory gives rise to two types of motivation-intrinsic and extrinsic. When individuals engage in an activity simply because they enjoy it, they are intrinsically motivated to perform, despite environmental conditions of limited resources and changing needs of beneficiaries. Extrinsic motivation on the other hand is driven by rewards and recognition, feelings of self-worth and the goals and values that an individual prioritizes in his/her life. (Güntert et al. 2016). However, it is questionable whether volunteers are expected to do more for literally nothing. In contrast to corporate employees who are required to volunteer as a part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives, there are people who spend all their lives giving back to the society in exchange for a pittance. (Orwig and Leasum 2011) Therefore, there do exist factors beyond monetary rewards that motivate such individuals. When jobs are identified as meaningful, employees of an organization do not look outside of their regular employment for meaningfulness. However, when jobs fail to provide individuals with a meaningful experience, they look outside of their corporate framework for such experiences (Rodell 2013). Research proves that spirituality as well as religious attendance has positively impacts on informal volunteering. (Abreu et al. 2015) Volunteering when carried out in an organizational setting and in a well-planned manner results in sustained benefits to society over a period of time (Penner 2002). However, in today's information sharing framework where people talk about burning issues in the society on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, creating awareness about issues is no longer a problem. Heightened awareness about problems may also motivate people to chip in and make a contribution whichever way they can. Evolving forms of volunteerism will also increase the

available opportunities for individuals to volunteer. (State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2011)
 If a volunteer is able to visualize the positive change brought about through the sustained benefits that are a result of the volunteer activity, he/she experiences commitment for the long-term. However, episodic volunteering is on the rise, with volunteers serving for short periods of time. This can be attributed to changing lifestyles and eccentric time schedules of individuals. The 21st century work culture has had a huge impact on the way people volunteering. The biggest motivation for those who want to volunteer but do not have the time is flexible opportunities to serve in non-profits. (McKee 2016)

Methodology

Governed by the nature of the study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is used for this study. The triangulation of different methods, different respondent samples and organizations increases the robustness and the veracity of the findings.

Sample Organizations

As part of the research project, four organizations were chosen on convenience sampling basis, headquartered in the regions of Hyderabad, Telangana State and Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh namely- HelpAge India (Hyderabad Chapter), Navajyoti, Sri Sathya Sai Mobile Hospitals and Sri Sathya Sai Vidhya Vahini. The choice of sample units is a unique one, as organizations from four different fields of work are selected for study. Two of them are in a socio-spiritual context (their management and volunteers are drawn due to common beliefs) while the other two organizations operate in a social but secular context. There is however, a common thread in terms of operational functioning and volunteer management strategies among the organizations under study.



Figure 2 Methods of Data Collection and Respondent Groups

A mixed methodology is employed for this study. Primary data is collected through two different methods from two different groups (volunteers and management). A survey on the factors driving volunteer commitment is conducted, with the volunteers of the aforementioned organizations serving as respondents. In- depth interviews of the core teams (comprising of the director and the functional heads) serve as the qualitative aspect of the primary data. Secondary data is gathered from official websites and scholarly articles to understand the deeper nuances of the topic.

The survey which is conducted among the volunteers of four different non-profit organizations consists of a set of statements required to be answered by the respondents on a five point Likert scale. The questionnaire is a compilation of statements from the following popular tools used to measure Volunteer functions and motives- Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary, et al., 1998), Bales Volunteerism Activism Scale (Bales 1996). A combination of the Volunteer Functions Inventory, Bales Volunteerism Activism Scale is used as a basis for the survey, thereby adding credibility to the process of identifying the potential functions served by the act of volunteering. The Volunteer Functions Inventory and Bales Volunteerism-Activism Scale enable measurement of a volunteer's propensity to volunteer as well as the various dimensions along which the volunteer receives motivation to serve in non-profits. A functionalist approach to volunteering is employed, examining the functional motives individuals have for choosing to volunteer.

Findings and Analysis

The findings of the survey and the semi –structured interviews are reported and analyzed on the basis of two perspectives, namely- volunteer perspective on motives and management perspectives on volunteer motives.

Volunteer perspective on motives

The survey aims at procuring data with respect to self-professed volunteer motives. The survey, therefore, enables identification of factors that motivate an individual volunteer to serve, from the perspective of the volunteer.

The Kano model is chosen for analyzing volunteer motives for the purpose of generating tailor made strategies for the benefit of the sample units. The sample units face several challenges in the process of managing their volunteer base. By using this model of continuous improvement, the understated, compelling, threshold and overt motives can be recognized and acknowledged. The Kano model is used in this study to identify which element of the

volunteering service is attractive to the volunteer and must be present to avoid dissatisfaction. In a similar manner, the non-profit can identify which elements of volunteering the volunteer is indifferent to.

In the context of continuous improvement in the service delivered, the Kano Model emerges as a successful tool in evaluating a service and prioritizing service attributes. Considering the service originator as the non-profit organization and the service provider as the volunteer, following could be the service attributes of volunteering.

- **Threshold attributes-** Threshold attributes refer to the basic attributes which are expected to be present in the service delivered. The absence of these attributes creates a sense of dissatisfaction to a large extent in the minds of a volunteer.
- **Performance attributes-** These are attributes, the presence or absence of which directly affects the satisfaction levels of a volunteer. The performance attributes could be needs which are verbalised by the volunteer and have to be met by the organisation.
- **Excitement attributes-** Attributes which are unspoken by the volunteer and are often unexpected may result in high levels of satisfaction. Their absence does not lead to dissatisfaction. However, they address real needs which are unknown to the volunteer himself and thus excite him.

Considering the potential application of the Kano model to interpret the results of the survey post data analysis, a general statement is identified.

Volunteering makes me feel important. (Clary, et al., 1998)

The possible motives for volunteering activity are also analyzed, thereby leading to the identification of the main variables used for measurement in the survey.

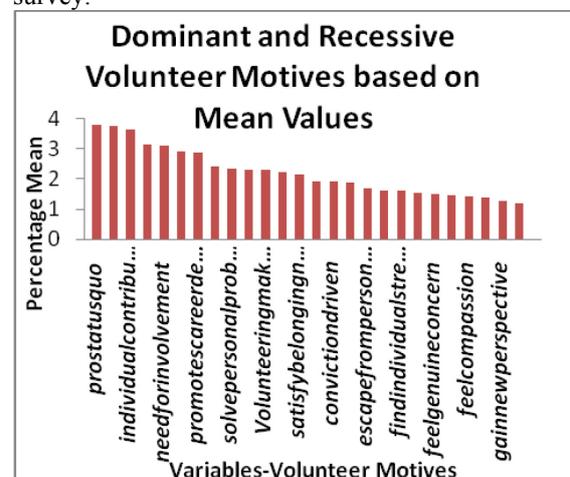


Figure 3 Dominant and Recessive Volunteer Motives based on mean values

Analyzing the above graph in the context of the questionnaire responses, it is understood that a high proportion of the respondents disagree with the statement “**You can’t really change things in your community, that’s just the way things are**”(Clary, et al., 1998). They are not pro status quo, in the sense that they do want to bring about a change in the society or in the lives of those whom they wish to serve. Therefore, they are indeed motivated to bring about a significant transformation through service. In a similar manner, the other motives are analyzed in terms of the average number of times a respondent has opined to strongly agreeing or disagreeing with respect to a certain motive.

The relative frequency of mean values of the variables, constitute the stated values while the derived values are found by correlating the stated values with the general statement and normalizing the r values by squaring them. Refer to (Table 1.)

Table 1 Derived Values and Stated Values of each Motive

Motives	Derived values	Stated values
Need for involvement	3.05	5.43
Pro status quo	0.54	6.62
Motivated by personal problems	6.38	6.55
Act on your beliefs	1.92	3.38
Individual contribution not enough	0.36	6.35
Self help	1.43	2.05
Conviction driven	0.71	3.38
Influenced by friends	4.58	3.89
Concern for the unfortunate	0.10	3.28
Peer influence	11.60	4.20
Escape from personal life	3.40	2.97
Feel genuine concern	0.09	2.59
Feel less lonely	3.82	3.38
Promotes career development	9.03	5.05
Learning about a cause	6.34	2.39
Increases self esteem	5.17	2.83
Gain new perspective	0.05	2.22
Feel compassion	0.00	2.46
Explore career options	6.26	5.09
Social reward	1.52	3.99

Hands on experience	0.62	2.66
Solve personal problems	1.45	4.10
Satisfy belongingness need	9.13	3.72
Prep up resume	16.23	5.49
Find individual strengths	6.21	2.80

Table 1 is used to generate a Scatter Plot diagram. Using this scatter graph as a base, the four quadrants of the Kano model are identified.

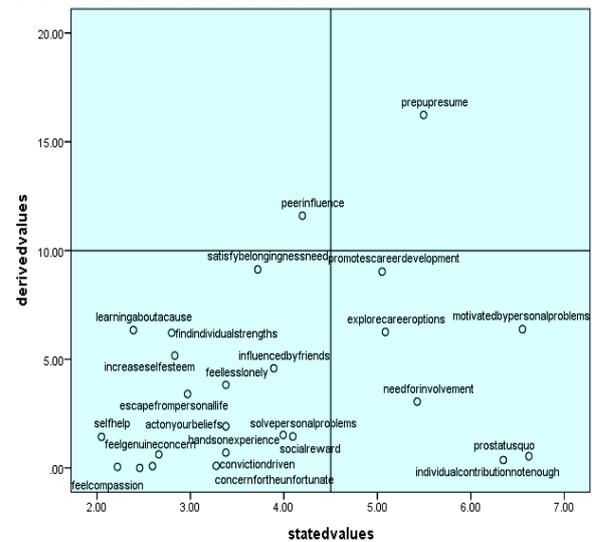


Figure 4. The Kano Model-Scatter plot of Motives

From the Kano Graph (**Figure 4**), it is evident that the understated motive that exists in the mind of the volunteer is peer influence. The explicitly stated motive of prepping up one’s resume speaks for itself. In a highly competitive job scenario, young individuals do believe that volunteering work gives an edge factor to their resume.

The scatter plot may be explained using the four diverse quadrants that represent the categories of factors that motivate volunteers.

The first quadrant represents the **understated** motive of peer influence. Peer influence is found to be an important motivating factor in driving volunteers to sign up for a charity organization. Young individuals who volunteer are highly driven by their peer group to the extent that their choices reflect that of their friend circles and other reference groups. This motive is not expressed by the individual but proves to strongly drive volunteering activity.

The second quadrant represents the motives that **compel** a volunteer to donate their time and effort to a non-profit. Analysis shows that prepping up one’s resume is an explicitly stated motive employed by volunteers. In a fast-paced and highly competitive world, volunteers who display volunteering activity on their resume are perceived on a higher scale than

those who don't. This can be attributed to the notion that those who spend their week working and weekends participating in charitable activities are viewed as holistic personalities who make a contribution to the society around them.

Management perspective of volunteer motives

Another set of primary data constitutes the semi-structured interviews of the top management of non-profits which serves the purpose of gaining an in-depth perspective on the functioning of a non-profit. The interviews give an idea of how the management of the organization perceives volunteer motives. A non profit organization has to gauge the motives an individual may employ in the act of donating time and effort in order to better manage them.

Using **MaxQDA**, a qualitative data analysis software, the interviews are coded in terms of various categories and sub-categories of codes with reference to the semi-structured interview format (which was derived from an intensive literature survey). The code "driver of motivation" is selected in order to enable analysis of the motivating factors driving volunteer commitment.

Code matrix, a tool in MAXQDA that generates code frequencies across interviews of the core teams of the four organizations, was used to generate the frequency of "Driver of Motivation" in comparison with other aspects of volunteer management. The set of questions regarding volunteer management and corresponding responses were chosen to construct relative importance of the broad facets of volunteer management along with the variables involved. A relative percentage of importance of the chosen code was generated, which enables understanding of the significance of motivating factors from an organization's perspective. (See Table 2)

Table 2 Weights given to Aspects of Volunteer Management

Codes	Code Frequency	% importance
Measuring volunteer satisfaction	3	4
Volunteer engagement strategies	5	6
Volunteer orientation	6	7
Driver of motivation	19	23
Volunteer management problems	32	39
Types of volunteers	18	22

A high weightage (23%) is given to *Drivers of Motivation* in the course of the interviews. The retrieved segments from the interview provide a deep insight into the minds of the non-profit's management on what motivates volunteers. The management considers volunteer motivation as important since the responsibility of fulfilling organizational goals rests on the shoulders of volunteers.

For the organizations with a spiritual base and operating in a religious context, the act of service through volunteerism is perceived as an offering to God. When asked what they feel is the primary driver of the urge to serve among their volunteers, interviewees stated "*Seva (service) is the instrument for realizing the higher values of life. You can call it self-realization or god realization or anything-Seva is a path. It is an instrument.*" However, an important point that needs to be noted in this regard is that despite the spiritual background in which the organization operates, the management perceives an intrinsic altruistic motivation that is specific to individuals and that which promotes their volunteering behavior. The management of one of the organizations operating in the spiritual context said "*There are many doctors who have an inbuilt instinct in them and serve because they feel that they have taken so much from the society. They believe that they need to pay back to the society.*"

Another interviewee said that volunteers were intrinsically motivated to work because of the flexibility offered by the non-profit to enable performance of tasks. "*Motivation actually comes from within. They are learning in the process of doing things and they have an opportunity to serve from wherever they are. They are not asked to come anywhere and it is at your doorstep.*"

Extrinsic motivation, too drives volunteer commitment. "*The happiness and satisfaction derived in this field keeps us motivated.*" Fulfilling the psychological needs of an individual volunteer is important too.

Besides intrinsic motivation, there are other casual factors, too. Boredom associated with retired individuals possessing rich experience in a particular area is also perceived as a motivator. Such individuals look at a non-profit as a window of opportunity to work in a challenging environment that creates a sense of excitement. "*There are many doctors who have retired now and they don't want to practice privately anymore. They get bored being in their own places, so these doctors come to serve in their free time to get rid of their boredom.*"

Organizational aspects like work environment, availability of the requisite facilities and amenities as well as support staff in certain fields of work also play an integral role in affecting the motivation

levels. A doctor volunteering and managing in the medical non-profit said *"A very good technical ambience is motivating."*

The challenges offered by non-profits in terms of uncertainties on a day to day basis and constantly changing work factors excite both young and old volunteers alike. A manager is quoted as saying *"Everyday has an interesting day. Each day differs from the other in terms of experience and difference in the work done."*

Therefore, the challenges enable volunteers to tap into their hidden potential, discovering capabilities they didn't know of earlier. Application of these capabilities is enabled by the non-profit through the tasks they assign to volunteers. The management believes that they create opportunities for volunteers to explore and learn, picking up new skills with diverse experiences at the workplace. A senior volunteer and manager, through the course of the interview confessed *"It has shown me, the hidden potential in me.", "it's me learning and me getting more."*

Ultimately, however, from the management's perspective, making a difference in another's life is the higher driving force among the other forces. A State Coordinator, in the course of her interview, stated that she drew daily motivation from this very aspect of volunteering. *"Volunteerism is to make a difference in a child's life, somewhere, in some part of the country."*

From the spiritual point of view, an elderly volunteer serving as a member of the management said *"So, it is for unraveling the beauty in your character, that you are volunteering- to unravel your own beauty."*

The sense of achievement experienced by the volunteer as a result of volunteering is the ultimate gift and most effective motivator. A senior member of the management stated that this very reward keeps him going on a daily basis. *"The sense of achievement experienced is a motivator."*

Mapping the Volunteer motives from the perspective of the non-profit, a different set of volunteer motives are arrived at, some of which are similar to those already garnered from the survey.



Figure 5 Volunteer Motives from the Management's Perspective

Therefore, from the perspective of the management, the above motives (See Figure 5) drive volunteer commitment.

Discussion

From the qualitative and quantitative findings, the results of the study do give a broader perspective on factors that motivate volunteers.

An element of self-interest that drives altruism is observed in both the findings. Though prepping up the resume is a stated driver in the quantitative findings; learning opportunities, personal growth and unraveling of hidden potential, the motives that underlie their stated belief are revealed in the qualitative analysis. The management too perceives the learning and development opportunities that they offer as well as the intrinsic rewards that follow act as motivators of volunteer behavior. The difference in views in terms of intrinsic motivators is more in degree than direction.

However, the gap between the individual volunteer perspective and the non-profit management's perspective arises in terms of extrinsic motivators of volunteer engagement. While volunteers said that their peer groups influenced them to sign up for volunteering, organizations believe that their vision to bring about change as well as the opportunities they offer for promotion of individual as well as societal growth, motivate volunteers. This mismatch is important to understand as it will help non profits to appreciate the importance of peer influence and the need to use strategies to promote positive peer influence.

The suggestions that logically emerge from this analysis are –

- Broadening the primary focus on the beneficiary to include the volunteer

- Using strategies like word of mouth to attract the right volunteers, since they are heavily influenced by peer group
- Explicitly stating the benefits that accrue from volunteering to prospective volunteers
- Using peer influence to keep volunteers engaged within the non profit organization

In a society with a high degree of peer influence, non-profits must learn to effectively tap the right volunteers through their offerings. Organizations are constantly thinking in terms of the best that they can offer to their beneficiaries in the non-profit context. However, if there is a shift of focus from 'delivering the best service to beneficiaries' to 'employing the best volunteers to deliver the best service'; a non-profit can truly be a change-agent in the transformation of society.

Word of mouth, a powerful strategic tool driven by individual experiences, can be used by non-profits in a more effective way than they are doing now. If regulated to suit individual organizational needs, an organization can attract the right volunteers, who experience value congruence with the non-profit.

Conclusion

A non-profit can successfully manage its workforce primarily constituting volunteers only when it meets their needs through the opportunities it offers to them. It acts as a platform that enables the volunteers to learn and develop in the process of upliftment of victim groups. Considering the diverse set of motives arrived at through the study, it is evident that social conscience and self-interest go hand in hand. A volunteer may never express self-interest that gets satisfied through volunteering, choosing only to display the motive of social conscience as a driver. However, it is imperative that the non-profit organization understands the import of the role played by 'drivers of volunteer motivation' in effective volunteer management. Therefore, a broadening of focus of the non-profit will result in inclusion of volunteers, along with ultimate beneficiaries, leading to serving the needs of volunteers along with the needs of the beneficiaries.

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