Beyond motivation: New ways to understand the volunteer experience

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Volunteers continue to be essential to the delivery of sport and recreation services. Consequently, recruitment and retention of volunteers can be considered a key management function for most sport organizations. In the last decade, there has been a plethora of research on volunteers, particularly research intended to understand the reasons why people volunteer (e.g., Birrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Green & Chalip, 2004; Strigas & Jackson, 2003). With rare exception, studies of volunteer motivation have used Likert scaled items and factor analytic techniques to identify key dimensions of volunteer motivation. While some of the dimensions seem to be consistent, others have varied across studies. In theory, providing volunteers with the benefits they seek should lead to satisfied volunteers, and should enable sport managers to better recruit and retain volunteers. Yet volunteer turnover remains a significant issue for many sport organizations. Motivation, it seems, is only part of the picture.

This symposium introduces new ways to understand volunteers. The first paper introduces the Kano Model of Consumer Satisfaction, and applies the model to determine what managers can provide to satisfy volunteers, and what managers can do to prevent volunteer dissatisfaction. The second paper introduces the Implicit Association Test (IAT), a method for examining strength of associations that are not easily accessible by traditional Likert-type items. This paper focuses on understanding how volunteers frame their experience—particularly in terms of work/play. The third examines differences by volunteer contexts: (1) continuing versus episodic and (2) sport versus social welfare. The discussant will then provide a brief critique and facilitate discussion.

What's Satisfaction Got to Do with It? Using the Kano Model to Retain Volunteers

The Kano Model (Kano, 1984) was developed based on the idea that satisfaction does not always conform to a linear continuum whereby more of a particular feature results in higher satisfaction and less results in lower satisfaction. That is, something that causes satisfaction does not necessarily contribute to dissatisfaction if it is not present and something that contributes to dissatisfaction does not necessarily contribute to satisfaction if present. Kano’s model was initially used to classify customer preferences, but more recently the model has been used to measure employee satisfaction (Martensen & Gronholt, 2001). This study focuses on the experiences of volunteers. Knowing which elements contribute to volunteer satisfaction and which contribute to dissatisfaction can better assist sport managers to provide quality volunteer experiences. Volunteers responded to a web-based survey of 26 pairs of items measuring volunteers’ satisfaction with 5 dimensions of volunteer experience: rewards, educational/skills, organizational, service, and personal/social. The paired items include one functional item (e.g., If you are provided free food, how does that make you feel?) and one dysfunctional item (If you are not provided free food, how does that make you feel?). Items are scaled on a 5-point scale ranging from "I like it that way” (1) to "I dislike it that way.” Response pairs are coded as either: (1) must be, (2) one-dimensional, (3) attractive, and (4) indifferent. "Must be" are those elements that volunteers see as mandatory for them to volunteer. These items do not contribute to satisfaction, but can lead to dissatisfaction. "One-dimensional" elements can lead to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction depending on the degree to which it is fulfilled. "Attractive" elements are those items that are not required. If present, the element contributes to satisfaction. However, its absence does not lead to dissatisfaction. "Indifferent" elements are those that do not contribute to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Retention of volunteers would be most affected by ensuring that "Must be" elements are present, and enhancing "One-dimensional" and "Attractive" elements.
Applying the IAT as a Framework for Understanding the Work/Play Component of Volunteering

In research, participants are often unwilling or unable to answer truthfully. As a result, a growing interest among social psychologists is the use of automatic processes in understanding social behavior (Barg, 1996; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Pratto, 1994). To measure such automatic processes, there is an increase in the use of reaction time indicators (Bargh, 1996; Zarate & Smith, 1990). One such method is the Implicit Association Test, which consists of the completion of computerized categorization tasks that target two contrasted concept categories (volunteer/paid staff) and two contrasted attribute categories (work-like/play-like). To date the IAT has been shown to be a very useful tool for research on automatic attitudes (Dasgupta, McGhee, Greenwald, Banaji, 2000; Greenwald et al., 1998). This tool allows researchers to explore how people think about volunteering and, in particular, the degree to which they associate volunteering with work or with play. Volunteers provide five words they associate with the category "volunteer," and five that they associate with the category, "paid staff." These words are then used in the Implicit Association Test. The contrasted categories appear in the left and right hand corners of the screen. For example, "volunteer" and "work-like" appear on the left, and "paid-staff" and "play-like" appears on the right. Random words from the wordlists created by the volunteers appear in the center of the screen. Volunteers are asked to rapidly press "e" to classify the word to the left hand categories or "i" to classify the word to the right hand categories. The test is repeated with the alternate pairings (i.e., volunteer with play-like and paid-staff with work-like). The IAT produces measures derived from latencies of responses to the two tasks. The more closely associated the pairing are for respondents, the less time needed to correctly classify the word provided. Word lists provide data to understand the ways in which volunteers differentiate paid and volunteer staff members. The resulting latency data enables us to understand the ways that respondents think about volunteering, and how they differentiate it from paid work.

Does Context Matter? A Comparison of Continuing and Episodic Volunteers

Much of the early research on volunteers was done in the context of social welfare organizations which utilize volunteers on a continuous basis. As a result, a great deal of volunteer research is grounded in the non-profit sector, and based on an understanding of volunteers with a continuing commitment to the organization or those that work on a weekly or biweekly basis for the organization. While sport organizations certainly need volunteers on a regular basis, much of sport volunteering is episodic. That is, the volunteer is asked to donate their time for a short, often one time event. This represents a very different volunteer experience than the traditional, continuing volunteer experience. Consequently, one would expect these two types of volunteers to vary in particular ways. This study focuses on distinguishing characteristics of continuing versus episodic volunteers in term of the ways in which they characterize their volunteering, the importance of dimensions of the volunteer experience, and the degree to which they associate volunteering with work or with play. For mega-events the prestige of being associated with the event or having special access behind the scenes has been attractive to volunteers. Mega-events have a strong pull factor while social services seem to be related more to purposiveness or intrinsic motives. Since distinct contexts of volunteering attract and retain volunteers on the basis of differing rewards (both intrinsic and extrinsic), the bases for recruiting and managing volunteers in varied contexts must also change. Identification of the ways that context differences are associated with differences in volunteers' expectations and evaluations of their experience as volunteers clarifies theoretical modelling about volunteers, and enables more effective management of volunteer systems.