

Motivation and Retention Factors of Sport-for-Development Volunteers

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(including questions)**

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Introduction

Due to the importance of volunteers within the sport industry, there have been increased efforts to determine the motivations behind these acts of volunteerism (Cuskelly, 1998). However, most research endeavors have focused on volunteers with professional sporting events and organizations, with very few studies investigating volunteer motivations for sport-for-development (SFD) initiatives (Bang, Alexandris, & Ross, 2009). Therefore the purpose of this study was to investigate the motivations of volunteers who chose to take part in the 2011 World-Scholar-Athlete Games (WSAG), a multinational SFD event for high school students. The WSAG platform consists of sport, fine arts, and educational programs with a mission to bring together the future leaders of the world to break down stereotypes, foster peace and understanding, and effect personal development and social change.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

As theoretical grounding, we adopted the functional approach to volunteer motivation (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Clary et al., 1998), as considerable research has utilized the functionalist approach to evaluate initial motivations to volunteer (Clary et al., 1998) and volunteer retention (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Finkelstein, 2008). Clary and Snyder (1991) initially determined volunteer functions by investigating functional theorizing literature including Smith, Bruner, and White (1956), and Katz (1960). In an effort to build on previous literature on volunteer motivation and evaluate the main factors that lead to volunteering, Clary et al. (1998) noted that different volunteers take part in similar activities to gratify diverse, and often multiple, motives. Subsequently, they proposed six motivational factors of volunteerism: (a) values; (b) understanding; (c) enhancement; (d) career; (e) social; and (f) protective (reduce negative feelings through volunteering).

Volunteers play a crucial role in the success of many sport organizations and events (Cuskelly, 1998; Green & Chalip, 1998). Research has examined the value of volunteers within grassroots and community sport (Silverberg, Marshall & Ellis, 2001) and within large, international events such as the Olympics or World Cup (Bang, Alexandris, & Ross, 2009; Bang & Chelladurai, 2003). For example, in a study of volunteers that worked at a marathon event, it was found that their reasons for volunteering were mainly driven by the sport itself and not the opportunity to help others or be altruistic (Bang & Ross, 2009). Cuskelly (2004) also determined that players and ex-players of various sports and activities would volunteer in an attempt to stay involved with their sport. On a local level, studies focused on youth sport volunteerism have revealed that volunteers are driven by the need to create an optimal sporting experience for children (Kim, Zhang, & Connaughton, 2010). However, none of these studies investigated volunteer motivation with a multinational SFD event.

Methodology

Data collection methods included focus groups, personal interviews, and direct observations. While some volunteer motivation studies have utilized quantitative methodology, scholars have suggested the benefits of utilizing qualitative methods to provide a deeper and more in-depth understanding of volunteer motives (MacLean & Hamm, 2007). In particular, as the current study is exploratory in nature, qualitative methods were well suited to providing a rich picture of volunteer motives and retention factors in a relatively unexplored area, that of SFD volunteers (Creswell, 1998).

We conducted semi-structured focus groups and personal interviews with 21 WSAG volunteers. Eleven men and ten women, 22-55 years old, were purposively sampled. We selected volunteers with a wide range of experience with the WSAG, some first-time volunteers and others who had volunteered multiple times, in order to gather data on

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initial motivations as well as retention. We also spoke with volunteers from various countries and activities that represented the diversity of the event. Throughout the 10-day event, each author observed different sport or fine arts programs along with attending workshops, keynote speakers, and extracurricular events. Twenty-five sporting events were observed ranging from fencing to swimming, as well as 10 fine art activities including dance and choir. To analyze the transcripts and field notes, open, axial, and selective coding was employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Guided by the functionalist approach (Clary et al., 1992; Clary et al., 1998), the open coding procedure was performed by the first and second authors going through the transcripts line by line to identify prominent motivational and retention factors towards volunteerism at the WSAG.

Findings

Findings revealed that the volunteers were highly motivated by two of the six motivational factors of the functionalist approach (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Clary et al., 1998), values and social, while two additional functionalist motivational factors were also deemed significant, although to a lesser extent; understanding and enhancement. Not only did these motives lead towards initial volunteerism, but they also inspired retention when satisfied.

Specifically, individuals were initially motivated to volunteer due to their values and continued to return when they experienced ongoing values alignment with the WSAG. The social climate of the WSAG motivated many individuals to attend the event in an effort to meet new people, network with their existing cohort, and bond with the younger participants. Furthermore, the social aspect was a prominent factor that prompted volunteers to return year after year. The theme of understanding was noted as the opportunity to work and learn from others in a multinational setting was an important motivation to initially become involved and to remain involved over subsequent events. Finally, enhancement was recognized as the WSAG provided an opportunity for volunteers to have an enjoyable and meaningful experience that created positive feelings and an opportunity for personal development and growth. These positive feelings were important in motivating volunteers to return and volunteer once again.

Discussion

Although previous volunteer motivation research has been conducted with a multitude of sporting events and initiatives (Bang & Chelladurai, 2003), this research makes a unique contribution as one of the first to investigate volunteerism with a multinational SFD event. An important contribution of this study to the theoretical understanding of volunteer motivation for SFD events is in demonstrating values alignment with the mission of a SFD initiative can serve as a valuable asset to recruit and retain passionate volunteers, more than Love of Sport (Bang & Ross, 2009) or other motives identified in the literature. Since there is an increasing competitive market for volunteers, non-profit SFD programs must identify factors that make the volunteer experience attractive (Costa, Chalip, Green & Simes, 2006), what motivates volunteers to donate time, and what contributes to future engagement or retention of volunteers (Clary et al., 1992; Cuskelly, 2004).

These results can be useful for SFD programs seeking to recruit new volunteers and retain existing volunteers. While it is not realistic or necessary for all SFD initiatives to include a global component and recruit volunteers from around the world, this research suggests that multinational SFD organizations consider emphasizing their missions and dynamic and innovative programming in an effort to attract and retain likeminded individuals who can become long-term volunteers. Several intriguing directions for future research also emerged from the study, which will be discussed during the presentation.