

4 Making sense of volunteer motivation

plaatsbepaling

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Vrijwilligersmanagers voelen zich wel eens gesandwiched tussen de verwachtingen en eisen van de organisatie enerzijds en de verwachtingen van vrijwilligers anderzijds. De manier waarop de managers en de vrijwilligers hun organisatorische context waarnemen, kan dit 'sandwich'-gevoel versterken. Immers, wanneer deze waarneming sterk verschilt, is het voor de managers extra ingewikkeld om de vrijwilligers te begeleiden, aan te sturen en te motiveren.

Verschillen in perceptie vormen het onderwerp van het artikel van Liao-Troth en Dunn. Hun aandacht richt zich op het beeld dat vrijwilligersmanagers hebben van de motieven van vrijwilligers om zich in te zetten. De aannname van de auteurs is dat, wanneer het beeld van de manager niet overeenkomt met de werkelijke motivatie van de vrijwilligers, dit de samenwerking compliceert. Het kan bijvoorbeeld tot gevolg hebben dat de manager beloningssystemen ontwikkelt die niet aansluiten bij de behoefte van de vrijwilligers. In het artikel doen de auteurs verslag van onderzoek waarin het perspectief van managers werd geconfronteerd met feitelijke motieven van vrijwilligers. Het onderzoek laat zien dat de beelden van de managers niet significant afwijken van de motieven die vrijwilligers zelf noemen. Een verklaring voor het vrijwel ontbreken van verschil hebben ze niet. Ze wijzen op het belang van meer onderzoek.

Het onderzoek van Liao-Troth en Dunn is geruststellend voor vrijwilligersmanagers. Blijkbaar voelen ze goed aan wat vrijwilligers willen, of hebben ze effectieve manieren gevonden om daarvan kennis te nemen. Toch is het te vroeg om verschillen in percepties te benoemen als niet relevant in de samenwerkingsrelaties. Interessant zou ook zijn de confrontatie om te keren. Welke percepties hebben vrijwilligers van [het werk van] beroepskrachten? En hoe realistisch zijn die? Nederlands onderzoek naar de samenwerking tussen vrijwilligers en beroepskrachten doet vermoeden dat percepties wel degelijk een rol spelen (zie Van Daal c.s. 2005)¹.

Het onderzoek van Liao-Troth openst een nieuw perspectief op de samenwerkingsrelatie tussen vrijwilligers en beroepskrachten. Wellicht horen we in de toekomst meer van hen over dit onderwerp. En hopelijk krijgt hun onderzoek navolging van Nederlandse onderzoekers.

¹ Van Daal, Henk Jan, Aletta Winsemius en Esther Plemper (2005). Vrijwilligers en beroepskrachten, verslag van een verkennend onderzoek naar hun relatie. Utrecht: Verwey-Jonker Instituut.

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4

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Introduction*

The non-profit sector in the United States accounts for more than \$480 billion of the United States' economy (Weitzman, Jalandoni, Lampkin, and Pollak, 2002). The structure that makes this sector of the economy so distinctive is its reliance on a largely volunteer-based workforce. Voluntary workers can be found in other sectors of the economy - primarily in education, healthcare, and human services in the public sector and among healthcare, higher education, and resort services in the private sector - but they are overwhelmingly evident in the non-profit sector. While there are many works in the field of non-profit management (Drucker, 1990; Gelatt, 1992; Wolf, 1990) and much research in volunteer motivation (Clary, Snyder and Ridge, 1992; Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Gidron, 1978), little of this work has been specifically concerned with addressing the interaction between non-profit managers and the volunteers they recruit, train, and develop (Rothschadl, 1983; Liao-Troth, 2001).

Professional managers of volunteers have high expectations placed on them by two decidedly different constituencies: *their own supervisors* and *the volunteers with whom they interact*. Newcomers to these professional positions often experience great conflict as a result of these dual expectations. If they have come from the ranks of volunteers, they must shift their cognitive construct of their responsibilities or risk being ineffective in meeting organizational goals.

If managers are hired from outside the organization, it

is likely they hold more senior management positions, and their interactions with "front line" volunteers is limited. If fresh from college, such managers will be trying to make sense of their new organization and their position within it, while simultaneously defining themselves professionally. In any case, such managers are the most susceptible to being caught between two different cognitions of the organization: the social construct of the volunteers, and the social construct of the professionals.

Making sense of it all

People make sense of the world around them through a variety of processes. Through "sensemaking" (Weick, 1979; Weick, 1993), people build a cognitive understanding of the world in which they live. Weick (1979, p. 45) defines "sensemaking" as a mental process having three steps: *selection*, *retention* and *enactment*. *Selection* addresses peoples' limited ability to observe - people only observe a small amount of what goes on around them so they must select, either consciously or unconsciously, what they observe. *Retention* concerns the storage of the observation and peoples' ability to link it to relevant or irrelevant issues. *Enactment* is the process of acting on individuals' beliefs of why things are, usually in a manner that reinforces their beliefs, as built from the selected and retained images of what they observe. When presented with an issue that does not fit their cognitive map, people will switch from automatic processing of their environmental influencers to conscious engagement until they have selected new observations that redefine their processes, or redefine their observations (Louis and Sutton, 1991).

* This is based on an earlier paper by the authors: Social constructs and human service: Managerial sensemaking of voluntary motivation. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 10 (4): 345-361.

Newcomers to an organization are thrown into a situation in which they are required to come to a quick understanding of their environment. The newcomer will be experiencing the change between the new and old setting, the internalized contrast between what they encounter and what their expectations were, and the surprise of what was not expected at all (Liao-Troth, 2005). The newcomer will need particular assistance in two cognitions: interpreting events in the new setting, and appreciating situation-specific interpretation schemata and cultural assumptions in the new environment (Louis, 1980). In such situations, the social constructs of their *work groups* will be of paramount importance, as these will provide the strongest inputs for creating a new social construct (Fulk, 1993).

If the newcomer is managing volunteers in a non-profit organization (or any other organization that uses volunteers), the peers of the newcomer will be other paid professionals in the organization; the majority of people with whom the newcomer works, however, may well be unpaid volunteers. Though working for the same organization or cause, professionals and volunteers may not necessarily share the same general cognitive construction of their work environment. More particularly, managers and volunteers may differ in their understanding of the *motivations* behind voluntary engagement with the non-profit organization. Such a difference has been found to be the case between paid employees and their supervisors (Kovach, 1987). Vroom (1964) asserts that motivation is in part a function of *valence* (the preference one holds for the rewards tendered). As managers and volunteers present their attributional schema as to motivations to volunteer, they reveal their preferences for both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, or valence. In this paper we focus on the degree of perceptual consensus between non-profit managers and voluntary employees on the issue of valence.

Hypotheses

Our primary research question - *do managers and volunteers ascribe the same motives to voluntary behavior?* - is explored through comparing managerial observations of volunteer motives with those of volunteers themselves. If managers and volunteers share similar attributions of motivation, then there is support for a model of common sensemaking of volunteer motivation. However, due to different environments, peer groups, and organizational expectations, it is anticipa-

ted that managers and volunteers do not make sense of their environment in the same way. This logic provides the first research hypothesis:

Hypothesis #1: Managers of volunteers do not make sense of volunteers' motives to volunteer in a way consistent with that of the volunteers themselves.

The second hypothesis is concerned with the *direction* of the difference between managerial attributions of volunteer motivation and volunteer self-reports of reasons for volunteering. The altruistic deception construct (Liao-Troth, 2004; Smith, 1981) would suggest volunteers (as well as all people in general) socially construct their volunteer work as having been motivated by altruistic purposes, regardless of any other actual reason for engaging in such activity. Due to their freedom from the self-perception bias of volunteers, it is expected managers will attribute *less* altruism to the volunteers' motives than will the volunteers themselves:

Hypothesis #2: Managers of volunteers will attribute less altruistic motivations to volunteers than voluntary workers attribute to themselves.

The process of sensemaking should additionally be affected by the managers' total amount of experience with volunteers, as external cues provide strong input to the cognitive process. Thus our third hypothesis:

Hypothesis #3: Increased managerial time of exposure to volunteers relates positively to similar constructs of volunteer behavior between managers and volunteers.

More specifically, it is expected that those with more experience managing volunteers (as differentiated from time of exposure to volunteers) will have more similar social constructs with volunteers than those who have less experience managing volunteers.

Hypothesis #4: Increased managerial tenure in a volunteer management job relates positively to similar constructs of volunteer behavior between managers and volunteers.

In countries with traditions of gendered social roles systems of social constructs place different gendered expectations on people of different sexes (Eagly and Crowley, 1986). Jacobs (1989) points out that there are a lifetime of influences that serve to reinforce such a construct. It has been suggested that one of the reasons that women have been so well received as professionals in non-profit organizations in the United States is

that "charity" has been seen as "women's work," (Reskin and Roos, 1990). There is some evidence of a slight difference in cognitive structures leading to helping behavior (Mills, Pedersen, and Grusec, 1989), and that social roles are a primary determinant of behavior (Eagly and Wood, 1991).

However, Gergen, Gergen and Meter (1972), in a multi-trait, multiple volunteer opportunity study showed that helping was situation dependent and not trait (or sex) dependent. Recent findings in prosocial behavior concur that there are no consistent sex or gender role differences in helping behavior (Miller, Bernzweig, Eisenberg and Fabes, 1991). This leads to our final hypothesis:

Hypothesis #5: Male and female managers of volunteers make sense of volunteers motives similarly.

Methods

This exploratory study is grounded in research conducted by Anderson and Moore (1978) on the reasons volunteers give for volunteering. The major difference in the current research method is that written surveys were mailed to *managers* of volunteers, rather than to the volunteers *themselves*. The rationale for this research design is to allow for conclusions relating to whether or not managers make sense of volunteer motivation in the same way volunteers themselves do.

Sample

The current study uses data collected from managers of volunteers across several agencies by means of a written survey instrument. Data from the survey were analyzed and compared with findings from the work of Anderson and Moore (1978). Anderson and Moore obtained their list of agencies from 49 branches of the Canadian Volunteer Bureau, the largest non-profit umbrella agency in Canada. The survey list for the present study was obtained from the United Way, the largest non-profit umbrella agency in the United States.

This research used a stratified random sample of human service agencies in San Diego County. The sample of human service agencies was identified through *Directions* (United Way of San Diego County, 1991), the human service directory of San Diego County by the San Diego County United Way. This directory includes United Way member agencies, non-member non-profit agencies, and public sector agencies. This sample selection technique mirrors Anderson and Moore's use

of a random sample of volunteer agencies obtained through local volunteer bureaus. The agencies in the current study were categorized according to "primary services provided" as (a) Adult Care Services, (b) Community Enhancement, (c) Disabled Services, (d) Health Services, (e) Human Dignity and Rights, (f) Human Services, and (g) Youth Services (*Directions*, 1991).

Survey Measures and Research Procedures

Two surveys were mailed to each executive director of 100 human service agencies. Each executive director was requested to distribute the survey to two entry level managers (defined as an entry level job position with that agency) who currently managed volunteers for the agency. The employees were requested not to speak with others about their answers until they had completed and returned the survey. A self-addressed stamped envelope accompanied each survey. Follow-up phone calls were made to all agencies to request participation by the agency. Participating agencies were not tracked, thereby assuring the anonymity of responses.

The actual survey had 56 variables of interest and was divided into four sections. The *first* section included questions to confirm whether the respondent did indeed manage volunteers and, if so, the number of volunteers managed. The survey also included a calculation for the number of volunteers that the managers interacted with on a weekly basis.

The *second* section concerned the volunteers supervised by the manager. The first part of this section addressed the managers' perceptions of what motivates volunteers. We used a Likert scale developed by Anderson and Moore (1978). For each of ten different at-

More and Less Altruistic Motives Classification

More Altruistic	Less Altruistic
Help Others	Companionship
Improve the Community	Feel Useful and Needed Friends (who volunteer in agency)
	Gain Work-Related Experience Meet People
	Occupy Spare Time Personal Development Self-fulfillment

Table 1

Volunteer Characteristics		
	Weighted Responses	National Data
AGE (in years)		
1-17	2.02%	10.61%
18-24	17.18%	8.78%
25-29	13.82%	9.92%
30-34	15.26%	10.82%
35-39	15.17%	10.92%
40-44	10.82%	11.02%
45-49	6.53%	11.22%
50-54	3.93%	8.98%
55-59	4.36%	9.18%
60 +	10.74%	7.55%
DEGREE		
None	3.26%	-
Grade School	8.64%	18.10%
High School	22.29%	21.90%
Some College	-	29.05%
Associate	5.18%	-
Bachelors or more	-	30.95%
Bachelors	24.61%	-
Professional	27.63%	-
Masters	4.68%	-
Doctorate	4.98%	-
EMPLOYMENT†		
Full-time	66.09%	52.69%
Part-time or unemployed	33.91%	47.31%
GENDER		
Female	57.46%	53.13%
male	42.54%	46.87%

† For employment, Hodgkinson et al. (1992) report 52.69% of all volunteers are working full time, and the remainder are either unemployed or working part-time. We collected both working (72%) and not-working (28%), and full-time (92%) and part-time (8%) of those working.

Some characteristics do not total to 100% due to rounding.

All national data is from Hodgkinson et al. (1992).

Table 2

tributes, managers were asked to rate the strength of the motivation to volunteer. These motives can be found in Table 5. Additional space was provided for an open response wherein the managers could add unlisted motivations.

Agency Characteristics		
Field of Service (total)	Study Participants	San Diego County
Adult Care Services (5/189)	9.4%	7.4%
Community Enhancement (12/563)	22.6%	22.2%
Disabled Services (2/232)	3.8%	9.2%
Health Services (15/855)	28.3%	33.7%
Human Dignity and Rights (1/119)	1.9%	4.7%
Youth Services (8/297)	15.1%	11.7%
Economic Sector		
Private, For-profit (0)	0.0%	
Private, Non-profit (47)	88.7%	
Public, Governmental (6)	11.3%	
United Way Membership		
Members (27)	50.9%	
Not Members (26)	49.1%	

Table 3

Respondent Characteristics		
	Mean	Standard Deviation
Years as prof. manager of volunteers	4.7	3.8
Years in current Position	4.0	4.0
Age	38.9	10
Highest Educational Achievement		
No Degree (1)	2%	
High School Diploma (7)	13%	
Associates Degree (10)	19%	
Bachelors Degree (14)	26%	
Professional Degree (1)	2%	
Masters Degree (14)	26%	
Doctorate (6)	11%	
note: does not add to 100% due to rounding		
Sex		
Female (34)	64%	
Male (19)	36%	

Table 4

The second part of this section concerns demographic information relating to the volunteers who serve the subject agency allowing assessment of the representativeness of the sample.

veness of the sample respondents. Table 2 contains summary data for volunteer characteristics.

The *third* section deals with agency characteristics including the area of service upon which the agency concentrated; these categories were consistent with the "types of agencies" listed in *Directions* (1991). Table 3 contains summary data for agency characteristics.

The *fourth* and final section included items designed to gather general information about the respondents themselves. The data from this section were used to determine a general demographic profile of the managers, including their amount of exposure to volunteers, their tenure in their current job, and their gender. Table 4 contains summary data for respondent characteristics.

Analysis of data

The data were coded and then analyzed. To insure that the survey was representative of voluntary workers in general, the managerial reporting of volunteer demographics were weighted by the number of volunteers in the agency and then compared with national volunteer demographics. To verify that the data were representative of the agencies selected, frequency counts were made of the agency's primary area of service and cross-tabulated with the number of listings for each category in *Directions* (1991). The Chi Square Test of Independence indicated that the sample was representative of the population. Table 3 indicates the areas of service for both the sample as well as the population.

Results

Over a period of twenty-two days, a total of sixty-two surveys were returned. Of these, nine were from agen-

cies informing the researcher that they did not utilize voluntary labor. Seven agencies were no longer performing service (they had ceased to exist since the publication of the agency directory) and their mail was returned to the sender. In addition, one reply envelope was returned empty and as such no data were recorded. This leads to a total of fifty-three usable surveys returned out of a possible one hundred sixty-eight, or a 31.5% response rate.

Volunteer Demographics

In the interest of generalizability, the volunteer demographic data were weighted by the number of volunteers in the agency as reported by the manager to see if the volunteers with whom the managers worked were representative of volunteers in the United States in general. Using the chi squared test of independence, it was determined the gender and age of the volunteers reflect that of volunteers in general (Hodgkinson et al., 1992), while academic degree and work status did not (refer to Table 2). Demographic data of volunteers is not available for the Anderson and Moore (1978) study, but their assumptions include a sample representative of volunteers as a whole.

Hypothesis 1: Managers of volunteers do not make sense of volunteers' motives to volunteer in a way consistent with that of the volunteers themselves. For both the managers in our sample and the volunteers in Anderson and Moore (1978) the ranking of volunteers' motivation for the top five motivations are both the same and the overall list is similarly ranked (see Table 5) and the differences are non-significant. Managers attribute the same set of motivations to volunteer that the volun-

Rank Ordering of Likert Scale Motivation to Anderson and Moore

	Volunteers Anderson and Moore (1978)	Managers Likert Scale
Help others	1	1
Feel useful and needed	2	2
Self-fulfillment	3	3
Improve the community	5	4
Personal development	4	5
Gain work-related experience	8	6
Meet people	7	7
Companionship	10	8
Occupy spare time	6	9
Friends	9	10

Table 5

teers have already endorsed in Anderson and Moore's work. Hypothesis one is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Managers of volunteers will attribute less altruistic motivations to volunteers than voluntary workers attribute to themselves. Based on the findings related to Hypothesis 1, managers do not appear to attribute less altruistic motives to volunteers than volunteers do to themselves; the Likert scale measures are significantly different from the findings of Anderson and Moore. Hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Hypothesis 3: Increased managerial time of exposure to volunteers relates positively to similar constructs of volunteer behavior between managers and volunteers.

Hypothesis 4: Increased managerial tenure in a volunteer management job relates positively to similar constructs of volunteer behavior between managers and volunteers. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were designed to test the impact of managerial exposure to volunteers and job tenure upon sensemaking. A one-way analysis of variance indicated that the differences were not significant ($F_{(1,60)} = 1.12$, and $F_{(1,60)} = 0.17$), and hence Hypotheses 3 and 4 are rejected.

Hypothesis 5: Male and female managers of volunteers make sense of volunteers motives similarly. A one-way analysis of variance indicated there was no significant difference between male and female responses ($F_{(1,53)} = 1.11$). This would support the finding that men and women managers of volunteers do not significantly differ in how they attribute motives to volunteers. As an additional precaution, both age and education level were examined to determine if the sample were systematically biased, as Eisenberg (1991) has pointed out such bias could mask or create gender effects. In neither case was the difference found to be statistically significant ($F_{(1,60)} = 2.75$, and $F_{(1,60)} = 1.48$). Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the current study indicate that managers tend to make sense of volunteer motivation in the same way that volunteers do. The similarity in ordinal ranking between volunteer responses in Anderson and Moore's (1978) work and managerial responses in the current study on the Likert scale measure points to general consensus on the question of why volunteers volunteer across these two groups. More particularly, ma-

nagers and volunteers share a common sense of the role of altruism in volunteer motivation. Furthermore, neither extent of exposure to volunteers, job tenure, nor gender significantly impact managers' attributions as they relate to volunteer motivations.

Conclusion

In order to be effective, managers must possess an accurate understanding of their employees' motivations to work. This is equally true whether supervising paid or volunteer workers. The findings of the current study provide some evidence that managers of volunteers generally hold reliable assessments of employee motivations. This is especially important as it contradicts earlier findings regarding the relationship of managers and paid employees (Kovach, 1987). While this study was exploratory in nature, the lack of a finding consistent with Kovach is especially telling, since there were many issues that should have biased this study to create differences that were not found. The two groups compared - aside from the contrast of volunteers and managers of volunteers - diverged in time (a period of almost twenty years), and culture (Canada and the United States). In those twenty years there has been a reduction of women in the volunteer workforce (beginning in 1974), and an increase in older volunteers (Hodgkinson et al., 1992). In terms of national culture, volunteerism is more idealized in the United States than in Canada (Pancer and Pratt, 1999), and is considered a part of the national identity of many Americans. Canadian national culture moved towards that of the United States between the time of the two studies due to the influence of American-based multinational companies (Frankman, 1998). It may be Kovach's findings are appropriate for managers of paid employees, but this is not generalizable to managers of volunteer workers.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the current study is to offer some assurance to non-profit managers that their intuitions about volunteer motivation can be relied upon as a basis for restructuring volunteer incentive programs. Tailoring job rewards as directly as possible to high valence volunteer preferences would likely lead to better volunteer-assignment fit, and thereby reduce both turnover and burnout as well as increase volunteer work satisfaction (Cherrington, Reitz, and Scott, 1971). For example, a manager of volunteers could develop an innovative volunteer recognition plan around the significance of the volunteers' work in light of the importance volunteers place upon "feeling

useful and needed."

While it is necessary that managers understand what values drive volunteers to engage with non-profit organizations, this knowledge is not sufficient to assure managerial effectiveness. Motivation is a function not only of the desire for particular rewards - a matter which managers seem to have some accurate sense about where their volunteers are concerned - but of expectancy and instrumentality as well (Vroom, 1964). In addition to the accuracy of their perceptions of volunteer motivations, managers must seek to assure that volunteers both hold the reasonable expectation that their efforts will lead to increased performance (expectancy) and see a link between their volunteer performance and the rewards they desire (instrumentality). While managers may well have one piece of the volunteer motivation puzzle clearly in hand - they have an accurate "read" of what volunteers seek from their volunteer engagement - if there are areas left for improvement they will have to do with clearer specification of the effort-to-performance and performance-to-reward linkages. Central to this task is establishment of unambiguous performance expectations for volunteers.

Directions for Further Research

Perhaps the greatest research design limitation of the current study is that the perceptions of volunteers from a study conducted a number of years ago in Canada were compared with the perceptions of managers from a study conducted at a later time period in the United States. This is a deficiency only to the extent that one can reasonably expect such perceptions of motivations to volunteer to have shifted over time and vary from one geographic area to another. However, the researchers engaged in the current study see no basis for making either assumption; Anderson and Moore (1978) generalized motives of volunteers from Canada to the United States. Nonetheless, it is recommended that future research pair data from volunteers directly with the managers for whom they work. Addi-

tionally, the sample should be expanded to include a greater number of managers in a larger population to verify that the current findings are not limited to volunteer managers in San Diego County. The dominant model of volunteer motives appears to be the Volunteer Function Inventory (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen and Miene, 1998), which has an established measure for the volunteers themselves, but not for the volunteer managers to rate their volunteers - this will need to be developed to use this model. Anderson and Moore (1974) have already conducted a study comparing volunteers between the two countries; studies of the attributes -both traits and skills -of successful volunteer managers within effective non-profit institutions would be most illuminating. Such studies could easily employ either quantitative or qualitative research methodologies; the best studies would probably combine both into a single research design. It has been noted that the accuracy of managerial perceptions of volunteer motivations is not sufficient to insure a highly innervated volunteer workforce. Inadequate research attention has been given to the perceptions of volunteers regarding the links between their efforts and their contribution to organizational well-being, or between their performance and achievement of desired outcomes. Both these constructs beg for further inquiry. More particularly, it would be useful for non-profit managers to apprehend the extent to which precise specification and evaluation of volunteer performance impacts volunteer motivation. Are there differences in volunteer motivation - and the objective indicators of same - between non-profit organizations that clearly articulate their expectations of volunteer performance, versus those non-profits that neither specify nor evaluate volunteer performance? Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) would imply the answer to this question is yes; empirical verification of this premise would prove a most fruitful direction for future research into the motivational schema of volunteer workers.

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