
Volunteer motives and retention in community sport

A study of Australian rugby clubs

RUSSELL HOYE, GRAHAM CUSKELLY, TRACY TAYLOR AND SIMON DARCY

ABSTRACT

The retention of volunteers has been identified as a significant organisational challenge for community sport organisations. However, little is known about the relationship between volunteer motives and their intentions to remain with an organisation. In this study, 402 volunteers from community rugby clubs were surveyed about their motivations to volunteer and intention to remain as volunteers. The results indicate that while volunteer motivations are primarily based on altruistic values, intentions of volunteers to remain with their club are only moderately affected by these motives.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is unpaid, freely chosen involvement undertaken through an organisation or agency and performed for the benefit of others or the environment as well as oneself (Cuskelly et al. 2006). Many nonprofit organisations, including community sport organisations (CSOs), are largely dependent on volunteers to perform governance, managerial and service delivery roles and these volunteers are integral to the achievement of sport development outcomes (Cuskelly, Hoyer & Auld 2006). The role of volunteers in CSOs has undergone significant and sustained change in recent years as the organisations in which they volunteer have adopted more professional management systems and structures (Kikulis, Slack & Hinings 1995a, 1995b; Slack 1985; Slack & Hinings 1992; Taylor 2004; Thibault, Slack & Hinings 1991). Sport organisations have sought to become more business-like in the way they manage staff, volunteers and other organisational issues (Chelladurai 1999), and have developed more sophisticated and complex management systems (Sharpe 2003). Doherty (2005) argues that this shift has contributed to changing the nature of the volunteer experience within CSOs, and subsequently the roles and expectations of CSO volunteers have shifted. Cuskelly et al. (2006) note that CSOs vary in their capacity to manage volunteers

and in the use of more formalised structures and management practices. Consequently, the CSO's management of volunteers may not necessarily align with the volunteer's expectations or motives. As Taylor et al. (2006) report, managing relationships within CSOs is more complex than first thought and the elements of the psychological contract between the volunteer club administrators and those who they oversee as volunteers in the operation of club activities are comparatively different.

Contemporary volunteer management frameworks endorsed or developed by government sport agencies in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom include the Volunteer Involvement Program, Volunteer Management Program and the Club/Association Management Program (Australian Sports Commission); Volunteer Investment Program (Sport England); and the Running Sport Program (Sport and Recreation New Zealand). These approaches promote the use of human resource management (HRM) concepts, which are 'modelled on work organisations' (Australian Sports Commission 2000, p. 10) and focus on the use of a system of planning, recruitment, selection, orientation, training and recognition practices in the management of volunteers. An important element of

these programs is an emphasis on sport organisations matching volunteer motives to specific volunteer roles to maximise recruitment and retention efforts.

There is some evidence that the adoption of certain volunteer management practices influences volunteer retention (Hager & Brudney 2004). Practices associated with higher volunteer retention rates include: offering training and development opportunities to volunteers, screening to identify suitable volunteers, and matching volunteers to appropriate tasks (Hager & Brudney 2004). This premise is supported by Phillips, Little and Goodine (2002) who identified ongoing appreciation and respect, meaningful volunteer experiences, and communicating and being responsive to volunteers, as important factors in volunteer retention. There has, however, been very little research into the efficacy of using such practices in enhancing volunteer retention.

In this study data was collected on the motivations of volunteers, within community rugby union clubs, and their intentions to remain as volunteers. In Australia there are approximately 20,000 community rugby club volunteers from 814 rugby clubs. These community rugby clubs are predominately governed by voluntary committees or boards that, in turn, utilise volunteer coaches, team managers, officials and other general volunteers to deliver services to their members. The context for this research is particularly timely given the significant organisational change and rapid professionalisation that has occurred in the sport of rugby union in the past decade. As Nichols et al. (2005) assert, changes in the external environment in which community rugby clubs operate have significant implications for volunteer management. While Davis Smith (1999) suggested that there is a shared understanding of the basic elements of volunteering across the globe, we argue that this shared understanding has not been extended into evidence-based best practice in volunteer management, specifically with regard to understanding volunteer motives for the purpose of increasing retention. The purpose of the study was to explore the relationships between motives to volunteer and intentions to continue volunteering.

VOLUNTEER MOTIVATION

The motivation to volunteer can be described as a desire to help others, or for personal and social

rewards. Stebbins (1996) labelled these motivations as altruism and self-interest that, he argued, coexist within formal organisational settings. Other researchers have developed motivation to volunteer models that are unidimensional (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen 1991), based on two factors (Smith 1981), three factors (Knoke & Prensky 1984), four factors (Batson, Ahmad & Tsang 2002) or more complex models with as many as six unique factors (Clary, Snyder & Ridge 1992; Clary & Snyder 1999; Finkelstein, Penner & Brannick 2005). It is not surprising then that Wang (2004, p. 420) surmises that 'despite recent advances in research on volunteer motivations, there is still considerable debate about the underlying structure or dimensionality of volunteer motivations'.

Research into the motives of sport volunteers has tended to focus on volunteers involved in the delivery of sport events, often on a large scale (Downward & Ralston 2005; Farrell, Johnston & Twynam 1998; Ralston, Downward & Lumsdon 2004; Wang 2004). Relatively few studies have focused on the motives of longer-term or seasonal volunteers operating at the community level of sport. Exceptions are found in the work of Burgham and Downward (2005) and Eley and Kirk (2002). Irrespective of the nature of the volunteers being studied, the research has tended to employ scales adapted from the work of Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991) or been of a qualitative nature.

As Clary and Snyder (1999) suggest, the context of volunteering impacts on the underlying motivations and dimensionality. For the purposes of examining volunteer motivations within the context of CSOs we have chosen to conceptualise volunteer motivations based on the work of Wang (2004) who identifies five motivations as follows: altruistic value, personal development, community concern, ego enhancement and social adjustment. Wang (2004, p. 421) provides a strong argument for utilising a multidimensional structure claiming that 'previous evidence to support the unidimensional structure was rather weak' and that the 'overwhelming majority of prior studies have suggested that motivation to volunteer is a multidimensional construct'. The altruistic values dimension is based on people choosing to volunteer because of personal values and beliefs, enjoyment derived from helping other people and being a person who likes to be involved. The personal development construct is concerned with motives to

volunteer to gain experience, for the challenge and being with people with similar interests. Community concern is focused on volunteering to make a contribution and service to the community. The social adjustment dimension is based on people volunteering because it is important to significant others who support their volunteer activities. Ego enhancement reflects the notion that people volunteer to feel part of a unique experience or event, because volunteering is fun and to feel needed or important.

The variety of attempts that have been made to develop a robust measure of volunteer motives are matched by efforts to discover how volunteer motives are related to other elements of the voluntary experience such as satisfaction, commitment and retention.

VOLUNTEER RETENTION

Volunteer retention is a significant problem for the community sport sector as it limits the capacity of CSOs to deliver services to members and other users (Cuskelly 2004). However, there is a limited amount of published research on the retention of volunteers in community sport organisations, or even in the wider nonprofit literature (Gidron 1985; Mesch et al. 1998). Volunteer retention has been measured simply by length of tenure (Clary, Snyder & Ridge 1992; Lammers 1991; Mesch et al. 1998) and also using various behavioral intention statements (Clary et al. 1998). To address the question of volunteer retention in this study on rugby clubs we developed a multi-item scale to measure behavioural intentions to continue volunteering which is discussed in more detail in the method section.

A study by Mesch et al. (1998) identifies that three variables have been reported to affect volunteer retention: motives, meaningful work, and satisfaction. The results of various studies using each of these variables are mixed, with arguably only the relationship between volunteer motives and retention being firmly established in the literature. Volunteer motives have usually been identified as altruistic or instrumental motives with both motives contributing to volunteer retention, however, Mesch et al. (1998) find that only instrumental motives were predictive of volunteer retention.

Lammers (1991, p. 139) investigates the factors

that predicted volunteer service duration within a voluntary telephone crisis centre and argued that 'predictors of *volunteering* should be different from predictors of volunteer *duration*'. In other words, volunteers join an organisation for a variety of motives that might well be different to why they would remain within an organisation once they have experienced its culture, management system, interactions with other volunteers or undertaken volunteer roles. In contrast, Clary, Snyder and Ridge (1992), and later Clary and Snyder (1999), argue that functional theory suggests that volunteers will be satisfied if their volunteer experience matches their motivations and that this will, in turn, lead to volunteers remaining for longer periods. The study by Clary et al. (1998) concludes that volunteer service organisations should consider matching volunteer experiences to volunteer motives to reduce volunteer turnover (i.e. increase retention).

METHOD

SAMPLE

A sample of rugby club volunteers (N=1280) was drawn from a randomly generated list of 100 clubs taken from a broader sample of clubs that had responded to an Australia-wide survey of volunteer management practices within community rugby clubs (Cuskelly et al. 2006). Personal contact was made with a nominated representative of each of the 100 selected clubs and volunteers' contact details were requested. These individuals comprised the sample of volunteers for the research.

INSTRUMENT

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect data regarding volunteer involvement, motivation to volunteer, intention to continue volunteering as well as selected demographic characteristics. After consideration of previously published volunteer motivation scales, a 16-item scale was developed based on the 20-item scale developed by Wang (2004). This scale comprised five dimensions: altruistic value, personal development, community concern, ego enhancement and social adjustment as previously described above. It was selected because it was developed in a sport volunteer specific context and had high levels of reliability and validity. The

items related to the ego enhancement construct were omitted as Wang's (2004) research concerned episodic high profile events, such as the Olympic Games, while the focus of the present study is on volunteer positions in seasonally-run community rugby clubs. Two items from the original scale (one each from the personal development and community concern sub-scales) were also omitted, as they were not applicable to the context of CSOs. One item was added to the social adjustment sub-scale 'volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best', as the original sub-scale only comprised three items. Respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with each of the 16 statements using a 7-point Likert-type scale. The rating scale was '1 Strongly disagree' to '7 Strongly agree' with '4 Neutral'.

Following the approach used by Clary et al. (1998) respondents were asked about their intentions and timing of their plans in respect of continuing to volunteer or leave their rugby club. These statements were:

1. I plan to continue volunteering at this club until end of this season;
2. I plan to continue volunteering at this rugby club next season;
3. I am likely to be volunteering at this rugby club three years from now;
4. I intend leaving this rugby club altogether within 12 months (reverse coded);
5. I intend to volunteer in the next 12 months but with a different organisation (reverse coded); and
6. I intend to cease volunteering at this rugby club as soon as another volunteer can be found to replace me (reverse coded).

They were asked to rate their level of agreement with the behavioural intention statements using a 5-point Likert Scale which was graded as follows: 1 = 'Strongly disagree'; 2 = 'Disagree'; 3 = 'Uncertain'; 4 = 'Agree'; and, 5 = 'Strongly agree'.

PROCEDURES

The questionnaire was pilot tested with a sample of 50 undergraduate and postgraduate university sport and leisure management students to check for the clarity of the instructions, content validity, and the

reliability of the on-line administration method. Midway through the 2005 competitive rugby season an internet link to an on-line self-administered questionnaire and a separate on-line incentive draw entry form were emailed to 1,280 volunteers. Each recipient was sent a maximum of two reminders to complete the questionnaire, unless the volunteer initially declined participation in the survey. In accordance with Dillman (2000), the first reminder was emailed ten days after the original email and a second follow-up was sent 21 days after the original email. Of the 1280 emails inviting participation 201 (16%) were returned as undeliverable or the recipient declined the invitation. Thus the effective sample frame was 1079. A total of 452 surveys were returned. Of these, 402 were used in the analysis, for a response rate of 37% (402/1079).

DATA TREATMENT AND ANALYSIS

Using SPSS descriptive statistics (reliability analysis, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and multiple regression) analysis was performed. Mean scores were computed on a case-by-case basis for each of the motivation constructs. The 16 items of the volunteer motivation scale were examined in terms of item-scale correlations and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for each of the four motivation constructs. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS 6.0 to examine the measurement properties of the 16 motivation scale items. The analysis examined relationships between the 16 observed variables and the four hypothesised latent motivation constructs: altruistic value, personal development, community concern and social adjustment. The error terms for all 16 observed variables were constrained to be independent, but the four latent constructs were left to freely correlate. The four constructs represented in the measurement model were considered reflective according to the criteria of Jarvis, Mackenzie and Podsakoff (2003). Maximum likelihood estimation procedures were used to evaluate data fit to the a priori hypothesised model of volunteer motives. To examine the fit between the measurement model and the data, three goodness-of-fit indices were utilised. The indicators and their associated 'rule of thumb' criteria included a goodness-of-fit index (GFI) of more than 0.90 and a root mean square error of approximation

Table 1: Results for confirmatory factor analysis for hypothesised final model – Individual scale items, standardised estimates for regression coefficients, mean factor scores, factor standard deviations, and factor Cronbach Alphas (N = 402)

Scale item: How do you feel about the reasons why you volunteer in rugby?	Standardised regression coefficients¹	Factor Means²	Factor SD	Factor α
Altruistic value		5.90	0.88	0.74
I volunteer because of my personal values and beliefs	.68			
I volunteer because I enjoy helping other people	.79			
I consider myself to be a person who gets involved	.65			
Personal development		5.35	1.00	0.74
To challenge myself and test my skills	.52			
To get to know people interested in the same things I am	.62			
To gain experience	.73			
To share my knowledge and skills with others	.72			
Community concern		5.80	1.00	0.84
Volunteering does something good for the community	.80			
Volunteers make a valuable contribution to the community	.82			
Volunteering is a community service	.82			
I believe in promoting volunteerism for the good of society	.62			
Social adjustment		4.98	1.13	0.69
People who are close to me would support me to volunteer	.76			
My family members would encourage me to volunteer	.72			
Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best	.52			

Notes:

1. Standardised regression weights for observed variables measured by the motivation scale. Regression weights set to one to arbitrarily fix a measurement scale on one item for each unobserved variable, per Arbuckle and Wothke (1999, p. 187).
2. Factor means, standard deviations and Cronbach alphas calculated from individual motivation scale item scores.

(RMSEA) less than .08, and a comparative fit index (CFI) greater than 0.90 (Kline 1998, p. 131). To test the extent to which volunteer motives predicted the behavioural intentions of volunteers, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The dependent variable was the behavioural intention of volunteers (index score) and the independent variables were the various volunteer motive subscales.

RESULTS

Results for the confirmatory factor analysis on the motivation scale (RMSEA = 0.079, CFI = 0.922, GFI = 0.919) indicated acceptable fit using 14 of the original 16 items. Standardised regression weights (factor loadings), means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha reliability measures for each of the

motivation constructs in the hypothesised model are displayed in Table 1. The standardised regression weightings ranged from 0.52 to 0.82, indicating good divergent validity, and all subscales indicated good internal consistency with Cronbach alphas ranging from 0.69 to 0.84. The means for each motivation construct ranged from 4.98 for Social Adjustment to 5.90 for Altruistic values. Standard deviations ranged from 0.88 to 1.13.

A correlation matrix for the motivation scale is shown in Table 2. Inspection of this matrix revealed moderately strong correlations between the four motivation constructs, which ranged from $r = 0.51$ to $r = 0.64$. These results provided evidence that the motivation constructs were related but distinguishable from one another and provide some evidence for discriminant validity.

Table 2: Correlation matrix of motivation scale dimensions and volunteer intentions (N=402)

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Volunteer intentions	1.0				
2 Altruistic values	.24	1.0			
3 Personal development	.17	.57	1.0		
4 Community concern	.15	.64	.51	1.0	
5 Social adjustment	.19	.51	.52	.51	1.0

Correlations significant at $p < .01$ are shown.

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis of behavioral intention of volunteers (index score) on volunteer motives.

Variable	B	SE B	β	Sig. p	Adjusted R ²	F for change in R ²
Altruistic values	.17	.06	.20	.005**		
Personal development	.02	.05	.03	.627		
Community concern	-.02	.05	-.03	.625		
Social adjustment	.06	.04	.09	.154		
					.05**	6.61**

(N=402), ** $p < .01$

By using an exploratory factor analysis the six-item scale used to measure the behavioural intentions of volunteers was reduced to four items and a mean score was calculated for each volunteer based on those four items. The mean score for volunteer retention was 4.13 (SD = 0.77). The scale had a Cronbach alpha of 0.83, indicating good internal consistency. The correlation analysis revealed there were small, positive correlations between each of the four motivation constructs and volunteer intentions to stay or leave (Table 2).

A multiple regression analysis procedure was used to test for significant predictors of volunteer intentions to stay or leave (see Table 3). The final model explained 5% of the variance in volunteer intentions to stay. Of the four motivation constructs, volunteers who had higher motivation scores on

altruistic values (i.e. 'I volunteer because of my personal values and beliefs', 'I volunteer because I enjoy helping other people', and 'I consider myself to be a person who gets involved') were significantly more likely (beta = 0.17, $p < .01$) to report that they intended to continue volunteering (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The results provide support for the argument made by Wang (2004) that volunteer motives are multidimensional. As such, this study extends our understanding about the motives of long-term volunteers within community rugby clubs, specifically that they can be conceptualised in four dimensions: altruistic value; personal development; community concern; and social adjustment. This result also supports the claim made by Clary and Snyder (1999) that the context of volunteering impacts on the underlying motivations and dimensionality. The results also bear out our decision to omit the ego enhancement dimension from Wang's (2004) scale based on the differences between episodic and longer-term volunteering contexts. The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that volunteer motives in this specific context could be conceptualised as comprising four distinct factors. The context in which volunteers, many of whom are parents or guardians of junior-aged participants, engage with CSOs such as community rugby clubs and the varied number of volunteer roles within these organisations suggests that individuals are attracted to volunteering for a myriad of reasons.

The results of this study demonstrate that volunteers whose motives were primarily altruistic would be more likely to remain volunteering with their community rugby club in comparison with volunteers who were motivated for instrumental reasons. This is in direct contrast to the findings of Mesch et al. (1998) who found that only instrumental motives were predictive of volunteer retention. This is arguably due to the different contexts of volunteering in each study (i.e. sport club setting versus stipended volunteers in the AmeriCorps).

This study has also increased our knowledge of the motives and behavioural intentions of longer-term sport volunteers outside the context of major sporting events. The study has shown that motives are a weak predictive factor in explaining volunteer

retention that is in direct contrast to the arguments of Clary, Snyder and Ridge (1992) and Clary and Snyder (1999), and the findings of Clary et al. (1998). That only 5% of the variance in volunteer retention can be explained by volunteer motives suggests the argument put forward by Lammers (1991), that motives for initially volunteering are different to motives for remaining a volunteer, is more applicable in the context of longer-term sport volunteering.

The implications for volunteer management within community sport organisations are: 1. volunteer coordinators and others charged with responsibility for recruiting volunteers need to design volunteer recruitment messages that target a variety of possible motives; 2. community sport organisations need to be cognisant of designing volunteer experiences that meet volunteers' ongoing needs or motives in order to retain them; and 3. need to recognise the impact that their own management practices have on volunteer motives and other associated issues such as volunteer commitment.

There are several limitations to the study, foremost of which is that the sample for the study was drawn from one type of sport organisation, namely community rugby clubs, so generalising from the results to other contexts, including other sports, should be approached with caution. Having said that, it might be reasonable to assume that volunteer motives in other community-run sport organisations might be related to indicators of retention in similar ways. The study also relied exclusively on self-reported measures for both independent and dependent variables. Common method bias was controlled through appropriate questionnaire design and guaranteeing response anonymity as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). The study also focused on analysing behavioural intentions rather than actual retention, a limitation imposed by the time constraints of the study. Further, the study focussed exclusively on exploring the relationship between volunteer motives and behavioural intentions through quantitative measures. Utilising qualitative measures may yield richer data, allowing for more insightful exploration of these complex phenomena.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that while volunteer motives are important for understanding the reasons individuals initially choose to volunteer, once engaged in

the volunteer experience their motives are not strongly predictive of the likelihood of their continuing to volunteer within the organisation. The study highlights the importance of the volunteer experience and the many other variables that may affect that experience, such as the manner in which community rugby clubs manage volunteers, as potentially having far more impact on volunteer retention rates. Community rugby clubs therefore, while needing to be mindful of the initial motivations of volunteers, should seek to understand the impact of management interventions and the overall volunteer experience on volunteer retention.

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- Russell Hoye is Associate Professor, School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality management, La Trobe University and teaches in sport management and organisational behaviour. Dr Hoye's research interests include corporate governance, volunteer management, public policy and the relationship between sport and social capital.*
- Graham Cuskelly is Dean (Research), Griffith Business School, Griffith University. Professor Cuskelly's research interests include corporate governance and volunteer management within community sport.*
- Tracy Taylor is Associate Dean (Teaching & Learning), Faculty of Business, University of Technology, Sydney. Professor Taylor's research interests focus on the management of volunteers and diversity within sport organisations.*
- Simon Darcy is Associate Professor, School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism, University of Technology, Sydney. Dr Darcy teaches in sport management and organisational behaviour and has research interests in volunteer management and research methods.*