Volunteer Motivations Across Student Organizations: A Test of Person-Environment Fit Theory

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Student volunteers in four campus organizations differed in Holland type and motivational needs. The findings support person-environment fit theories.

Volunteerism has existed for centuries, but formalized volunteer programs have come about only recently (Ellis, 1985). Henderson (1985) has defined a volunteer as "someone who contributes services without financial gain to a functional subcommunity or cause" (p. 31). College student volunteerism became popular during the 1960s and 1970s as colleges and universities encouraged community service through campus-based programs (Ellis, 1978). There has been a recent decline, however, in volunteer involvement on college campuses. It has been reported that 29% of college students volunteered for a charity organization and 40% became involved in fund-raising activities during their undergraduate years (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1984). These numbers may seem high, but they represent a decline in volunteer participation from earlier years. Newman (1985) suggested that this decline may be due, in part, to societal and individual trends toward egocentrism and self-development. Henderson (1985) argued that social and economic forces are increasingly making volunteerism a luxury that can be undertaken by only the wealthy. She further suggested that "the days of altruism may be over" (p. 32) and hypothe-

sized that people are now seeking growth and self-satisfaction from their volunteer experiences, in addition to the more traditionally hypothesized motivations of helping others.

There have been recent attempts in higher education to increase the involvement of students in volunteer activities and increase the quality of their experiences. These efforts have been founded, in part, on (a) the importance attributed to the services made available through volunteer commitment, (b) the finding that involvement in campus activities contributes to student development (Astin, 1985), and (c) the apparent positive relationship between campus involvement and overall retention rates for students in higher education (Astin, 1977; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987).

One way in which college student affairs administrators may increase student volunteer involvement is through clarifying the reasons why people volunteer. Traditionally, volunteer motivations have been assumed to be altruistic. This view of volunteers has influenced the way in which volunteer programs are designed, operated, and studied. Recently, however, researchers and writers alike have focused on additional motivations that cause people to volunteer. Henderson (1980) suggested that each volunteer has unique motivations and expectations of his or her experience. Ascertaining these motivations can contribute to providing student volunteers with a satisfactory experience.

In her study of 4-H volunteers, Henderson (1981) found that the primary motivation for adult volunteers was affiliation, or the desire to interact with others. These individuals construed their volunteer involvement to be a leisure activity. A recent study of student volunteers de-

termined that they were motivated to volunteer by both altruistic and egoistic needs (Fitch, 1987). As a result of these findings, Fitch suggested that volunteer program directors consider social exchange theory when organizing and supervising their programs.

Social exchange theory suggests that people contribute to the degree that they perceive that they are being rewarded. When an imbalance between contributions and rewards is perceived, an individual is likely to move toward a greater equilibrium. An individual who perceives that the rewards for volunteering are imbalanced with contributions is likely to discontinue involvement. Mowday (1979) offered one such theory. Thus, Fitch (1987) empirically tested the concept of volunteerism as a source of need fulfillment as well as an altruistic activity and offered a more complex conceptualization of the volunteer experience.

Research findings and a more complex understanding of volunteerism are positive steps toward recruiting additional volunteers and providing them with satisfactory experiences. One flaw of previous conceptualizations and studies of volunteers, however, is that they have tended to focus on only one volunteer organization and to generalize results to other organizations and volunteers. Person-environment fit theory (c. f., Holland, 1985), however, suggests that individuals in diverse organizations would have different personal characteristics, which would make generalizing from one organization to all volunteers misleading. The possibility that volunteers in different organizations are very different types of people has implications for volunteer recruitment and retention.

Holland's theory (1985) postulates that people will search for environments that will allow them to use their skills and abilities and express their attitudes and values. Holland proposed that there are six characteristic types that depict both individuals and environments, which are summarized in Table 1. Holland (1985) has found extensive evidence that both people and environments can be represented by these types and that the greater the type consistency between the individual and an environment, the more satisfied the individual.

In a second person-environment theory, developed by Murray (1938), it is predicted that individuals seek situations that will fulfill their needs. Murray's theory contains 15 individual motivations, such as the needs for Achievement, Autonomy, Order, and Deference. Murray hypothesized that people are compelled to act in such a way as to satisfy their needs; this drive is a "motivation." Murray's model has been used extensively in research on human motivation, and several instruments have been developed to measure the motivational constructs as Murray viewed them.

Henderson (1980) hypothesized that volunteers may be motivated by a variety of motivational needs. She suggested that an understanding of volunteer motivations can be put to use in recruiting volunteers who will be most satisfied with the organization and will likely volunteer again. Henderson's (1980) work has both practical and heuristic value. Identifying the motivations of various student volunteers will allow volunteer program directors to recruit and retain volunteers by providing them with an experience that matches their interests and motivational needs. In applying motivational theory to student volunteers, Henderson (1980) has created a heuristic paradigm for research on student volunteers. Her tenets, however, have not been adequately tested.

One flaw of previous research on volunteer motivations is that researchers have typically developed nonstandardized measures to study volunteers. These locally developed instruments have the advantage of being relevant for the

TABLE 1
Summary of the Holland Personality Typology

Type	Characteristics
Realistic	Asocial, conforming, frank, practical, materialistic
Investigative	Analytical, cautious, critical, curious, independent, introspective, rational
Artistic	Expressive, imaginative, impulsive, independent, introspective, open
Social	Cooperative, friendly, helpful, idealistic, kind, sociable, warm
Enterprising	Adventurous, ambitious, agreeable, extroverted, sociable, self-confident
Conventional	Careful, conforming, methodical, orderly, practical, persistent

sample of interest, but the validity and reliability of study results, and thus the ability to generalize these findings, are not clear. One notable exception is a study conducted that compared the motivations of volunteers from two organizations using standardized measures (Quade, 1986). In this study, Henderson's (1980) hypothesis was confirmed: volunteers in two different organizations were found to vary in their motivations for volunteering and in their personal characteristics, as measured by Holland type. Several problems in this study, however, limited the ability to generalize the results. These included a small sample size ($N = 81$ from two organizations), low return rate (42%), and the sampling of only two organizations, which may have introduced sampling bias into the study. Finally, Quade's study did not compare the volunteer group with a control group of college students.

The research questions in the current study were (a) Do volunteers in diverse organizations have different motivations and personal characteristics? and (b) Are the motivational characteristics of volunteer and nonvolunteer students different?

METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted at a large eastern university. Participants were 199 volunteers from four different volunteer groups or organizations. Volunteer groups were chosen on the basis that they appeared superficially to represent diverse types of organizations. A 73% rate of participation was achieved.

Group A (Program Board) is a large programming board of a student union. Through the operation of nine autonomous subcommittees, volunteers in this group are responsible for planning and implementing a large budget and for planning and approving student programs. The time commitment required by this organization tends to be high.

Group B (Recruitment) is a large volunteer group affiliated with the undergraduate admissions office. Their purpose is to aid in recruiting new students to the university. They staff programs such as student and family tours of the university and a "buddy system" in which potential students are paired with current university students for a day. This is a very formal group receiving a high degree of structure and supervision from its parent organization. Volunteers in this organization are required to commit less time than do those in other groups in the study.

Group C (Peer Counselors) volunteers operate and staff an oncampus peer counseling, referral, and telephone hotline service. This group is supervised by the campus counseling center.

Group D (Service Fraternity) is a coed service fraternity whose purpose is to provide charity services to the campus and to the greater community. Examples of their programs include visits to local nursing homes and blood drives. This group has a fairly formal structure and meets biweekly, but it is not an independently housed fraternity.

Instruments

The Adjective Checklist (ACL) (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) is a measure of Murray's (1938) 15 hypothesized needs. It comprises 300 adjectives, and participants check those adjectives that they perceive as being descriptive of themselves. Norms for the ACL have been developed for college students. Although additional evidence of the validity of the ACL is necessary, its utility as a research measure has been established in many prior studies (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983; Mitchell, 1985). The internal consistency of the subscales ranges from .53 to .95, with a median of .94.

Self-Directed Search (SDS) (Holland, 1985) is a measure of the personality/occupational typology described by Holland (1985). The Occupational Daydreams section of the SDS has the most predictive validity of all SDS scales and has been used in isolation to determine Holland typology (Holland, 1963; O'Neil, Magoon, & Tracey, 1978). In this section, participants are requested to identify their current and past occupational choices, from which Holland types (high-point codes) are inferred. Internal consistency coefficients for the six scales of the SDS range from .67 to .94, and test-retest reliability coefficients for college freshmen range from .60 to .92 over a period of 7 to 10 months. It was used in this study because of its predictive validity, reliability, and ease of administration. High-point codes were assigned on the basis of the most recent occupational choice.

Analyses

Data were analyzed using chi square, *t* tests, and multivariate analysis of covariance. All analyses were conducted at the .05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Volunteer Demographics

The participants in this study were predominantly women (60%) and white (82%). There were no race or sex differences in the volunteers between the four organizations. Of the volunteers. 61% were juniors or seniors, and participants had been volunteering with their organizations for a mean of 2.52 semesters (median = 2.00 semesters; mode = 1.00 semester).

Holland Codes

A chi-square analysis of Holland high-point code by organization was conducted to test the hypothesis that volunteers in the four organizations would be different in type. The chi-square statistic was significant, $\chi^2(9, 183) = 46.95$, $p<.001$) indicating that there were differences in Holland type between organizations. Although there was a variety of types in each organization, Group A (Program Board) and Group D (Service Fraternity) can be best characterized as Investigative types, Group B (Recruitment) as the Enterprising type, and Group C (Peer Counselors) as the Social type (see Table 2).

Motivational Needs

A multivariate analysis of covariance was conducted to test the hypothesis that volunteers in different organizations would be motivated by different needs. The covariance resulting from the number of adjectives checked by participants was partialed out because of its spurious correlation with several ACL subscales (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983). Pair-wise comparisons of subscale raw score means were conducted in posthoc analyses using *t* tests.

There were significant pair-wise differences among the four organizations in motivational needs (see Table 3). Group B (Recruitment) was significantly higher than were the other groups on needs for achievement, endurance, order, nurturance, affiliation, and heterosexuality. This group was also higher than were the Program Board and Peer Counselor volunteers in the need for dominance, higher than the Program Board group on intraception and abasement, and higher than Peer Counselor volunteers on exhibition. Service Fraternity volunteers were higher than was the Program Board on needs for achievement, dominance, endurance, order, intraception, nurturance, affiliation, heterosexuality, and exhibition. Peer Counselors were higher than were Recruitment volunteers in need for succorance and abasement, while the Program Board group was higher than were Recruitment volunteers in need for succorance and abasement, while the Program Board group was higher than were Recruitment volunteers on succorance. The Program Board volunteers were also higher than was the Service Fraternity group on need for succorance.

TABLE 2
Holland Types by Organization*

| | Percent of Volunteers in Organization | | | |
| | Groups | | | |
Holland Type	A Program Board	B Recruitment	C Peer Counseling	D Service Fraternity
Realistic	1	7	0	5
Investigative	38	14	23	43
Artistic	20	5	0	10
Social	21	26	68	14
Enterprising	19	47	9	29

Note. No Conventional types were found in the sample.
*χ^* = 51.95; *p<.001*.

Needs	A Program Board	B Recruitment	C Peer Conseling	D Service Fraternity
		Groups		
Achievement		a, c, d		
Dominance		a, c		a
Endurance		a, c, d		a
Order		a, c, d		a
Intraception		a		a
Nurturance		a, c, d		a
Affiliation		a, c, d		a
Heterogeneity		a, c, d		a
Exhibition		c		a
Autonomy				
Aggression				
Change				
Succorance	b, d		b	
Abasement	d	a	b	
Deference				

Note. All noted values significant at *p*<.05.
*a = significantly greater than Group A.
 b = significantly greater than Group B.
 c = significantly greater than Group C.
 d = significantly greater than Group D.

Finally, a series of *t* tests was conducted to assess whether or not the volunteers in the study differed from the norms reported for college students in the ACL Manual (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) on the 15 motivational need subscales. Significant differences were found on 7 of the 15 subscales. Volunteers were significantly higher than was the normative group on the heterosexuality, exhibition, autonomy, and change scales. They were lower than was the normative group in assessed needs for endurance, order, and affiliation.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm the hypotheses that (a) volunteers would differ from a sample of nonvolunteers and (b) volunteers in diverse organizations would have different characteristics and individual motivations, as indicated by their differences in Murray's (1938) motivational need categories and in Holland (1985) high-point codes. First, volunteers in this study differed from other students in motivational needs, as suggested by the differences in ACL scores of the current sample and the normative sample of the ACL. There are, however, limi-

tations to this comparison. These differences may be attributable to differences between volunteer and nonvolunteer students or may be due to the difference in the samples. These possibilities might be explored in future studies by investigating a control group more closely matched with the volunteer group.

The volunteers in this study also differed according to organizational membership. The volunteers involved in peer counseling had more Social types than did the other groups. These volunteers were also found to have higher motivational needs in areas that would suggest a greater emphasis on group decision making and deference to the needs of others. Recruitment volunteers were predominantly Enterprising and Social and were highest in motivations that reflected needs for independence, autonomy, affiliation, and achievement. The Service Fraternity had the greatest number of volunteers who were Investigative types: whereas the Program Board reflected the greatest diversity in Holland codes. The diversity of this latter group is probably best explained by the nature of the organization, which is organized into many autonomous subgroups. providing a variety of environments for volunteers.

It is suggested in person-environment theory that people and environments both have characteristic "personalities" and that individuals will seek environments in which they can express their strengths, values, and primary characteristics (Holland, 1985). The results of this study suggest that this principle operates in volunteer organizations. First, volunteers differed from other students in their motivational needs. Additionally, the hypothesis that volunteers cannot be considered a unitary group, but rather, vary systematically from one organizational environment to the next, was confirmed. This provides further support for Quade's (1986) finding that volunteers in different organizations may differ in systematic ways. These results have several implications for volunteer programs in higher education.

One practical use of these findings is in the recruitment of new volunteers. Locating volunteers who are likely to succeed in the particular environment represented by an organization will increase the likelihood that they will remain with the group. Wilson (1976) has argued that social programs tend to fail because of a lack of appropriate management and an oversimplified view of individual motivations. An organization that is aware of the characteristics and motivations of volunteers who are likely to succeed and fit well into the organization can target their recruitment efforts toward these students (Henderson, 1980).

The first step in this effort is to assess the goals, objectives, and structure of the organization. An organization that provides a great deal of structure and guidance might appeal most to people who are high in motivational needs for order or who have Holland high-point codes of Conventional or Investigative. A more informal organization that values group consensus and decision making might be a better fit for volunteers with a high-point code of Social or high motivational needs for abasement or affiliation. In attempting to recruit new volunteers, organizations should be clear in their materials about the types of experiences that are available to volunteers. Recruitment efforts should be targeted toward groups that would best fit the type of volunteer tasks available to volunteers.

These findings also have implications for organizations that are attempting to increase the diversity of their volunteers. To promote this objective, volunteer organizations might incorporate additional types of task and reward structures to attract these individuals. For example, if an organization would like to increase the number of volunteers who enjoy working with others, opportunities for social interaction should be fostered. The availability of such experiences could be advertised in an effort to appeal to these students. Clarity about the structure and goals of the organization is critical to creating this match.

The results of the study also have practical implications for the retention of volunteers. According to person-environment fit theory (e.g., Holland, 1985), a better match between individual characteristics and motivations on one hand, and organizational structure and rewards on the other, would result in a greater level of individual satisfaction and less aversion. Although it remains to be tested, one benefit of an optimal match between person and environment may be a longer tenure for volunteers in the organization. An organization can maximize this fit for its volunteers by considering the nature of volunteer tasks as well as the type of rewards that are offered. Social exchange theory, mentioned by Fitch (1987) in the context of volunteer organizations, is one example of this application. Fitch found that volunteers had both altruistic and egoistic reasons for volunteering, and he suggested that providing rewards for volunteers may be the key to increasing the quality and quantity of volunteer involvement.

The current study provides further evidence that achievement of these goals is facilitated by understanding various volunteer characteristics and motivations and by determining the specific rewards that appeal to various types of volunteers. Program directors can determine the kinds of rewards that are offered to volunteers on the basis of their characteristic types to optimize the organizational-individual match. For example, volunteers with a Holland high-point code of Social might feel most rewarded by interacting directly with the consumers of a service. A good service reward for this group might involve an informal "social" to honor and celebrate their contributions. On the other hand, volunteers with a Holland high-point code of Enterprising might feel more rewarded by a formal recognition of their achievements in the organization. Reward ceremonies and certificates of achievement might best reinforce these individuals. Volunteer retention efforts can be fostered by altering the organization's task and reward

structure to better meet the needs and characteristics of the volunteers.

The results of the study also have implications for future research involving volunteers. Most studies concerning volunteers and their characteristics or motivations have involved only one organization and have generalized findings to other volunteers and organizations. The results of this study suggest that generalization of this nature may be unfounded. Volunteers have many different motivations for volunteering, as suggested by Henderson (1980). Studies involving volunteers need to involve people from several different organizations to apply conclusions subsequently to a variety of volunteer organizations. Future studies should identify additional characteristics that distinguish volunteers across organizations as well as the types of rewards and incentives that are most appealing to various volunteers. Finally, research is needed to categorize volunteer tasks within organizations by Holland type to test whether or not volunteers who differ in Holland high-point code actually prefer different activities. If this link between Holland code and actual volunteer activities could be made, volunteers could be assigned to tasks that would have inherent reward characteristics associated with them.

Better understanding of the characteristics and motivations of college students who volunteer their time and service can aid efforts to design programs that will recruit and retain successful volunteers. The application of person-environment fit theories in volunteer organizations can help to maximize the experience for the organization, for the volunteers, and ultimately, for the consumers of the service.

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