Motivational Factors in a Volunteer Organisation

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This article considers research into motivational factors of volunteers in an organization working with street people. A grounded theory framework using an abductive strategy was chosen to explore the issues of motivation in the volunteer population of the not for profit organization herewith known as the Youth Bus Program (YBP).

The research methodologies chosen to collect data were qualitative interview using a convenience sampling method and a random sample survey instrument. Both a qualitative and quantitative methods were applied within a survey instrument as well as initial interview data to provide for triangulation. Previous research literature was used to inform the current research in terms of research problem setting and research methodologies Literature has been used to inform the current research in terms of research problem setting and research methodologies as well as insights developed referring to the earlier research.

The findings of this research identified prevailing grounded theory categorisations that were consistent across the two qualitative data collection instruments and supported by the findings of the quantitative data. Interpretation of the grounded theory findings and quantitative data uncovered a number of impacts affecting decisions by volunteers to remain as volunteers

Field of Research: Volunteerism, Motivation, Organization Behaviour.

1.0 Introduction – Motivational Factors of Volunteers

Although there have been significant numbers of research projects on volunteerism and impacts on volunteers in overseas contexts (Rotolo. 2000; Reich; 2000; Clary et al. 1998; Dekimpe and Degraeve,1997), there have been too few studies on volunteerism in the Australian context (Lyons et al., 2006).

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This article presents a small project on an Australian volunteer group studying motivation for volunteers of a Youth Bus Program (YBP). The organisation controlling the YPB is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission of improving "the well being and self-worth of alienated and excluded Australian street children, through unconditional support, whenever and wherever necessary, with the view to reconnecting them with the community" (Organisational Annual Report, 1998). The YBP is run in partnership with a major private health care facility in Australia as part of its outreach program.

The article is structured in the following manner. Firstly a literature review covering the issue of the research identifying various motivations for volunteerism and also rationales for ceasing to be volunteers. The Methodology section of the paper considers the research design aspects in particular to use of both qualitative interview and quantitative survey data to secure triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). A discussion and findings section identifies the key issues related to the analysis of the data before concluding with insights from the present research project.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review has uncovered a wide variety of research relevant to issues associated with volunteer motivation and related aspects of commitment and attrition of volunteers. The findings of this literature review has been summarised below.

2.1 Motivation of Volunteers

Dailey and Wilson (1992) identified a number of aspects of leadership in volunteer organisations and provide insight into the implicit rewards of volunteerism such as "feeling good" and a sense of "fulfilment" gained in the volunteer work. It also points out that there are rewards in terms of "business experience… developing new skills… building new networks " (Dailey & Wilson, 1992, pp. 43 – 44). Research by King and Lynch (1998) into the motivation of volunteers to join a volunteer program in a nature conservancy, found that 62.7% (n= 86) of volunteers responding to a survey indicated altruistic motivations in becoming a volunteer. Similarly, research by Uggen and Janikula (1999), argued that people choose to volunteer for a variety of altruistic and egoistic reasons. This research therefore expanded the selfless and self-driven motives of volunteers to present a multi-reason paradigm operating in the choice to engage in volunteerism. Clary et al. (1998) identified six primary motives for volunteerism. These were: expression of important *Values*; better *Understanding* of the world and its peoples; positive self-*Enhancement*; *Protective* effects against guilt or negative feelings; fitting into *Social* reference groups; gaining *Career* skills.

2.2 Multiple Realities of Volunteers

In his study of street youth worker volunteers, Baizerman (1996) clearly articulated that multiple philosophies and realities exist. He further suggested as outcomes to his analysis that youth work as a vocation includes reciprocal development of both youth and community particularly regarding public perception of street youth. This research again identified the notion of multiple realities of street workers in dealing with street work issues. Its relevance to the current research lies in the nature of the work and context of working with street youth. Although there are inherent differences between a vocational street youth worker and street worker volunteer, the prevailing contexts of engagement with street youth are similar. The fact that multiple realities exist within the framework of professional street youth work supports the contention that multiple realities and philosophies exist in the voluntarist construct of street youth work.

Earlier research by Baizerman (1995) argued that a caring community is not viable unless adults recognise the place of adolescents in the context of being, ideas and real persons in their own lives. This paper affirms a strong notion of a caring community connecting to street youth as people, and engaging with them in non-judgemental social interaction. Dekimpe and Degraeve (1997) analysed the attrition rate of volunteers with the Belgian Red Cross. Their findings for that volunteer group were expected length of stay becomes smaller for more recent volunteers and the conditional likelihood of quitting increases rather than decreases with the volunteer's length of service. Australian research conducted on behalf of Volunteering Victoria, Crisis Line and Women's Information Referral Exchange (WIRE), (Bird, 1996), identified that people volunteer for differing reasons. Some reasons cited in that research were: "training for career path, meaningful work, contact with people outside of their home environment, unemployment, to name a few", (Bird 1996, p. 7). This appears consistent with several of the six factors identified by Clary et al. (1998).

More recently Prouteau and Wolff (2008) suggested the relevance of this relational motive using two samples of, respectively, 1578 volunteers and 2631 participants in associations. According to their own statements, many volunteers seek to make friends and to meet other people through volunteer activities. The authors therefore argued for a relational motive for volunteerism. Finally, most recently Stukas et al (2008) have undertaken research matching personal motivations to environmental affordances (i.e. volunteer activities, role organization itself) in the volunteer sector. Findings indicated that the multiple matches on volunteer outcomes effect might be greater when organisational contexts are less structured and smaller when contexts are more structured in terms of coordination, rules and evaluations in place.

2.3 Evidence of The Need For Volunteers

Paolicchi's 1995, research was qualitative using narrative interviews focusing on respondents' personal life histories. The impact of Paolicchi's research (1995) was that it uncovered a perspective of volunteers not being defined by motivations, personality traits or common values, but defined by the manner in which they live their network of concrete relationships. This established a further support for an

interpretivist ontology and epistemology for the research on the Open Family volunteer group. Paolicchi, in his abductive research identified volunteers living the network of their concrete relationships between volunteers and between street people as creating a shared world in which feeling close to others is established as a key element of everyday life.

Norum, (1997) in a conference paper entitled "Living the research: Stories from homeless youth", highlighted research around the experience of homeless youth. Although it deals specifically with the position of the public school system as an intervention to better serve homeless youth, the paper does explore the increase in homeless youth aged 17 or younger, as a trend in the USA. It also indicated outreach connections as valid engagements to improving the lot of homeless youth. This supports the Open Family Youth volunteers' position of seeing social connection to homeless youth as bringing value to homeless youth as people.

Research by Reich (2000) investigated the degree of commitment in relation to core self and role identity as a volunteer. The volunteer group investigated, were Emergency Medical Technicians. This empirical study considered potential differences between younger (mean age 30.69 years) and older (mean age 38.71 years) volunteers in terms of their identity and role focus. Although the nature of the volunteerism for this study (Reich, 2000) was more technical in nature on the difference in relational and task oriented focus of volunteers, it does have some connectivity to the current study. That connection is in terms of the commitment to volunteerism as a construct of core self and its strong link to identity. The concept of identity and self is a notion that was to be explored in the interviews with the YBP volunteers.

An empirical study by Rotolo, (2000) identified significant correlations between life cycle transitions and voluntary association membership. Life cycle transitions included, marriage, parenting stages through to, "empty nest", as well as critical occurrence events such as divorce (Rotolo, 2000), The Rotolo (2000) research as well as that of Reich (2000), have relied on concepts of identity and life cycle phases as adapted from the work of Erikson on identity and social milieu and Levinson's social clock theory. The key element of both research projects has been the impact of life cycle on commitment to volunteerism.

Another study by Omoto, Snyder and Martino (2000) considered age related issues within volunteerism. This study looked at volunteerism and the life course. The research investigated the purposes, expectations and outcomes of adult hospice volunteers of various ages. Data analysis supported the hypothesis of younger volunteers tending to be motivated by interpersonal relationships, whereas older volunteers tend to be motivated by service or community obligation concerns. These results present a contrary view to the research of Reich (2000), however the volunteerism context and nature of activities was markedly different in both studies. There was a professional and technical nature of volunteers in the Reich (2000) study, versus an implied unskilled nature of volunteers in the Omoto et al (2000) research. The context and complexity of the volunteer group/organisation, the nature of the volunteer activities as well other related variables, will necessarily

impact on the results of findings relating to volunteer motivation in relation to age and lifecycle phase. This is borne out by the disconfirming findings of research by Reich (2000), Omoto, Snyder and Martino, (2000), and Rotolo, (2000).

2.4 Insights From Review of Related Literature

In the main the research into volunteer motivations has mainly focussed upon motivation to join volunteer organisations. Little research has been undertaken to pinpoint the reasons why volunteers remain or depart from volunteerism. Those research projects which have investigated issues of volunteer retention and/or departure, have been mainly US focused around student and community volunteerism as opposed to volunteer work with homeless or street youth. Although the research listed above gives insights into volunteer behaviours in terms of joining and retention, the differing contexts, populations, cultural and demographic variables involved create a difficulty in projecting findings to another volunteer context with differing humanist variables at play. Comparisons and insights of the current research have been outlined in the discussion of findings sections of this article.

3.0 Methodology and Research Design

The project is exploratory in nature and has focused mainly on qualitative data gathering and analysis. Some quantitative analysis has been undertaken to confirm, disconfirm and further determine relevance of themes and issues established in qualitative interviews. This method will act as a triangulation approach (Flood, 1999). Triangulation assists with improving validity and can be useful in qualitative data methodologies to confirm original data and affirm and refine interpretations by obtaining a variety of information on the same issues (Sarantakos, 1998; Blaikie, 1993).

An interpretivist framework was used to explore and understand the research issue. In the interpretive perspective reality is whatever is perceived by the actors (people) involved (Burrell, and Morgan, 1993). It "is internally experienced … socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors … reality is not objective but subjective, reality is what people see it to be" (Sarantakos, 1998, p.3). According to Sarantakos (1998), the purpose of interpretive research is to understand the participants' reasons for social action, the way that they construct their lives, the meaning that they attach to them.

Two methods of data collection were employed to secure triangulation and recoverability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The two methods were:
- Interview, where participants were asked to consider a series of open-ended semi-structured questions designed to explore some of the key issues around motivation, commitment, retention and attrition of volunteers. The interviews lasted 10 - 15 minutes.
- A mailed out Survey Questionnaire, designed based on the considerations stemming from the initial pilot study interviews. The survey involved qualitative open ended semi structured questions, closed questions supported by open

ended question for detail of response and interval (Likert) scales to assess a list of issues affecting volunteer continuation cited in the initial qualitative data gathering interviews.

The dual qualitative and quantitative approach creates a triangulation to add greater rigour and potential for greater clarity for any conclusions drawn from the research (Jick, 1984).

4.0 Discussion of Findings

Eight interviews were conducted using open-ended questions in a semi structured interview process (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Data from these interviews were analysed applying a grounded theory approach to develop emergent categories from the data. Following an iterative process of comparison and refinement across codes and recoding of data the following key categories emerged. (Refer Appendix A)

Grounded Theory categories, related to the research question of Motivational factors in Volunteers working with Street People, emerged through a process of refinement from the raw data. The core categories identified in the qualitative research using a Grounded Theory approach informed by an abductive strategy, were identified as the following:

Personal Needs and Issues - representing the connections of personal and relationship life as an affect on volunteerism.
Fulfilment - indicating the need for personal satisfaction through varied (Enjoyment, Learning) with street people in the work.
Frustration - the meaning of which lies in the capacity for volunteers to demonstrate consistent behaviours of "self organisation" across the entire group.
Connections - representing the need for involvement and contribution by volunteers.
Support - indicating differing needs within the volunteer group requiring some attention and accommodation by the organization.
Focus - indicating various needs to achieve expectations of the volunteer progr

Table 4.0   Comparison of response category results between interrelated series of questions on attitudes to aspects of volunteer programs

Question - Stem Likelihood to affect respondent decision to remain a volunteer	Very Likely %	Quite Likely %	Neither Likely nor Unlikely %	Quite Unlikely	Very Unlikely %
Disillusionment with what the Open Youth Bus Program does	13	13	13	34	27
Identification of another volunteer program that better meets my needs	13	27	13	27	20
Identification of another volunteer program that meets the needs of young people more effectively	27	6	20	34	13

Referring to the results above for the survey questionnaire responses (Table 4.0):
A comparison of responses to the three questions indicates that a majority of volunteers (61%) would not be affected by disillusionment in what the YBP does. This result tends to reaffirm the response rate of 80% indicating that they were as committed to the YBP as when they first joined. From the results above, 47% of respondents indicated that they were unlikely to be affected in their decision to remain a volunteer if they identified a volunteer program that better met their needs. Similarly 47% of respondents indicated that they were unlikely to be affected in their decision to remain a volunteer if they identified a program that met the needs of young people more effectively.

A significant change in responses between the questions about an alternate program occurred in the response categories Very Likely and Quite Likely.   The rate more than doubled to the category Very Likely in response to the question around more effectively meeting young peoples needs compared to the question around own needs.   Also the Quite Likely category in relation to the question relating to an alternate program more effectively meeting young peoples' needs reduced dramatically to less than a quarter of the same response category in consideration of the question around own needs. It would appear from the data to the three questions taken together, that a high proportion of Volunteers are committed to the YBP and are unlikely to be affected by take up of alternate volunteer programs.   Also there is evidence that if a program that more effectively met the needs of young people was identified a proportion of the population between 10% and 20% may be affected in their decision to remain YBP volunteers.

Comparing the results of the coding and categorisation of the survey responses with the earlier Interview coding and categorisation results in Appendix A, confirmation and refinement of themes under categorisations unfolds. Terms such as "Enjoyment", "Personal Satisfaction", *Connection* (A key category) appear strongly within the responses. The categorisation of *Personal Needs and Issues* appears mainly through the survey results but is intimated in the diverse responses to the Interview question - "What factors might cause you to leave the volunteer bus program?" The categorisation *Frustration* appears in both the Interview and Survey data and is a genuine issue affecting volunteers. Frustration appeared mainly in connection with qualitative responses regarding problems with organization or differences in performance between volunteers. *Disinterest,* as a category emerged from responses to the survey instrument. This particular category appeared mainly in response to specific questions around volunteer meetings and social events.

A very complete picture of the YBP volunteer group emerges in terms of the Grounded Theory. YBP volunteers find fulfilment and real connection in their hands on volunteer activities with street people and with fellow volunteers. *Personal needs and issues* act as the major driver affecting decisions to remain a volunteer. A degree of frustration with volunteer behaviours in terms of volunteers reflecting a more complete volunteer role being involved in all facets of the volunteer organisation (**Complete Volunteer**), as opposed to a volunteer who only commits to going out on the bus and no more (**Bus Volunteer**), role is an issue for some volunteers. In the data collection responses a group that can be identified as Bus Volunteers (Concentrating on going out on the YBP bus only and not involved in other program activities), indicated that they are committed to going out on the bus, but are clearly disinterested in the other YBP administrative and social activities.

4.1 Analysis of Random Sample Survey

The random sample survey questions were based on results obtained from the pilot study of semi-structured interviews. A mix of both qualitative questions in line with those developed for the pilot study interviews, as well as quantitative questions again based upon issues stemming from the pilot study were used in the mailed out survey instrument. This method is consistent with Todd in Easterby-Smith et al (1991) who advocates Methodological triangulation. The population is predominantly female as indicated by the survey sample. The sample result in terms of ages would also be consistent with the population, with the ages of 35 to 55 representing the majority of volunteers.

Analysis of the questions related to currency of involvement with the bus operations indicated all respondents had been out on the bus as volunteers within the last three months, with 80% within a month of the survey and 47% within two weeks prior to the survey. This indicated that the respondents have current experience to rely on in responding to survey questions designed to identify potential reasons for departure from the volunteer group.

An interesting result stemming from the question of level of commitment to the YBP was that:

- 12 of the 15 respondents (80%) indicated that they were as committed to the YBP as when they first joined the program
- 1 respondent indicated that they were not as committed as first joining
  2 respondents indicated that they were contemplating leaving the program.

This question could be reviewed against further qualitative and quantitative questions to clarify statements of commitment and also to clarify potential reasons for leaving the volunteer program, particularly in relation to those respondents indicating that they had considered leaving the program. Analysis of each of the questions regarding likelihood of affect upon decision to remain a volunteer provided interesting results. The analysis of responses to each question is presented below. The researchers have referred back to previous studies where the research is relevant. The results to the question of likelihood of disillusionment with hands on volunteer work affecting the respondents' decisions to remain a volunteer indicated, a fairly balanced split of results across likely and unlikely scales.

The data presented a marginal skew towards unlikely, 30% of respondents indicated quite unlikely and 30% indicated quite likely. Results to the question of likelihood of increase in demands of work/job affecting respondents' decisions to remain a volunteer indicated strongly that this was unlikely, with 60% of respondents indicating quite unlikely to very unlikely, and with 14% indicating neither likely nor unlikely. Clearly work demands for the sample are not a prime issue affecting ability to continue volunteerism. With 55% of all respondents aged 40 and over, and 40% aged over 50 years, work demands may not be significant issues to these respondents in a mature phase of work life cycle. This would be consistent with the research of Rotolo (2000), which considered life cycle phases in volunteerism, inclusive of stages of work-career and identity in terms of take up and commitment to volunteerism.

The question of the likelihood of an increase in demands and needs of personal life/relationships/family in affecting respondents' decisions to remain a volunteer strongly indicated this as quite unlikely to very unlikely with a response rate of 60%. Again the results to the question, considered in relation to the age statistics of respondents, would be consistent with the research of Rotolo (2000). The empirical study by Rotolo identified significant correlations between life cycle transitions (marriage, parenting stages through to, "empty nest", as well as critical occurrence events such as divorce) and volunteerism. Rotolo's research indicates volunteerism peaks at middle age and then declines. This would be considered consistent with the age characteristics of the YBP research sample and the "empty nest" nest and need for connection and contribution identified in Rotolo's research (2000).

The question as to the likelihood of a critical incident such as witnessing a fight between street people or feeling threatened affecting respondents' decisions to remain a volunteer presented an interesting result. 60% of respondents indicated it was quite unlikely to very unlikely in affecting them. 27% of respondents indicated it was neither likely nor unlikely to affect their decision to remain. Only 13% indicated

that it was likely to affect their decision to remain. This is an important finding. Given that:

1.   There had been a number of street fights in the twelve months prior to the research (not accurately chronicled - discussed at general monthly meetings, therefore anecdotal evidence)

2.   Volunteer training emphasises that events like this can and do occur. Much time is spent in training explaining, a non-involvement, take no sides, policy

Clearly the respondents are "comfortable" with the notion that conflict does occur with street people and that the sensitising training offered in the induction program is effective at least in terms of espoused cognition and emotion around the personal impact of such critical incidents. The issue of too little structure of the YBP affecting volunteer willingness to remain a volunteer is an interesting one to consider. Research by Stukas et al (2008) on indicates that the multiple matches of motivation on volunteer outcomes effect may be greater when organisational contexts are less structured and smaller when contexts are more structured in terms of coordination, rules and evaluations in place. This would seem to confirm the YBP volunteers' preference for more structure to deal with administration issues of food, clothing, materials, setting training, general standards, rostering and bus routines and volunteer roles to be structured rather than left too loose.

In relation to the survey questionnaire two questions stand out to confirm the above analysis in relation to the YBP volunteers. To the survey question "Likelihood that too little organization of the bus program would effect respondent decision to remain a volunteer with YBP", 33% of respondents indicated it was likely to effect their decision whereas only 7% indicated it quite likely to affect their decision to remain a volunteer, in responding to the question "Likelihood that too much organization of the bus program would effect respondent decision to remain a volunteer with YB

4.0 Conclusion

Insights into research topic area mainly identified that the YBP volunteers remain highly committed to their volunteerism as evidenced by the initial qualitative interview data and the qualitative and quantitative survey results.   The qualitative interview data and triangulated qualitative survey form data confirms that volunteers gain "Fulfilment" and "Connection" to others, particularly street kids through their volunteer work.   In this they reflect findings of motivation through altruism expressed in earlier and contemporary research on volunteer motivation. Regarding critical findings relating to this particular volunteer group, based on the interview and triangulated survey results the following interpretations are posited, stemming from the grounded theory analysis and quantitative survey results.

Analysis of the qualitative data for both interview data set and survey data set indicates no overriding reason as to what issues or events may lead to a volunteer departing. The responses from the two samples confirm that "Leaving YBP" is ostensibly base on a personal decision framed around the notion that "when your times up its up". A conjecture from this would be that the volunteers contemplating leaving may feel that they no longer have or no longer need "Connection" or no

longer gain "Fulfilment" from the program. "Connection" and "Fulfilment" were two of the strongly represented categories in the grounded theory elements of the current research.

Although no absolute reasons for departure came from the current study, some evidence in the quantitative data indicated that the following issues do affect volunteers' decisions to remain a volunteer with the YBP:

- Research findings support the view that demands and needs relating to personal, relationship and family, have a higher level of impact on decision to remain a volunteer than other issues investigated in the research.
- Research findings also indicated that YBP volunteers appear to be comfortable with levels of conflict as they occur in the course of the Bus program volunteer work, however volunteers indicating that they have contemplated leaving the YBP have a markedly higher sensitivity to conflict affecting their decision to remain a volunteer in comparison with volunteers indicating that they are as committed to the program as when they first joined. This result would indicate that conflict does play an issue in decisions to remain a volunteer however its weight in the decision process has not been determined by the current research.
- Research findings also indicated that level of organisation was an issue for some volunteers both in terms of qualitative responses pointing out "Frustration" at other volunteers not "pulling their weight" and also findings supporting the view that too little organisation of the YBP would be an issue affecting decision to remain a volunteer.

The aforementioned findings lead to the definition of two possible Roles of the Volunteer in the YBP. Firstly the "Complete Volunteer", who not only goes out on the bus but also attend meetings (Volunteer Group Meetings and Annual General Meetings), attend social functions and perform other administrative or maintenance tasks. Secondly, the "Bus Volunteer" who in the main goes out on the bus and takes no other role in YBP events or requirements. This finding of different levels of commitment may have implications for other volunteer organizations as well as have implications for levels of retention and attrition. Further research is therefore warranted.

5.0 References

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Appendix A   Final coding and category matrix from interview questions

Interview Question	Coding	Recoding	Category
Why did you join the bus program?	Give something back. Commitment Practical Enjoyment	Commitment Practical	**Contribution**
Why do you continue to be associated with the bus program?	Enjoyment Learning	Enjoyment Learning	**Fulfilment**
What factors might cause you to leave the volunteer bus program?	Social issues Health issues Work issues Conflicts	Personal Issues	**Personal Needs & Issues**
If something did occur that made you think of leaving, what sort of support could be provided that would help you to stay with the program?	Debrief Transport & Accommodation . More flexible schedule	Support	**Support**
What do you most like about the volunteer bus program?	Communication Connection	Communication Connection	**Connection**
Why?	Enjoyment Learning	Enjoyment Learning	**Fulfilment**
What do you like least about the volunteer bus program?	Cleaning Differences amongst volunteers Conflict with Volunteers Physical layout of bus	Annoyed Disturbed	**Annoyance**
Why?	Frustration	Frustration	**Frustration**
What one thing would you improve about the bus program that you would find most satisfying?	More contact with clients More resources Improved organization No change	Focus	**Focus**
Why?	Frustration with volunteers Frustration with lack of resources Frustration with limits of contact	Frustration	**Frustration**