



True Volunteer Foundation



Understanding volunteer expectations and motive fulfilment

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INTRODUCTION

As a cultural and economic phenomenon, volunteering is part of the way societies are organised, how they allocate social responsibilities, and how much engagement and participation they expect from citizens (Anheier & Salamon, 1999:43). The following report will delineate the different types of volunteering available today and enquire what is understood by *fulfilment* of volunteer motivations. It will also include a discussion of people's attitudes to their working lives and the increasingly instrumental use of volunteering as a career enhancement strategy – especially in the context of youth and graduate unemployment. Furthermore, the report will illustrate the growing potential of the charity sector as a viable career option. As the most popular route into voluntary service is through a membership or participation in an organisation, the report will proceed to discuss the current trends in volunteering from a charity's perspective. While the patterns of volunteering become more complex and fluid, it becomes crucial to consider the attraction and retention policies of non-profit organisations and their different ways of managing volunteers' expectations. In light of volunteer retention strategies, the report will look at the legacy of the 2012 London Summer Olympics to enquire how to build on the momentum created by the Games and effectively harness the incredible work of the volunteers involved in the Olympic events.

The central recurring theme of this report will concern the *fulfilment* of volunteer motivations and how individual expectations are addressed and managed in an organisational context. Volunteering is a non-market activity while fulfilment is a very subjective term, based on different individual interests, expectations, and so forth. Motivations to volunteer will always be complex and varied while fulfilment is actually a *process* that depends on:

- the careful and thoughtful choice of a volunteering opportunity where we match our interests and skills to the role (we should choose to contribute to a cause we feel passionate about)
- the expectations we set (e.g. personal development or career-related benefits)
- the nature of work (risk, benefits, satisfaction, challenges, workload, as well as the relationships we develop inside the organisation)

Each of the above factors can affect the length of one's volunteering experience and determine whether or not it becomes fulfilling. People will commit less time and less energy if they are allocated a task that does not match their interests and skills. Sometimes, fulfilment will depend on the less obvious motivations and situational factors. For example, if someone volunteers to seek emotional support, fulfilment may depend on whether the experience has helped him or her to escape negative feelings and reduce isolation.

Fulfilment can also simply refer to recognition or "feeling appreciated" as this was one of the most commonly given responses characterising a positive volunteering experience – both in the questionnaires designed to produce additional data for the present report as well as in existing studies and literature on the subject (Gaskin & Smith, 1997; Skoglund, 2006; McCabe *et al.*, 2007). Recognition of voluntary action was also a central objective of the United Nations General Assembly when it proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of the Volunteer. However, people do not volunteer just to be viewed favourably by others. For example, although public recognition may have been an

important reason why people volunteered in the 2012 London Olympics, the eventual hugely positive public response was rather a pleasant surprise to the participants, in other words, an effect, not a cause. Volunteers are “in” for both instrumental and selfless motivations. Organisations can benefit from the volunteer’s individual input as well as collective team effort, but they should also bear in mind that nothing is ever completely altruistic. As it is not necessarily a negative thing in the volunteer world, both parties should accept this dichotomy and aim at establishing the right balance between the organisational objectives and individual motivations.

1. DEFINITIONS OF VOLUNTEERING: A CRITICAL VIEW

The conceptual origins of the term “volunteering”

The concept of volunteering is rooted in the Lockean notion of a self-organising society, but it was also a very prominent theme in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville (especially in his magnum opus – *Democracy in America*) or the basic tenets of the Scottish Enlightenment movement. In principle, volunteering takes place outside the confines of state or religious authority, although for many centuries certain voluntary activities were monopolised by the Church or the central government. The noun use of the word “volunteer” derives from the Latin adjective *voluntarius* (“voluntary, of one’s free will”). Initially, the noun form and the verb “to volunteer” were both most commonly used in a military context – *voluntaire* in Middle French signified “the one who offers himself for military service”. The term was thus originally very much tied to state authority, and army volunteers also received financial contribution for their service while voluntary service today does not include material gain (except for reimbursement of certain expenses, such as lunch and travel). Similarly, activities such as caring for the poor, visiting the sick, assisting at school, and so forth are no longer services provided solely by religious organisations, neither are they solely associated with the work of just one institution, such as the Red Cross.

Today volunteering is a much larger and more independent phenomenon. It is also more diverse, dynamic and institutionalised. The size of the non-profit sector exemplifies how great a part has volunteering come to play in our society. Yet the change is perhaps best epitomised by the variety of different types of voluntary action available to individuals today, which are outlined in the following two chapters.

The degree of the “selfless” in motivations to volunteer

According to Wilson (2000), volunteering is best described as the time given freely to benefit another person, group or cause. It is a rather a planned and thoughtful decision as opposed to any spontaneous act of helping (such as bystander interventions in emergency situations). Another concise definition of the term explains volunteering as the different acts of non-obligated helping (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Many scholars argue that volunteering should always remain a combination of the “unpaid, formal and part-time” (Anheier & Salamon, 1999: 51). However, “unpaid” is a tricky term; voluntary work is nowadays understood to include reimbursement for certain expenses (for example, lunch and travel). There are also instances of partly-funded volunteering placements, in which

volunteers may sometimes obtain health and accident insurance, contributions towards pension payments or some forms of modest bonuses as part of recognition for their service. However, the type of “desirable” recognition always depends on the type of volunteering we engage in. An event volunteer who is a football lover and works during the Champion’s League final will be volunteering merely for the chance of being close to such an important sporting event. Likewise, the 2012 London Olympics volunteers did not do it for the badges, uniforms, lunches or even a sneak preview of the opening ceremony rehearsal. They only wanted to be a part of the event and share a sense of pride in helping to make the event run successfully. Their passion and efforts were widely acknowledged by official organisers, visitors, athletes as well as traditional and digital media (e.g. the popularity on Twitter of the hashtag #bigupthevolunteers). At a time when the use of volunteering gradually becomes more instrumental, the 2012 London Olympics showed how amazing, generous and selfless volunteer input can still get.

Going back to definitional terms, it is very important to note that volunteering is also a rather formal phenomenon. Although it occurs within an organisational context, volunteering remains different from paid work as well as from membership and leisure – an explanation of which is based on the third-party criterion. Some activities are non-marketable, for example: I cannot have someone else perform for me without giving up the benefit of performing or playing for my own pleasure. A sports club can pay a coach or get one to volunteer as one, but the club members cannot get someone to play for them. Similarly, to attend a rally is to participate in it, while organising it is volunteering (as long as it is un-obligated, unpaid and formal). The distinction here is that membership participation is actually leisure while coaching is work (Penner, 2002). It is true, however, that *in practice* there are blurred boundaries between the two concepts. I can support the local library by paying for the membership, but at the same time I could also volunteer to help run some events in the same library (a book club or other group discussions, creative writing workshops, and so on).

Another useful conceptual framework for understanding volunteering is contained in the United Nations’ definition. The following are the key defining characteristics of voluntary action according to the UN:

- activity not undertaken primarily for financial reward (although reimbursement of certain expenses is allowed)
- activity undertaken voluntarily (although school community service schemes strongly encourage, if not require, participation of students)
- activity to be of benefit to someone other than the volunteer, the society at large (although it is now recognised there are also significant benefits to the volunteer)

Among the “non-profit, non-wage and non-career actions” that once defined volunteering, the latter criterion is no longer a defining feature of voluntary action. Career considerations are too closely linked to the decision to volunteer and there are also more volunteering roles with the UN itself, among its numerous organisations and agencies, which equip individuals with an excellent skills set for a career start in international development and other fields. Evidence from the UK also suggests that career considerations are now inextricably tied to volunteering. The Mayor of London’s current plans to maintain the momentum created by one of the biggest volunteer drives ever in the UK (the 2012 Summer Olympics) also prioritise employability boost as a key characteristic of volunteering. The “Team London 2013” programme will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

2. CURRENT TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERING

Institutional recognition and promotion

In the past two decades volunteering has enjoyed considerable political and cultural recognition. In November 1997, following an initiative of several major international NGOs as well as the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 52/17, which proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). The resolution served to highlight the invaluable contribution of millions of volunteers worldwide. The UN has recognised the voluntary sector's work in national welfare systems as well as its role in tackling global social, economic, or humanitarian problems.

In the UK, the public and institutional recognition of volunteering is most evident in the context of the 2012 London Summer Olympics. Harnessing the enthusiasm and interest in volunteering created by the Olympic Games can positively contribute towards the building of the "Big Society", i.e. David Cameron's vision of a "rebalanced" economy and society. This is a big and varied concept that has become a major narrative in the UK political discourse. In the Hugo Young memorial lecture in November 2009, David Cameron described his ambition of creating a transition from "Big Government" to "Big Society", a de facto further decentralisation of power and authority. The Prime Minister recognised that the third sector organisations have often the right answers to the social problems in the UK and they should take up their rightful place as the *first* sector:

"...we will want to do everything we can to help what used to be called, rather condescendingly, the third sector but I believe is the first sector: the excellent charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises that do so much for our country..."

(The Rt Hon David Cameron, Prime Ministers Questions, 14 July 2010, Hansard)

After the 2012 Olympics the passion and efforts of volunteers were widely acknowledged by official organisers, visitors and athletes as well as traditional and digital media. It would be useful to put this in a wider context of the aforementioned statement by the Prime Minister and remind people of the official praise and recognition of not only individual volunteers, but also the entire voluntary sector. The increased participation inspired by the Olympics has led to improvements in organisational infrastructure and increased government funding for charities. Combined efforts of maintaining the spirit of volunteering (officially and in civil society) could now foster the creation of a genuine volunteering culture and active citizenship while also impacting on individual volunteers' skills and employability potential.

Out-of-country volunteering

The increasing number of NGOs active in development and relief work has also led to the internationalisation of volunteering. We all want to see new places, meet new people, or learn new skills. We are after an adventure, a life experience, or a chance to learn foreign languages and thus we take career breaks or gap years and travel to developing countries – often spending considerable time in local communities where we can help in teaching in schools and orphanages, building homes or

supporting an environmental campaign. Increasingly, volunteering is the “route” or the means to achieve the above motivations. Expecting no financial gain, volunteers nevertheless look for long-term social or career benefits when choosing the type of activity they will engage in. While volunteering, they can gain exposure to different issues and get hands-on experience of real-life situations that require problem-solving skills and other competencies that will boost their employability potential.

Some countries respond to these trends by helping to facilitate the attraction and retention of volunteers in key development projects through government funding. The German government, for example, supports the “voluntary social year” programme (*Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr*¹), which used to be an alternative to the country's compulsory military or civilian service. Two years after this requirement was abandoned, the FSJ still enjoys considerable interest among prospective volunteers and substantial support from the state. The programme is often linked to specific skills or language training and even professional qualifications. Similar programmes also run in other countries. In the UK, this is commonly associated with *Voluntary Service Overseas* (VSO) – a charity providing essential health and education services in the least developed areas of the world. The VSO has established effective strategic relationships with several governmental bodies including the Department for International Development (UK) as well as the Dutch and Norwegian Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The FSJ and VSO examples highlight the popularity of out-of-country development work programmes pointing out that this type of volunteering is regarded as particularly rewarding and fulfilling.

Micro-volunteering

Due to insecurity in the job market and competition for paid work at an all-time high, less people opt for career breaks fearing they may not be able to return to their jobs. Some may also find it difficult to volunteer outside their regular job's working hours due to excessive workload. Fortunately, many charities have responded to this with more flexible arrangements for their volunteers. This new option is *micro-volunteering*, which now allows people who are constrained by time or workload at their regular employment to contribute towards a worthy cause by working (volunteering) remotely from home. Micro-volunteering involves easy, quick, and low-commitment actions done via the internet on an ad hoc basis, for example market research, blogging, writing or editing content for an online magazine.

Increase in regular volunteering

Although in the UK people generally prefer short-term opportunities volunteering has nevertheless become more regular and has again reached the record participation rates (44 per cent) from 2005. Between 2008 and 2012 the number of people in the UK volunteering at least once a year has remained steady at 25 per cent, most likely due to the economic downturn. It previously oscillated between 27-29 per cent in the 2005-2008 period (*Ibid*). The most recent official statistics released by the Cabinet Office in February 2013 reveal a new resurgence in volunteering. According to the *Community Life Survey*, conducted after the Summer Olympics, 44 per cent of adults in England had

¹ *Freiwilliges soziales Jahr*: Germany's state-funded voluntary work programme particularly for young adults. It can last between six to eighteen months and also be spent working abroad. Before compulsory military or civilian service was abandoned in Germany, the FSJ could be used as a replacement if the service duration was at least twelve months.

formally volunteered at least once in the previous 12 months while 29 per cent of people reported that they formally volunteered at least once a month. This means that more than 19 million people in England formally volunteer at least once a year and more than 12 million people at least once a month. Although not necessarily valid for the UK adult population as a whole, the survey results nevertheless show that there has been an enormous increase in volunteering following the 2012 Olympics.

Volunteering as a career move

Recent increases in paid jobs within the third sector have turned it into a more viable career option. There have been many changes in the institutional landscape along with a 40 per cent increase in paid jobs, amounting to 2.7 per cent of total employment in the UK. Interestingly, the sector has grown during the recession period by 19 per cent since 2007 (Clark *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, non-profit organisations have undergone a decade of continuous growth at a quicker rate of change than their public and private counterparts, especially in terms of equality and inclusion. People with a disability account for 20 per cent of the voluntary workforce in the UK and 67 per cent of employees within the non-profit sector are female, which is 29 per cent more than in private employment (*Ibid*). Along with the fact that 62 per cent of the sector is now comprised of full-time employees, the above statistics increase the sector's attractiveness and significance as an employer. Young people no longer see it as just a provider of a range of services for public benefit, but also as a realistic employment opportunity. The charity sector encourages employees to be creative and provides them with a modern, inclusive working environment, which offers more flexible working arrangements and challenging frontline roles. The non-profit sector thus remains more conducive to the pursuit of individual motivations. Finally, organisational culture within non-profit institutions is much more likely to allow workers to be open about their lifestyles. Productivity increases when staff feel no need to hide their sexual orientation or health conditions, and this is why increasing attention should now be paid to the adoption of third sector organisational structures, management practices and ways of thinking.

Volunteering as a response to youth and graduate unemployment

Amidst high unemployment levels and a volatile job market, some individuals (all too often university graduates) are increasingly likely to consider a volunteering experience. Recent graduates face an exceptionally difficult job market situation. Those who can "afford" not to work (until they find their dream job), are increasingly willing to undertake volunteering with the intention to gain the necessary skills and experience to kick-start their career and secure a paid job that matches their interest and ambition. The UK government has even begun to facilitate its interest by creating a website where they can look for opportunities that will eventually connect them with businesses and potential employers. The name of the initiative is "Graduate Talent Pool" (graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk), which is in itself an encouraging caption that seems much more promising than typical job advertisements today. The following quotes highlight a key motivation behind young people's decision to volunteer after graduating:

"I was a recent graduate, unemployed and I was struggling to find a job. I felt as though the skills and knowledge I had developed during my degree were going to waste."

[HR assistant in an international development charity]

“I was receiving many rejection emails before (...) as a result of my lack of experience in the field (...) and volunteering seemed the best option, especially as I would be helping myself and helping others.”

[Volunteer office assistant]

A growing group of young people, who are unable to find a dream job, are willing to consider volunteering in a role related to their interests. However, some prospective volunteers remain unable to commit to it due to financial reasons. In other words, they face a difficult choice: *to volunteer (in a field related to interests, studies or career plans) or to assume any job that is of no interest to them.* The situation might be easier for couples that are living together – when one person is working and earning the other can consider a career enhancement route through volunteering. Yet, those who could not afford not to work will be reluctant to engage in unpaid voluntary service if their financial situation is harsh; they will accept *any* job that just “pays the rent”.

“I volunteered after quitting a job I didn’t like. I was in a lucky position as my husband got promoted in his job and there was less pressure on me to keep mine. It [volunteering] reminded me what jobs I could do with my degree and where my true interests lie. It was also good for meeting interesting people and making contacts.”

[Visitor services assistant at a research institute]

It should be pointed out that although it makes sense to use volunteering as a stepping stone to a meaningful career, it is also important not to make volunteering look as a *necessary* stage into employment. As the charity sector grows, it is becoming much more professional. Today’s volunteers are not always casual workers, but often senior, experienced professionals, civil servants or policy experts. This attracts many recent graduates that look for meaningful employment or skills training. However, this increased professionalism may discourage those who would like to see the third sector as it was – perhaps less bureaucratic or elitist and more *voluntary*. *Volunteering England* (part of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations) fears that some charities may re-brand their volunteering opportunities as internships to attract young graduates. Advertising internships as voluntary positions carries legal obligations. *Volunteering England* points out that some unpaid interns who were recruited as “volunteers” may actually be taken on to undertake work that would usually rest with *paid* employees.

Since the term ‘intern’ is not defined in UK law, depending on the situation, they may be workers or volunteers. It is therefore important to monitor employment practices (especially in the private sector) where volunteers risk being substituted for paid staff. Volunteers are vital for charities, but if they are wrongly recruited in a form of job substitution as “volunteers” they may be exploited as cheap labour. It is important to avoid that as it could be severely damaging to the perception of volunteering, which should be preserved as an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing

something that aims to benefit a good cause – where the boost to an individual’s employability prospects is a positive additional outcome.

3. VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

People volunteer on a casual and short-term, as well as on a long-term, on-going basis. Some prefer roles that fit their mobile lifestyles (e.g. working outdoors, coaching sports clubs, cleaning open spaces or helping to preserve wildlife), while others will gladly opt for an office-based opportunity (e.g. doing clerical work for a union, serving on boards or working on committees). Yet another group would prefer intensive out-of-country volunteering in projects that will show substantial results of their input, for example building homes with *Habitat for Humanity* – an international development charity that aims to eliminate homelessness and housing poverty. All this depends on individual motivations to volunteer, which involve expressing important values, learning about the world, personal development, seeking challenging assignments and chances to take initiative, or escaping negative feelings by seeking emotional support. Below is a summary of the most frequent responses and emerging themes concerning motivations to volunteer:

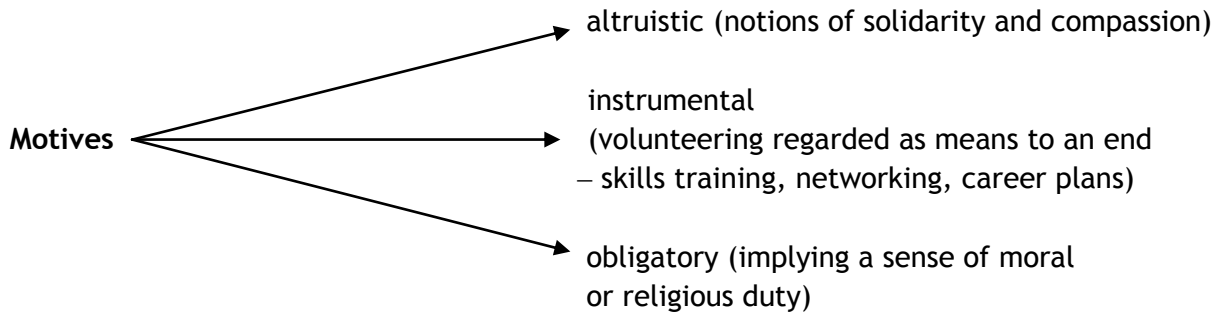
- “Right time” – when people undergo a period of transition, searching for meaning or purpose in their lives
- “Always wanted to volunteer” – seeking to learn more about the world, become proficient in a foreign language, learn technical skills, hands-on experience, specialist training, etc.
- Altruism or pro-social values: a reason underpinned by a desire to “give something back” or share one’s skills, experience and expertise where it is needed the most (sharing often changes into “exchange”; even with a remarkably selfless attitude to volunteering one is always receiving some beneficial experience in return)
- Personal growth
- Desire to stay active
- Social motives: to be with like-minded people or to be engaged in an activity viewed favourably by important others
- Career-related reasons: exploring different career options, taking a career break, improving one’s CV file

Volunteering at specific cultural or sporting events posits additional motivating factors, such as the sense of pride from participating in a global event like the Olympic Games. The glamour, prestige and scale of some events is often enough to motivate people to volunteer. Sometimes, the decision to become an Olympic volunteer can be a mix of business and pleasure. For someone involved in sports journalism or marketing, the stint as a volunteer in the 2012 Olympics was a fantastic opportunity to get up close and personal with a major global sporting event and world-class athletes.

There are also themes based on other situational factors. Many of us volunteer because we “have been asked”. Gaskin & Smith (1997) found that people directly asked to volunteer are more

likely to do it. Remarkably, the scholars reported that among the top reasons for not volunteering was “never been asked” (*Ibid*). Moreover, many people will engage in a volunteering activity when it offers an *alternative to military service* (which is ironic considering the term was initially used in a military context).

Motivational factors can also be summarised in a shorter typology:



While the “obligatory” orientations are sparse, instrumental considerations are on the rise. Some scholars also propose replacing the term “altruism” with “pro-social behaviour”. According to Pearce (1993) “altruistic” implies self-sacrifice or actions that are contrary to the actor’s best interests. Whereas “pro-social” acts are done by an unpaid volunteer – acts that produce and maintain well-being in others without the restrictions found in employment (*Ibid*).

One of the dominant motivations for volunteering today is “career enhancement” or employability potential. People increasingly look for flexibility in their working lives; they still carefully plan their careers, but also leave room for improvisation. The so-called “new careers” they are after are less bureaucratic, but more entrepreneurial and creative (Hudson, 2004). They are also said to be developing beyond the boundaries of a single organisational or occupational setting. Interestingly, many people are also likely to consider volunteering as a “career break.”

4. MOTIVE FULFILMENT & THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is coterminous with selfless acts of helping, but the best volunteering experiences are also fulfilling to the individual. Fulfilment depends largely on the extent to which we feel appreciated or acknowledged for our work. Most importantly, however, fulfilment depends on the extent to which we include self-interest in our volunteering decisions. It is therefore vital to identify the causes that we are passionate about. We should determine a good fit between our own goals and the organisation’s objectives, aiming for equilibrium where the personal motivations meet the institutional demands. In other words, when we choose the right activity for ourselves by performing some “suitability check” we can ensure greater commitment and length of volunteering. There are now opportunities that can fit any time commitment and charities are more responsive and adept at tailoring volunteer opportunities that fit our lifestyles.

If you normally work for a high-powered corporation, you may get impatient with the way things are done at a non-profit that you choose to volunteer for. This is a *fulfilment question*: you would want to do something meaningful, and if you enjoy it you will continue doing it. Again, “take charge” kind of people will not like stuffing envelopes or knocking on doors so a good match between the role and the individual is a key determinant of a successful and fulfilling volunteering experience. An important step is when it is the time to contact relevant organisations or people, for one’s first point of contact to be inspiring and encouraging. Finally, prospective volunteers should be prepared for a challenge – boredom and impatience with the process are the biggest threats to a fulfilling volunteering experience. One should expect personal growth. In out-of-country development work volunteering, the exposure to diversity and engagement with the “other” or the disadvantaged can make one’s stereotypes crumble and this can foster social integration and cross-cultural understanding in increasingly diverse societies.

Sheena Hudson’s study on New Zealand’s development workers in the VSA programme indicated that self-direction, challenge, adventure and personal resilience were dominant themes in the attitudes to career, motivations, and experiences of the VSA assignment (Hudson, 2004). Volunteering abroad can be challenging, but also exceptionally fulfilling as it entails greater lifestyle and career changes. VSA participants taking a career break experienced a short-term disruption to professional development in their original field, but said they experienced long-term benefits (foreign language proficiency, leadership abilities, teambuilding skills, confidence boost, and higher self-esteem) when they returned to work while graduate or student volunteers (e.g. those taking a gap year) did not regard having a “short-term delay” to their career or further studies as a trade-off. In fact, “in return” for delaying job or study applications, volunteers gain new skills and valuable hands-on experience that would improve their employability skills in the long run.

To determine what influences a fulfilling volunteering experience could also include looking at certain personal qualities. For example, having a pro-social personality would be a factor conducive to enjoy a rewarding experience of the voluntary service. Someone who volunteers due to social pressure or situational factors (e.g. “have been asked”) might expect a change of motivations or develop what some scholars call a weaker “volunteer role identity” (Penner, 2002). This will in turn affect the length of one’s volunteering service as well as a charity’s infrastructure and capacity to achieve its mission.

Volunteering for a charity organisation in a city like London can bring about a range of benefits. For instance, voluntary staff can learn about their organisation, its internal workings, organisational culture, and interpersonal interactions within. Employees’ attitude towards the organisation is very telling and can help people make more informed decisions about their career. One can also find out about the realities of working in a given field and gain valuable work experience by learning on the job and coming into contact with new, challenging situations. Attending internal meetings can provide a wider understanding of an organisation’s work while particularly valuable are any job shadowing schemes where volunteers can maximise their learning opportunities by shadowing a senior member of staff. Gaining insight into new issues can also help to explore one’s own undiscovered strengths. Eventually, such a volunteering scheme boosts an individual’s employability skills. Volunteering proves that one has shown a degree of commitment; it is good evidence for what employers often ask for –

initiative, teamwork, creativity, etc. Volunteering can thus be a “way in” – or a way of getting a foot in the door and moving up the ranks internally from an unpaid position.

What do former volunteers say about the benefits of their volunteering experience in the non-profit sector? The table below presents some interesting observations:

The different benefits, motivations, lessons learned as well as direct responses to what types of volunteering offer the most fulfilment

Having a parallel “social career” alongside regular employment or studies

“Flexible voluntary work offers the most fulfilment – the ability to work remotely alongside other commitments.”

[TVF’s voluntary HR assistant]

Recognition

“I felt more like a casual, accepted friend who did a few useful things, than an outsider around for a short term.”

[Anonymous volunteer from the *Casas de la Esperanza* building project in Nicaragua]

People skills

“Working for a non-profit community organisation gave me the best experience in social interaction and interpersonal skills.”

[Anonymous, from the article “Readers Respond: My Best/Worst Volunteer Experience Was...”]

Lessons learned

“I learned that ‘help’ does not mean immediate help. You can’t change the whole system or environment, but you can give hope.”

[Volunteer teaching assistant, Nicaragua]

Giving something back / Being with like-minded people

“I became involved [in volunteering] when my husband was in a motorcycle accident and was out of work and we needed help paying some bills. They (NFPO Children of Fallen Riders) came in and helped keep us afloat while we had no income coming in and since

then I have been there to help with any and everything.”

[Anonymous, from the article “Readers Respond: My Best/Worst Volunteer Experience Was...”]

Mutual benefits

“Volunteering aids my personal development as well as enables me to make a valuable contribution to the charity.”

[Volunteer office assistant]

“Envision [a charity engaging youth in social projects] has been more than just a volunteering opportunity – it brought together my interests and provided me with a unique opportunity to help make a difference.”

[Bruno, former Envision volunteer]

Long-term volunteering commitment

“I volunteered only for three months, so I don’t think my job had an impact in the local society. For a high degree of impact you should stay at least six months or longer.”

[German volunteer on the Voluntary Social Year programme]

Prompted to specify what type of volunteering is most rewarding, the volunteer replied:

“Definitely long-term and direct in the society (...) there are many large organizations but I think if you want to help directly in a community you should choose a small organization with a direct engagement in the community.”

Another German volunteer on the same programme concurred with this view and added:

“I should have stayed longer. Short-time volunteering doesn’t make sense if you work with kids or people! You need the time to get really in touch with the community – if every three months there is a change of volunteers, you can’t build strong relationships within the community.”

Volunteering after university – role matching the degree studied and a chance to enhance one’s CV file

“Volunteering has been a great opportunity to build upon my knowledge within

The interviews carried out to support research for this paper also revealed that out-of-country volunteering projects make their participants very likely to remain committed to support similar initiatives in the future. Here are some key highlights of the impact of a volunteering project in Nicaragua on its different participants:

Upon returning home, two German volunteers hosted a number of fundraising events to help the local organisation they have previously worked with. The collected donations went towards school supplies, building projects, and funds for dental care treatment. It is crucial to ensure regular check-ups and treatment in this particular area of health care because it is very limited, if not non-existent in Nicaragua. Two of the teaching assistants in the same intake were actually qualified teachers from California who wanted to spend their summer break volunteering in a rural school. They admitted that they have become more committed to their profession at the end of their placement. The opportunity to practise Spanish while teaching in Nicaragua later enabled them to better communicate with parents or guardians whose first language was not English during the parent-teacher conferences (they worked in a school district with a sizeable Latino population). A sizeable group of volunteers at the time comprised university graduates from the UK, who had volunteered with the same organisation, became inspired to pursue a qualification in teaching, a decision that allowed for their self-development and addressed the market demand for graduates in teaching. Finally, even those for whom volunteering in Nicaragua was just a “gap year experience” found it extremely rewarding and stimulating. Volunteers also reported that they have been frequently asked at job interviews whether they have ever volunteered and describing their experience proved an important factor in making a good impression at interview.

5. VOLUNTEERING FROM AN ORGANISATION’S PERSPECTIVE

When recruiting volunteers, non-profit organisations search for talent, enthusiasm, new ideas, creativity and commitment. Ideally, they would seek individuals with a good match between interest in the charity’s work, personal skills and availability. Any forms of skills-based volunteering are mutually beneficial to the individual volunteer as well as the charity. Volunteers can put their skills in to practice while also strengthening the infrastructure of the organisation. Apart from building and sustaining an organisation’s capacity to achieve its mission, volunteers may often run the charity entirely on their own.

The key benefit to an organisation is cost-effectiveness, but also a competitive advantage and improved performance, provided they can attract and retain a given number of volunteers (Skoglund, 2006). Volunteers are often asked to recommend friends, so the recruitment strategy may take a snowball effect. Social networks formed in voluntary circles are one recruitment catalyst. More people

learn about opportunities from family or friends who already volunteered. They may also receive information because of their ties to a church, congregation or other membership organisations. This social capital then serves as social inclusion mechanism making people more likely to volunteer (Anheier & Salamon, 1999). Organisations can thus benefit from networking the same way individual volunteers do.

Advertising and attraction strategies

Because the frequency and patterns of volunteering are never constant it is crucial to develop effective attraction and retention policies of volunteers. People need to remain both motivated and satisfied with the experience. Non-profit institutions should take into account the individual perceptions and feelings about the way volunteers are treated in the workplace. This is important in the context of organisations having to rely on continuity. Some charities may have a rotation system, in which board members, full-time staff, friends, business partners (or in case of volunteering in a developing country even some expat philanthropists who have settled in a particular locality) periodically take charge of the daily management and operations. Small organisations active in international development must also ensure they set a minimum number of volunteers to assist in the running and implementation of projects.

When recruiting for most of the volunteer roles, the charities' main interest is in people who can display enthusiasm, dedication, ideas and creativity. Volunteering opportunities are often worded so that the organisation appears to have a special interest in the person who reads the advert. It sometimes proves effective to make volunteer roles not resemble job descriptions, because more volunteers can feel encouraged to volunteer. Those who are in meaningful employment already may also want to feel that what they volunteer for is not something as formal and demanding as their job. Many volunteering opportunities that can be searched online are worded so as to present clear incentives to prospective volunteers. Examples include:

do-it.org.uk
vinspired.com
graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk
joininuk.org/get-involved

Below is an excerpt from an advert of Progressio for a volunteering placement in a developing country:

“Whether you feel you have a lot or little to share, you will definitely develop new skills through varied activities and working with local people, and contribute to lasting change. There will be plenty of opportunities to be creative and use your initiative. As you will be part of a diverse group, you will all have different skills, experiences and interests, which you can use as a team to have real impact.”

New Zealand's VSA programme opted instead for a more concise message, yet just as effective:

“Feel involved, be involved.”

Envision, an organisation that sought to attract youth workers and mentors to in turn inspire young people in the Olympic boroughs in London to take charge in their own community, advertised its opportunities as follows:

“Want to do something exciting and rewarding? Are you energetic and enthusiastic? Are you interested in working with young people? Do you want to make a positive difference? Do you want to be inspired?”

However, there are also volunteer posts that require many specific skills and qualifications. Those who volunteer in order to acquire the necessary skills and further exposure to the demands of working in a particular field will actually prefer the volunteering vacancies to resemble paid work opportunities. Examples of organisations that specialise in skills-based volunteering and require specific expertise include the Cranfield Trust and the Young Foundation. Cranfield Trust volunteers are often high-calibre managers who have completed an MBA degree or other postgraduate qualifications. The Young Foundation also targets volunteers among policy experts, senior civil servants, experienced researchers, ethnographers or prominent management consultants.

6. A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LEGACY OF THE LONDON OLYMPICS

Local initiatives like Envision, along with the success of the 2012 London Olympic Games inspired the widely publicised volunteering programme “Team London 2013”. The campaign has been endorsed by the Mayor of London and aims to make it quick and easy for Londoners to offer their time, find volunteering opportunities and do good things in their local community, creating anew the enthusiasm that accompanied the Olympics. The campaign’s focus is twofold and it relies on:

- (1) strengthening local community spirit, and
- (2) increasing opportunities for young people

The initiative was launched in early 2013 and it has already got people involved in many high-profile sporting and cultural events around the capital, including the recent UEFA Champions League final at Wembley. Apart from the amazing volunteering legacy of the 2012 Games, what served as another inspiration model is the example set by New York City Service. According to its chief officer Diahann Billings-Burford since the inception of NYC Service in 2009 the project engaged 4.8 million volunteers whose work has greatly improved city living in New York by addressing its most urgent needs.

Although the Mayor of London has highlighted the recruitment and management of volunteers to support the development of major sporting and cultural events in the capital, the campaign has already extended the range of opportunities to include categories such as “greening and cleaning”, “my community” and “training and skills”. It is understandable that volunteering at London events attracts more interest as it provides access to a great experience; yet it is important to note that those of us who have a good, positive first-time volunteering stint are more likely to volunteer again. Among the most popular opportunities is volunteering at primary and secondary schools. Team London ambassadors involved in school projects (e.g. mentoring) act as a catalyst for more volunteers in the future. Research has shown that engaging youth in volunteering increases their attendance and

academic attainment. In the long run, better grades may translate into prospects of getting into a good university or securing meaningful employment. There are also substantial long-term societal benefits of combining volunteering and grass-roots sports. Both ideas are recognised in the mayor's programme, i.e. volunteers can find relevant roles under the "mentoring and coaching" and "sports and healthy living" categories, respectively.

The mayor's campaign follows the successful example of New York City, is well-planned and has considerable potential to maximise volunteering initially across London, then possibly "spilling over" to inspire other areas in the UK. The official website's features allow current and prospective volunteers to set up email alerts and match the opportunities to their personal interests and availability. Registered users can also log the hours they volunteered and create an online CV, which is endorsed by the mayor. Expected outcomes for "Team London 2013" volunteers include new friendships, skills and memories, not to mention the significant boost to employability prospects. The project directly addresses the youth unemployment issue with a pledge to have at least 10 per cent of participants from the 18-25 years group (and not currently in employment) as Team London event volunteers. All of this makes Team London 2013 a remarkable and praiseworthy initiative about harnessing the time, skills and passion of Londoners to make real improvements to their local communities, and to London as a whole.

Taking the 2012 legacy beyond London

London 2012 raised the profile of volunteering in public discourse as well as in government and policy-making circles. The important question is whether the positive legacy of London 2012 is transferable and applicable in a wider UK context. As we all try to harness and cultivate the haphazard spirit of volunteering and all the enthusiasm created by the 2012 Summer Olympics, it is important to remember that there is a big difference between volunteering for a one-off event that will last a few weeks and providing public services in the long term. However, there are some indications that the Games have indeed improved the overall perceptions on volunteering nationwide. The government is currently supporting an initiative called National Citizen Service (NCS) – a voluntary national service (non-military) for 16 and 17-year-olds in England. First piloted in 2011, the programme has enabled young people to complete 700,000 hours of social action. Over 8,000 young people took part in NCS in the inaugural edition, while 26,000 participated in 2012. This year's scheme takes place in the summer and autumn and in both cases begins with a residential visit to an activity centre which coincides with school holidays. After this, volunteers create a social action project to raise awareness of a particular issue in their local community.

Another of the Olympics' legacy programmes is *Join In*. The initiative aims to encourage people to help out at sports clubs and community groups around the UK. The first step is for clubs and groups to host special community events. Since 2012, *Join In* delivered over 6,000 events across the UK, with over 300,000 people taking part. Both NCS and *Join In* highlight an overlooked effect of the Games, i.e. that they have decreased the perceived geographical mismatch between areas where charity services are most needed and places where resources are most available. The Games have transformed East London's most deprived communities and engaged many people in community service. Whether the programmes building on the enthusiasm of the Olympics are about supporting sports-related activities or some rather thorny social issues, it is important for them to be identified and delivered

locally. Only then will it be feasible to expect other deprived areas to undergo an impressive regeneration, such as the one that took place in Stratford and the surrounding boroughs.

Recommendations

In order to take the impact of the London Olympics across the country, the positive stories from the Games should be made available to a larger audience. This is already somewhat recognised as important. Team London 2013 website features blogs written by its ambassadors – the first two came from former Olympics volunteers who shared their positive experiences from before and explained their motivations for their continued involvement in the new initiative.

Such recognition certainly helps to maintain the enthusiasm and engagement of former volunteers who in turn become more likely to succeed in encouraging more new people into volunteering. Perhaps maintaining a database or other records of people who already volunteered in 2012 could help them carry the experiences back to their respective local communities and make things happen there. There is evidence that other UK regions are presently building on the momentum created by the Olympics. For instance, an independent charity Legacy Trust UK is leaving a lasting impact from London 2012 in communities by funding ideas and local talent to inspire creativity across the UK, particularly in the West Midlands, Yorkshire and the South West, whereas a press release from the Kent County Council from March 2013 illustrates other local initiatives that take place outside London. Two examples of creating a volunteering legacy in the county are The Kent Greeters and the Kent eVent Team. The latter is about recruiting volunteers for events and one-off sport, leisure and cultural activities across the county. Initiatives like this one are springing up nationwide and many local charities have truly been making the most of the Games far beyond the event itself.

The Games have also taught charities the importance of creating a value attached to their volunteering. For example, someone who is a Samaritans volunteer or a Scout leader has a certain value attached to their role and is not just recognised internally, but by the wider public. This points to the importance of “brand” – i.e. the sense of pride and engagement that volunteers feel when they are part of a prominent project. Charities should design volunteer roles with that in mind. To acknowledge individual input, organisations often provide official branded clothing (especially to those helping out during sporting and cultural events) while other charities create official email addresses for volunteers. These are simple measures, but they do make volunteers feel more valued.

Finally, attraction of new volunteers is one thing, but perhaps equally important is simply making it easier to get involved for those who are already “inspired”. What is needed here includes improving ways of finding and accessing information, e.g. creating an interesting, relevant and searchable content on websites or through social media, customisable email alerts, and so forth. Many websites feature a search box in the middle of the page, for example with the words “I want to volunteer for...” clearly visible and followed by a drop-down menu with more relevant choices and types of volunteering opportunities available.

CONCLUSION

Volunteering is not only about how satisfied we feel with having helped a charitable cause, but also how we have helped ourselves. Joanne Fritz, who has worked in the non-profit sector for most of her 30-year career, believes now is a very exciting time to be a volunteer. Charity organisations (and charitable causes) are in the public eye daily while interest in volunteering is at an all-time high. According to Fritz, nearly 63 million Americans volunteer every year and the worth of a volunteer's time has reached \$21.36 per hour. In the UK, the 2012 London Summer Olympics have begun the process of reversing the previous decline in volunteering. The results from the *Community Life Survey* commissioned by the Cabinet Office reveal that the Olympic Games had an enormous impact in changing the perception of volunteering across the UK, including policy-making authorities. Nick Hurd, the Minister for Civil Society, said in February 2013 that coinciding with the increased interest in volunteering sparked by the Games, the government has established a *Social Action Fund* and allocated more than £20 million to charities in order to help them recruit more volunteers. As many as 500,000 volunteers were expected to be recruited by autumn 2013. An additional £40 million is to be invested in other projects – the most promising initiatives that use social action to help solve some of the thorniest social issues.

According to the Pimlico Connection, a voluntary tutoring scheme for university students to engage in tutoring and mentoring in science-related subjects at primary and secondary schools, volunteering now contributes £4.8 billion to the UK GNP and is the fastest growing job sector, while an ICM Research survey from March 2013 reveals that an impressive 91 per cent of Londoners regard volunteering as an important part of bringing communities together and 86 per cent recognise that it provides essential skills for work. As much as 44 per cent of the population in England reports to have been involved in voluntary action in the past 12 months. The Olympics have clearly acted as a key catalyst for organisational capacity building. The challenge lying ahead now is to take the positive impact across the country.

Another reality is that more people want to progress their professional development and pursue their other interests alongside their regular, paid employment. If your “9 to 5” job is routine-based, you can express your creative potential working for a charity. Volunteering can run parallel to regular employment. As the demand for autonomy and jobs reflecting and accommodating pro-social values is growing, the availability of paid employment within the third sector is gradually increasing as well. For young people entering the job market, volunteering can already be a stepping stone to a career in the desired field. For older citizens, it posits a chance to stay active or revive a career. Whereas, for private and public sector employers, the voluntary sector has already turned into a “talent pool” from which they can recruit creative talent.

The rise of the voluntary sector suggests that increasing attention should now be paid to the adoption of its organisational structures, management practices and ways of thinking. Charities generate much more “social returns” relative to the resources invested when compared to public and private sectors, which are overly focused on goals that can be monetised. Many socio-economic problems that Britain faces today can be mitigated by nurturing people's altruism, generosity of time and spirit, and giving them a sense of agency to change the things they feel most strongly about.

However, the crucial preliminary steps to the above goals must include effective ways of managing volunteer motivations whose input allows the charities to thrive. People will commit more time if they perceive their time in an organisation as “more than just volunteering”, i.e. as fulfilment of personal expectations and goals. This is why it is important for organisations to:

- recognise and legitimise the importance and impact of volunteers
- design tasks that are motivating and roles that can be recognised as valuable both within the charity as well as externally and by a wider public
- make volunteers’ workload manageable
- pay attention to the organisational variables that might influence volunteering patterns, e.g. a volunteer’s motivations change over time, so charities must also remain flexible about their expectations
- provide opportunities for motive fulfilment in a timely manner
- respect and nurture volunteering for its true *voluntary* nature, not just the end product

Some of the above recommendations also apply to public sector employers. State authorities could facilitate the volunteering process indirectly by providing insurance or social welfare protection to volunteers as well as tax deductions for whoever supports non-profit organisations and voluntary initiatives. Public sector employees could also be granted special leave of absence if they want to undertake voluntary service. However, what is most crucial is for the non-profit sector to spread the best practice and continue to grow in significance as an employer and a source of meaningful career advice. Volunteering is increasingly seen as a popular route into a promising career, and the charity sector has a strong potential to be an exemplar in personnel practices, especially in employing and developing truly diverse talent. The UK Voluntary Sector Almanac figures illustrate the strong focus on inclusion, equality and diversity of workforce within the charity sector. It is a unique, complex and fascinating environment where new models for addressing global problems emerge at an increased pace. It has become a positive career option offering frontline roles where one can experience having real impact, satisfaction, prestige, and motivation fulfilment.

This report has frequently addressed the fulfilment question. Although a fulfilling volunteer experience remains difficult to define (because volunteer motivations are highly subjective and change over time), it is fair to say that fulfilment should always entail recognition for a volunteer’s input and enough opportunities to develop specific skills and employability potential. If we can satisfy our specific motivations, collect fantastic memories and make lasting friendships, the experience can become even more rewarding. At the same time, however, we should create better conditions for an overall fulfilment of organisational objectives and individual volunteer motivations. In the long run, such mutually supportive relationship between individuals and the institutions with which they volunteer can foster the development of a society of active citizens, widen participation, reduce social exclusion and tackle other pressing issues in society.

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