

The Unique Value of Volunteerism for RECIPIENTS OF SUPPORT

This study has attempted to address the gap in literature of the value of the service offered by volunteers that differ from paid workers and is based on a theoretical paper presented at the 2011 ARNOVA (Association for Research on Non-Profit Organizations and Voluntary Action - Indianapolis) Conference in Toronto (www.arnova.org).

SUMMARY

This study demonstrates that volunteerism can sometimes result in more positive perceptions, attitudes and reactions of clients.

Views of How Volunteers Differ From Paid Workers – within this study

- Volunteering is an act of free will with no expectations of monetary rewards
- Volunteering can represent a very different psychological approach to participation in an organization – identifying with the core values of the organization – are more driven by relational concerns
- Volunteers are perceived and evaluated different by the recipients of support (than paid workers)

Experiment of Actual Client Perceptions of Volunteers

The perceived motivations of people's actions are important predictors of how we evaluate these persons. We often pay close attention to whether others decide to help from the heart (affect) from the head (cost-benefit) or by the book (roles).

Findings

- Volunteer mentors are perceived to be more willing to do things that are not part of their tasks (altruism) than what people learn about a paid volunteer
- Volunteer mentors are perceived as being more sincere and more dedicated
- Paid volunteers/mentors were seen as fulfilling a role and/or because they are getting something in return
- Based on the perceptions of unpaid volunteers being more altruistic, their evaluations of the role of the volunteer and their attitudes toward the volunteer will be more positive
- Recipients are more grateful when receiving benefits from people who intentionally are willing to put in effort and costs (time) without their effort being determined by a role-based relationship with the beneficiary

- Volunteers might cause more positive affect in clients because of the client's perception of the volunteer as a 'trustworthy person' – trust equates with a sense that the recipient will not be taken advantage of by the other person (volunteer)
- It is perceived that when people invest emotionally in relationships, express genuine care and concern for the welfare of the other party and believe in the intrinsic value of such relationships - active foundations of trust are derived – e.g. the relationship is more stable and enduring
- When interpersonal care and concern are perceived as personally chosen rather than role described, this can be critical for the development of affect-based trust – VOLUNTEERS MIGHT BE MORE LIKELY THAN PAID PROFESSIONALS TO BUILD AFFECT-BASE TRUST IN CLIENTS (RECIPIENTS)
- Recipients perceive more affect-base trust with volunteer mentors than with paid volunteers (mentors)
- PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY PERCEIVED THEIR PAID MENTOR TO BE MORE COMPETENT THAN PARTICIPANTS WHO EXPERIENCED A VOLUNTEER MENTOR
- Recipients of volunteer mentorship might sometimes be more open to the influence of the volunteer compared to the paid volunteer as being a positive role model – the recipients with the volunteer mentor perceived their mentor to have a slightly higher influence than recipients with a paid volunteer.
- Clients are sometimes more willing to accept influence and are more likely to cooperate with volunteers compared to paid workers