



Volunteerism: Can It Provide Insights For Employee Selection?

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Abstract

A review of the social sciences literature suggests prospective employees involved in volunteer activities may have personal attributes desired by employers. For example, studies have found that when compared to nonvolunteers, volunteers are significantly more socially responsible, agreeable, extraverted, and emotionally stable. To examine this issue further, this study examined the relationship between volunteers and motivation, work ethic and company and job satisfaction. Results support hypothesized relationships between volunteerism and work ethic and between volunteerism and work motivation. These findings suggest that employers' inquiry regarding applicants' volunteer activities may provide insight into values, individual differences and behaviors desired by employers.

Keywords: Selection, Recruitment, Volunteerism, Volunteers; Work Ethic, Motivation

Review of Literature

Selection of appropriate new employees is a key to the success of any business. But exactly how does a manager identify the characteristics in the prospective employee that he or she needs in the organization? We have long known that past behavior is predictive of future behavior (i.e., Curen-ton, 1965). Human resource experts have thus argued that managers should inquire about past activities and behaviors, in search of desired behaviors for the current job.

One underutilized aspect of an employee's behavioral tendencies is his or her volunteer activities. The social science literature is rich with studies comparing behavior and attributes of volunteers to non-volunteers. Studies have found volunteers to be more socially responsible, agreeable, extraverted, and emotionally stable than are those who do not participate in volunteer activities. The current study examined many of those behaviors and attributes and extends the

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literature by examining if other behaviors and traits valued in organizations can be linked to volunteer activities. Specifically, this study empirically examined the relationship between volunteerism and employee motivation, work ethic, and company and job satisfaction.

Individual Differences and Volunteerism

Clary, Snyder and Stukas (1996) argued that an individual's traits and dispositions rather than situational factors, are the key motivators to volunteer. Omoto and Snyder (1995) agreed, arguing that some individuals are predisposed to engage in helping relationships, a predisposition that is characterized by empathy, nurturing and social responsibility. In their Conceptual Framework for the Volunteer Process, they suggested that volunteers are predisposed to helping others because of their personality attributes and their personal and social needs and motivations. Omoto and Snyder, however, also added a third contributing factor. They argued that the features of an individual's life circumstances, e.g., friends, family and coworkers, affect one's predispositions to help others.

One stream of research has resulted in a set of individual traits referred to as "the personality of the volunteer." The research, which focused on young adults, found that volunteers had higher levels of self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy (Allen & Rushton, 1983; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Pancer, Pratt & Hunsberger, 1998). The volunteers also had higher work aspirations and academic results (Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000; Kirkpatrick Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer & Snyder, 1998). According to Marta, Guglielmetta and Pozzi (2006), "Young adults involved in voluntary organizations also demonstrated a high propensity towards prosocial attitudes and behaviors, which, moreover, seem to be reinforced by their very involvement in volunteerism." (p. 224) Prosocial attitudes and volunteerism, then, appear to be closely linked.

In exploring prosocial attitudes, Penner, Fritzsche, Craiger and Freifeld (1995) derived a two-factor measurement of prosocial personality which they called the Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB). The first dimension measured by the battery is *other-oriented empathy* which is primarily concerned with empathy and feeling responsible for others. The second dimension, *helpfulness*, not surprisingly is associated with being helpful. Penner (2002) found a high correlation between other-oriented empathy and agreeableness as well as with nurturance. The helpfulness dimension was strongly correlated with dominance and assertiveness. Additional research using the PSB found other-oriented empathy and helpfulness to be correlated with time spent in volunteer efforts (Penner, 2002; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998) and with organizational citizenship behavior (Midili & Penner, 1995). Further, Midili and Penner (1995) found a significant relationship between other-oriented empathy and job satisfaction, perceived organizational justice and positive moods on the job.

Other studies in the social sciences literature have also linked specific individual differences to individuals who volunteer. For example, Brown-Liburd and Porco (2011) found a positive relationship between higher levels of volunteerism and higher stages of cognitive moral development. In a study of Big Brothers-Big Sisters volunteers, Spitz and MacKinnon (1993) found that those who completed the training program and met their commitment to the program scored higher on intelligence, trust, imagination and self-assurance than those who did not complete the training program. Hackett and Omoto (2010) found a correlation between those who volunteered with social and political activities and those who view human beings as fundamentally similar and equal. Gomà-i-Freixanet (1995) reported that people who help others may be more emotionally stable and have more positive mood states.

In addition, numerous studies have found volunteers to be more extraverted (i.e., Camí, Llorente, Farré, Bandenas & Ugena, 1989; Elshaug & Metzger, 2001; Mitchell & Shuff, 1995; Myers & McCaulley, 1985). Omoto, Snyder and Hackett (2010) found AIDS activism to be

positively correlated with extraversion, emotional stability and agreeableness. They also found that other-focused motivations predicted AIDS activism. Based on their research they argued, "...it is through their volunteerism that people learn more about social issues, interact with politically and socially engaged individuals, and develop skills and perspectives that increase their willingness to take on additional tasks for their organization and in other contexts as well" (Omoto, et al., 2010 p. 1726). Additional research has suggested that the same motivational framework that leads young adults to volunteer also lead to the competence and self growth necessary for entering the job market (Capanna, Steca & Imbimbo, 2002; Omoto, Snyder & Martino, 2000).

These studies, largely reported in journals outside the management arena, have strongly suggested that volunteerism is closely related to a manifestation of traits desired in employees in the workplace. That information could be useful for companies reluctant to administer individual difference and personality tests to prospective new hires. The cited studies suggest the potential value of including past and current volunteer efforts as a dimension to consider in the selection of new employees.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

In today's "do more with less" environment, employers struggle with how to motivate employees who are solely motivated by extrinsic rewards (pay, fringe benefits, bonuses, etc.). The employee who is motivated by intrinsic rewards (a job well done, challenges, etc.) is a valued commodity. But without administering a pencil and paper test, determining whether a prospective employee is extrinsically or intrinsically motivated can be challenging. In a study using the Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB), Finkelstein (2009) found that other-oriented empathy and helpfulness were correlated with intrinsic motivation and with other-focused motives for volunteering (Finkelstein, 2009). Based on this research, we offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Employees who report higher levels of volunteerism will be significantly more motivated by intrinsic factors than will employees who volunteer less.

Hypothesis 1b: Employees who report lower levels of volunteerism will be significantly more motivated by extrinsic factors than will employees who volunteer more.

Work Ethic

In their study of volunteers, Elshaug and Metzger (2001) found that those who volunteered were "more easy going, more active, more energetic and better able to concentrate on the task at hand" than were those who did not volunteer. Given the assumption that volunteers are more intrinsically motivated and Elshaug and Metzger's finding that volunteers are also more energetic and able to concentrate on the task at hand, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Employees who report higher levels of volunteerism will report significantly higher levels of work ethic than will employees who volunteer less. Specifically:

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Hypothesis 2a: Employees who report higher levels of volunteerism will score significantly higher on the work ethic dimension of Pride in Craftsmanship than will those who volunteer less.

Hypothesis 2b: Employees who report higher levels of volunteerism will score significantly higher on the work ethic dimension of Moral Importance of Work than will those who volunteer less.

Company and Job Satisfaction

Based on the literature, the relationship between volunteerism and job satisfaction is unclear. A longitudinal study by Staw, Bell and Clausen (1986) suggests that job satisfaction is, to some degree, a dispositional trait related to individual differences. Similarly, Arvey, Bouchard, Segal, and Abraham (1989) found that 30% of the observed difference in general job satisfaction was due to individual differences. Thus individual dispositions seem to play a role in job satisfaction. The question remains: Can volunteerism be used to identify those individual differences?

Research has shown significant relationships between volunteerism and individuals' attitudes of trust, acceptance (Spitz & MacKinnon, 1993) and agreeableness (Elshaug & Metzger, 2001). Further, those who volunteer are more likely to be emotionally stable and to experience positive mood states and prosocial behaviors that have been associated with low levels of anxiety and depression (Gomà-i-Freixanet, 1995; O'Connor & Cuevas, 1982).

Though not specifically tested, the above mentioned behaviors and emotional states closely fit the descriptors of positive affectivity (PA). PA reflects an individual's propensity to experience positive emotional states such as cheerfulness, confidence and enthusiasm. In contrast, negative affectivity (NA) reflects the tendency to experience negative emotional states such as anger, fear, insecurity, guilt, and sadness (Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999). Studies have consistently revealed relationships between job satisfaction and positive and negative affectivity (see Brief, 1998; Spector, 1997; Watson, 2000). In a recent meta-analysis Connolly and Viswesvaran (2000) found correlations (corrected for unreliability) between PA and NA and job satisfaction of .49 and .33, respectively.

Based on the similarity of PA and behaviors that have been shown to be linked to volunteerism, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3a: Individuals who report higher levels of volunteerism will report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b: Individuals who report higher levels of volunteerism will report significantly higher levels of company satisfaction.

Methodology

The questionnaire used for this study included items measuring various aspects related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, company and job satisfaction and work ethic. Work ethic

questions were developed and used in a 1974 study by Cherrington and his colleagues (Cherrington, 1976; Cherrington, Condie, Crawford, England, & Wright, 1975; Cherrington, Condie & England, 1979).

Sampling Criterion and Data Collection

To achieve a sample that represented a diversity of geographic regions and industries, a group of distance learners enrolled in MBA and Executive MBA programs at a major university in the Southeastern United States was used. This group of participants was chosen because the vast majority of them were employed fulltime and represented various industries across the United States.

The initial sample size was 450 MBA students. To enlarge the sample, each student was mailed ten surveys, asking the participant to complete one and give the remaining nine to friends, acquaintances, neighbors, relatives, customers, etc. The only requirement was that the respondents held full-time jobs. Instructions and the researchers' e-mail addresses and phone numbers were included. Postage-paid, pre-addressed return envelopes were provided with each questionnaire for individual mailing.

We acknowledged from the beginning that this two-stage method of distributing surveys would result in a lower response rate. Some MBA students might not only fail to return their survey, but might also choose not to distribute the other nine surveys. Individuals receiving the other surveys might also choose not to respond, particularly since they had no connection to the researchers. Participation was completely voluntary, and no incentives were offered for completing the survey. As expected the response rate was lower than for many studies utilizing questionnaires. Within a four-week period, 362 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 8%. After review of each questionnaire for relevant missing data, 27 were eliminated, resulting in a final sample size of 335.

Sample Demographics

Respondents represented a wide diversity of professions. The largest percentage of respondents worked in manufacturing (35%), with heavy representation from government and military employees (24%).

The majority of respondents (70%) were from the Southeastern region of the United States; 87% were white and 8% were African-American. The average age was 39 years. This was a well-educated group, with 92% having attended college, 3% technical school, and 4% high school. Almost half of the participants reported holding a non-supervisory position (44%), while the remainder held first-line management (19%), mid-management (27%), and upper management (10%) positions.

Research Constructs and Items of Interest

Volunteerism. Volunteerism was measured using two questions on the questionnaire. First, respondents were asked to respond to the following statement: "I gladly volunteer my time to charitable and/or civic organizations that benefit my community." Respondents answered on a 1-7 Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The second question asked

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respondents to indicate how many hours in the past three months that they had volunteered to charitable and/or civic activities that benefit the community. Response categories included 0-15 hours; 16-30 hours, 31-45 hours and 46 or more.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were measured using six and three questions (respectively). The questions were measured with a ten-point Likert scale (1=extremely desirable, 10=extremely undesirable). To measure intrinsic motivation, respondents were asked to relate the desirability of items such as “Feeling more worthwhile.” Extrinsic motivation was similarly measured but using items such as “Getting more money or a larger pay increase.” Factor analysis was performed on the scales used to measure employee motivation. The three items used to measure extrinsic motivation loaded on one factor. The five items used to measure intrinsic motivation loaded on another factor. Coefficient alphas were calculated for the measures. Intrinsic motivation had a Coefficient alpha of .87 and extrinsic motivation 0.70.

Work Ethic. Work ethic was measured with scales used by Cherrington and his colleagues (Cherrington, 1976; Cherrington, et al., 1975; Cherrington, et al., 1979). Their work was based on previous surveys by Wollack, Goodale, Wijting and Smith (1971) and Blood (1969). The items were factor analyzed to examine the factor structure and to assure the items loaded onto separate factors measuring separate constructs. Two primary scales were confirmed: Pride in Craftsmanship and Moral Importance of Work. Pride in Craftsmanship was comprised of six items examining how individuals feel about doing a “good job” (e.g., “Getting recognition for my work is important to me” and “A worker should do a decent job whether or not his supervisor is around”). The Moral Importance of Work variable was comprised of five items dealing with the perceived moral value of working and of performing a good job (e.g., “Working hard makes a man a better person”).

The items in each scale were averaged to form a scale score for the factor. Coefficient alphas were also calculated. The Coefficient alpha for Pride in Craftsmanship was acceptable at 0.71. The coefficient alpha for the Moral Importance of Work was unacceptable at 0.4.

Job Satisfaction. To measure job satisfaction, respondents were asked to rate how they feel at work most of the time. Responses were on a continuum anchored by eight pairs of descriptors such as “Appreciated/Unappreciated” and “Valuable/Worthless.” To measure company satisfaction, respondents were asked to respond to ten statements on a 1-7 Likert scale. Sample statements included, “Considering everything about the company, I’m very satisfied with it,” and “I have a lot of confidence in the business judgment of top management.”

Results

To assess the participants’ level of volunteerism, two questions were asked. The first question stated, “I gladly volunteer my time to charitable and/ or civic organizations that benefit my community.” Regression analysis was used to determine if a relationship existed between employee motivation, work ethic, and company and job satisfaction. No departures from normality were detected, except for job satisfaction. As a result, a separate ordinal logistic regression was conducted to analyze the relationship between volunteerism and job satisfaction.

The second measure of volunteerism was the number of hours a respondent reported volunteering to charitable and/or civic activities within the past three months. Respondents

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could have coded their answer in the following four categories: 0-15 hours, 16-30 hours, 31-45 hours, and more than 45 hours. After preliminary analysis, a lack of variance among the answers given by respondents was found. As a result, the four categories were collapsed into two categories: 0-15 hours and greater than 15 hours.

Binary logistic regression was used to determine if a relationship existed between employees' level of volunteerism within the past three months and their motivation, work ethic, and company and job satisfaction. The only significant relationship found through this analysis was between volunteer hours and moral importance of work ($\beta = -.48$, $p < 0.005$).

Table 1
Results of Regression Analysis

Variables	I gladly volunteer my time...		Hours volunteered in past 3 months	
	Coefficient	s.e.	Coefficient	s.e.
Intrinsic Motivation	.376 ***	.105	-.122	.143
Extrinsic Motivation	.159#	.085	-.172	.116
Pride in Craftsmanship	-.403***	.123	-.001	.170
Moral Importance of Work	-.182#	.105	-.480***	.151
Satisfaction with Job	-.108	.111	.048	.152
Satisfaction with Company	-.124	.082	-.110	.115

Notes. # $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 1 states employees who report higher levels of interest in volunteerism will be significantly more motivated by intrinsic factors than will employees who volunteer less. Regression results indicate a significant relationship ($\beta = .376$, $p < 0.001$) does exist between employees' intrinsic motivation and their willingness to volunteer time to charitable and/or civic organizations that benefit their community. This finding was confirmed by an ordinal logistic regression analysis.

Hypothesis 1B states employees who report lower levels of volunteerism will be significantly more motivated by extrinsic factors than will employees who volunteer more. The regression analysis indicates a marginally significant negative relationship exists ($\beta = .159$, $p < 0.055$) between extrinsic factors and employees' willingness to volunteer time to charitable and/or civic organizations that benefit their community. That finding was supported by ordinal logistic regression.

Hypothesis 2 states that employees who report higher levels of volunteerism will report significantly higher levels of work ethic than will employees who volunteer less. Specifically, Hypothesis 2A posits employees who report higher levels of volunteerism will score significantly higher on the work ethic dimension of Pride in Craftsmanship than will those who volunteer less. Results of the regression analysis indicate Pride in Craftsmanship has a significant relationship ($\beta = -.403$, $p < 0.004$) to an employees' willingness to volunteer time to

charitable and/or civic organizations. Those findings were supported by ordinal logistic regression analysis.

Hypothesis 2B states employees who report higher levels of volunteerism will score significantly higher on the work ethic dimension of Moral Importance of Work than will those who volunteer less. The regression analysis indicates a marginally significant relationship ($\beta = -.182$, $p < 0.08$) exists between Moral Importance of Work and an employee's willingness to volunteer time to charitable and/or civic organizations. These findings were supported by ordinal logistic regression. As noted earlier, binary logistic regression was used to analyze the relationship between Moral Importance of Work and past volunteer hours. Using the binary logistic regression, findings indicate a significant relationship ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .005$). One should remember, however, the Moral Importance of Work scale had an unacceptably low coefficient alpha, raising concern about the results of the Hypothesis 2B finding.

Hypothesis 3A states individuals who report higher levels of volunteerism will report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction. Due to a lack of normality, a regression analysis was not performed. An ordinal logistic regression analysis indicates a significant relationship does not exist between job satisfaction and employee volunteerism. Hypothesis 3A was not supported.

Hypothesis 3B posits individuals who report higher levels of volunteerism will report significantly higher levels of company satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis indicate a significant relationship does not exist between company satisfaction and an employee's willingness to volunteer time to charitable and/or civic. Support was not found for Hypothesis 3B.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that examining an applicant's volunteer activities may provide valuable insight into his or her work behaviors and attitudes, both of which can sometimes be difficult to assess. These results suggest a positive relationship between volunteer activities and work ethic and work motivation.

Some researchers suggest there is a "constellation of traits" that characterize a volunteer's disposition (Elshaug & Metzger, 2001). It does appear, at least, that individuals with certain traits and behaviors seem to self-select volunteer activities. Many of those traits, such as those examined here, are desirable in the workplace. Other researchers have found volunteers to be more adventurous and less risk averse (Gomà-i-Freixanet, 1995). Those traits, too, can be advantageous in many work environments.

In addition to work attitudes and behaviors, volunteers often gain experience from volunteer activities that is further beneficial in the workplace. Volunteers often develop organizational and administrative skills and are often more adept at organizing meetings (Wilson & Musick, 1999). Also volunteers frequently develop an outside network of contacts that can directly or indirectly benefit the organization (Stukas, Worth, Clary & Snyder, 2009). In addition, volunteerism has been found to be associated with a higher level of trust (Brown, 1999). Volunteerism has been found to be associated with both mental and physical health. Those findings may be because individuals who volunteer develop stronger networks that buffer stress and reduce risk for disease. Finally, volunteerism may also help individuals feel they can make a difference and thus enhance personal efficacy and a sense of control over one's life (Wilson & Musick, 1999).

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They concluded, “The research on the effects of volunteering leaves little doubt that there are individual benefits to be derived from doing volunteer work that reach far beyond the volunteer act itself and may linger long after the volunteer role is relinquished” (Wilson & Musick, 1999 p.167).

The above research as well as the findings of this current study would strongly suggest that individuals who do volunteer work have characteristics and a pride in their work that employers would value. Looking at an applicant’s current and previous volunteer efforts may provide valuable insight for prospective employers.

Limitations

This study suffers from three primary weaknesses. First, the sample, though differentiated by city, company, work experience, and education, was a convenience sample. Second, and more problematic, is the somewhat weak nature of the volunteerism measure. The construct was measured using only two items. The first asked subjects to respond to the question, “I gladly volunteer my time to charitable and/or civic organizations that benefit my community.” The second question asked respondents to indicate how many hours in the past three months that they had volunteered to charitable and/or civic activities that benefit the community. Response categories (0-15 hours; 16-30 hours, 31-45 hours and 46 or more) did not allow enough differentiation of responses at the lower level, and ultimately the scale had to be collapsed into a dichotomous scale.

The third limitation is the issue of common method variance. Given the broad-based nature of the study, in terms of having respondents across the country, the limitation was deemed necessary to begin to explore the issue with a national group of respondents.

Future Research

This study just begins to examine the value of considering an applicant’s volunteer activities in the selection process. The results of this study as well as the results of previously cited studies suggest that in identifying volunteers, organizations can identify individuals likely to possess a constellation of desirable traits and behaviors. Clearly this idea needs to be further examined. Stronger measures of volunteerism need to be used, and the problems of common source variance need to be considered further.

Despite the limitations of this study, it does suggest the potential value of considering the applicant’s volunteer activities as a part of the selection process. With additional confirmation of its value, a review of applicants’ volunteer activities may well be worth consideration as a selection tool.

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