VOLUNTEER MOTIVES AND SATISFACTION WITH MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Retention of volunteers has been identified as a significant organizational challenge for community sport organizations. However, we know little about the reasons volunteers stay with an organization or decide to leave, and if these decisions relate to the way volunteers are managed. Previous research efforts focused on volunteer management suggest that identifying effective management practices is an area in need of further investigation, particularly in light of increased pressure of professionalism, managerialism and accountability (Hager & Brudney, 2004; Lewis, 1993; Nichols & King, 1998; Nichols et al. 2003; Russell & Scott, 1997). Current volunteer management frameworks endorsed or developed by governments in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom including the Volunteer Involvement Program, Volunteer Management Program and the Club/Association Management Program (Australian Sports Commission); Volunteer Investment Program (Sport England); and the Running Sport Program (Sport and Recreation New Zealand) promote the use of human resource management (HRM) concepts, which are "modelled on work organisations" (ASC, 2000, p. 10). These frameworks focus on the use of a system of planning, recruitment, selection, orientation, training and recognition practices in the management of volunteers. While these practices are generally accepted by the CSOs within these jurisdictions, there has been very little research into the efficacy of such frameworks in volunteer retention. It is not known if such management practices have unintended consequences for volunteer motivation and retention, particularly by changing the experience from a leisure time activity to a more work like role.

METHODS

In this study, 402 community sport volunteers were surveyed about their motivations to volunteer, perceived satisfaction with volunteer management practices and intention to remain as volunteers. We explored these issues within community rugby union clubs throughout Australia through an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant with the Australian Rugby Union. The context for this research is particularly relevant given the significant organizational change and rapid professionalization that has occurred in the sport of rugby union in the past decade. Community rugby clubs are predominately governed by voluntary committees or boards which, in turn, utilize volunteer coaches, team managers, officials and other general volunteers to deliver services to their members. As Nichols et al. (2005) assert, changes in the external environment in which community rugby clubs operate have significant implications for volunteer management. A self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect data regarding volunteer involvement, motivation to volunteer, views about satisfaction with volunteer management practices, intention to continue volunteering as well as selected demographic characteristics. A 16-item scale was developed to measure volunteer motives based on the 20-item scale developed by Wang (2004). The respondents were also asked to rate their level of satisfaction with seven statements that broadly reflected seven common volunteer management practices cited in the literature and were also asked about their intentions and timing of their plans to stay with their CSO. Data analysis procedures included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS

The results of this study demonstrate that volunteers whose motives were primarily altruistic would be more likely to remain volunteering with their CSO rather than volunteers who were motivated more for instrumental or personal reasons. The results of the study also provide strong support for the previously untested assumptions that HRM practices have an impact on volunteer retention (Hager & Brudney, 2004). Volunteers perceived club recruitment practices, orientation systems and how clubs went about replacing them as relatively unimportant compared to the extent to which their club cared about their performance as a volunteer, recognised the efforts of individuals, provided support to them and clarified their roles and responsibilities. Volunteers who were more satisfied with the extent to which their role was made clear to them and the extent to which their club recognised their work were more likely to continue volunteering for their club.

DISCUSSION

The results provide support for the argument made by Wang (2004) that volunteer motives are multi-dimensional. As such this study extends our understanding of the motives of long term volunteers within CSOs, specifically that they can be conceptualised in four dimensions: altruistic value, personal development, community concern, and social adjustment. This study has increased our understanding of the motives and behavioural intentions of longer term sport volunteers outside the context of major sport events. The study also highlighted that some of the HRM practices utilised in traditional work settings such as demonstrating appreciation and communicating roles to volunteers as argued by Phillips, Little and Goodine (2002) have a role to play in the effective management of volunteers within CSOs. This in turn is likely to influence the capacity of CSOs to retain volunteers through the application of widely utilized HRM practices. The implications of these results and limitations are discussed in the paper.

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