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Motivations, job characteristics, satisfaction, and likelihood of future service in sport event volunteers: Insights from the European Football Championship 2008

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Background

The sport sector relies heavily on volunteers in the majority of countries in the European Union (European Commission, 2010). The involvement of volunteers has always been essential to sports organizations at the local and community level. Large scale sport events are becoming increasingly dependent on volunteers, too. However, there is little research on what actually causes sport event volunteers' satisfaction and retention and sport event management is only sporadically using social sciences' insights in volunteers' motivation and the design of voluntary work. Studies on volunteers at large sport events and at a longer-term community level use custom questionnaires, qualitative measures or exploratory and data-driven approaches. In the field of traditional volunteering the *functional approach* has gained wide acceptance in assessing volunteer's motivation, proposing that volunteering serves different functions for different people. Clary et al. (1998) developed a robust instrument to measure volunteers' motivations, the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). A six factor model of the VFI has been validated and the reliability of the VFI has been proven among several samples of long-term volunteers. Relatively few studies have examined which job characteristics and organizational features are particularly relevant to volunteer outcomes, although evidence suggests that job characteristics are related to volunteers' autonomous motivation, satisfaction and performance (Millette & Gagné, 2008). In paid work settings the *job characteristics model* by Hackman and Oldham (1975) is broadly used as a motivational model of work design stating that work's motivational potential is based on autonomy, skill variety, task significance, feedback, and task identity. Dailey (1986) found autonomy and feedback to be strong predictors of organizational commitment in a sample of fundraising volunteers. In a sample of traditional volunteers Güntert and Wehner (2010) have identified task significance and feedback to be success factors among the job characteristics.

Objectives

In our study we address two main questions: (1) Motivation: Why do people volunteer for mega sports events? Are their motivations similar to that of long-term volunteers? And (2) job characteristics: Is event volunteering "good work"? Do job characteristics affect outcomes as satisfaction and intention to volunteer at a similar event?

Methods

In a longitudinal field study a sample of 869 unpaid volunteers of the 2008 UEFA European Football Championship (47% female, 53% male; mean age = 43.37) completed measures of

motivation (using an extended version of the VFI), job characteristics (using the JDS by Hackman & Oldham), organizational features, satisfaction, and intention to continue, assessed at three points in time (before, during, and after volunteering).

Of 869 volunteers 667 volunteers (77%) answered the second questionnaire. Of these 667 volunteers 275 (41%) answered the third questionnaire, too. Further statistical analysis suggests that differences between the final sample and its full sampling frame are isolated and unpatterned. The structure of event volunteers' motivation is analyzed applying CFA. The impact of job characteristics and organizational features on satisfaction and likelihood of future service is examined by regression analyzes.

Results

Results showed that the functional approach of volunteer motivation can be applied to sport event volunteers and should be extended by two new functions, citizenship and excitement. We found the excitement, citizenship, values, and understanding function to be most important in sport event volunteers. Compared to traditional volunteers, the values and social function seem to be less important in sport event volunteers. Furthermore, we found younger volunteers to be more likely to be motivated by career-, understanding-, and excitement-related aspects, older volunteers by citizenship-related aspects of the event.

Conducting regression analyses, critical factors of event volunteers' satisfaction and retention can be specified. Event volunteers' satisfaction depends on job characteristics, appreciation and professional and social support. Among the job characteristics skill variety and task significance are the strongest predictors of volunteers' satisfaction. Satisfaction has a significant effect on the intention to volunteer at a similar event in the future, even beyond volunteers' initial intention.

Compared to traditional volunteering and paid work, volunteers' work at the 2008 UEFA European Football Championship seems to have less motivational potential; yet differences between different jobs and fields of activity are significant.

Conclusion

The study has two major implications for sport management:

- (1) To achieve quantitative and qualitative goals of recruitment, sport event volunteer managers have to promote those aspects of their event that are functional to the motives of potential volunteers. Sets of predominant motives in certain groups of volunteers can be specified.
- (2) Besides the *why* the *what* does matter in sport event volunteering. Job characteristics and organizational features affect volunteers' satisfaction and intention to continue. Event volunteering managers can enhance volunteers' satisfaction by designing tasks and activities that have a high motivational potential and that provide recognition by the employer and colleagues as well as professional and social support. These kind of volunteer activities are likely to result in a higher intention to continue the engagement at a similar event.