



A process model of volunteer motivation

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ABSTRACT

Traditional HR functions of recruitment, selection, training/development, and retention must be adapted when managing a volunteer workforce. While much research has focused on what motivates people to volunteer, very little has focused on the process of volunteer motivation. In this paper, we move beyond the traditional content-based approaches to explain how people decide whether to volunteer, how much effort to expend, and then whether to continue volunteering over time. Our model, based on image theory, provides new insights into volunteer decision making and behavior.

Volunteer motivation matters for both for-profit and nonprofit organizations because volunteers make a significant contribution to society and organizations alike (CNCS, n.d., 2017). There are many similarities and several essential differences between employees and volunteers. The basic human resource management goals remain intact for both categories of workers: recruit, select, train, and retain. But, the way in which these goals and processes are enacted are vastly different. Volunteers require different recruitment strategies, performance management processes, recognition programs, and screening criteria to name a few. Understanding volunteer motivation is imperative as it directly and indirectly affects many other organizational or human resource domains (e.g., employee motivation, organizational culture, structure, and reputation). Most previous research on volunteer motivation takes a more content-oriented focus (Harrison, 1995). That is, it explains *what* motivates individuals to volunteer. In contrast, we propose a more process-oriented focus that explains *how* individuals become motivated to volunteer. Process theories explain how individuals select behavioral actions in order to meet their needs and determine the success of their choices (Campbell & Pritchard, 1976). We draw upon image theory, affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), and event system theory (EST) (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015) to explain how volunteers: (1) decide whether to volunteer or not, (2) choose from among volunteering options, (3) decide how much effort to expend, and (4) decide whether to continue volunteering over time or not.

As more and more companies add civic engagement as elements or extensions of the workplace (Rodell, 2013), volunteer motivation needs to be examined in relation to both for-profit and nonprofit human capital. Thus, we provide insight for human resource (HR) scholars and professionals by explaining the different mechanisms and decision-making criteria volunteers use to determine when, how, and why to volunteer.

We provide a more comprehensive and useful model for researchers who study volunteers and for HR practitioners who manage volunteers. What causes individuals to consider volunteering (i.e., energizing and arousal), how do they choose where (i.e., what type of nonprofit such as a homeless shelter) to volunteer (i.e., direction), how much effort do they expend, and what causes them to continue volunteering (i.e., persistence) are imperative questions to answer. Volunteer motivation, like work motivation, is the

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psychological processes that direct, energize, and maintain action toward a job, task, role, or project (Campbell & Pritchard, 1976; Grant & Shin, 2011). The job, task, role, or project may differ based on volunteer setting or based on the individual volunteers.

Some people may choose to volunteer as a result of a significant event in their lives. For example, when a natural disaster occurs, many people are energized and directed to volunteer in local nonprofit organizations participating in the recovery. In contrast, other people may choose to volunteer when they reach a stage in life, such as retirement, when it is both meaningful and they have time to devote to the endeavor. Volunteering may involve short and intense efforts, such as helping organizations during a disaster recovery, or it may be more long-term, such as when a retiree has a continuing role as a docent at a museum, or it may occur virtually, as when people raise funds for a cause using social media. Some people may volunteer in addition to paid employment, whereas others may volunteer in lieu of holding paid employment. And, intriguingly, some may outsource their volunteering by funding others to do jobs, tasks, roles, or projects. The landscape of volunteering is vast and varied. Gaining a better understanding about how people make volunteer decisions will advance both theory and practice.

This article begins by defining the concept of volunteering and providing an overview of volunteer motivation research from the nonprofit and corporate/human resource perspectives. Then, we present a model that examines and explains volunteer motivation through a multi-stage process that addresses the initiation and choice of whether to volunteer, where to volunteer, how much effort to expend, and whether to continue volunteering. Last, we provide implications for this model and discuss future research. In the next section, we describe volunteering and who participates.

1. Volunteering: what is it and who does it?

After meeting the Director of Love Without Boundaries, a nonprofit that helps orphans who do not meet criteria for adoption because of their deformity (cleft lips and palates), Dr. John Ness, a plastic surgeon, realized that he could help these kids meet the criteria for adoption. He noted, "Working 12-14 hours a day on 'vacation' to repair the broken smiles of orphaned infants so that they can have a new chance to be joined with a forever family... is the most profoundly humbling experience I have ever known." (Cargas, n.d.)

What makes individuals like Dr. Ness sacrifice their time for others? How does an individual decide where to volunteer? How much effort will a volunteer expend? What ensures that individuals continue to volunteer? These are the questions that intrigue academic researchers and haunt nonprofit practitioners. This paper examines the central component of these questions—volunteer motivation. Motivation factors are crucial to unraveling the complexities of volunteer recruitment and retention, to improving nonprofit service provision, and, increasingly, to assist for-profit organizations in supporting their employees, their organizational reputations, and improving their own efficiency and bottom lines through popular corporate or employee sponsored volunteer efforts.

Definitions of volunteering vary throughout the literature, but most focus on volunteering as a prosocial, unpaid activity providing service to individuals, groups, or the community, usually done through a formal organization (Geiser, Okun, & Grano, 2014; Lee, Alexander, & Kim, 2013; Lindemeier & Dietrich, 2011). The U.S. Department of Labor, as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), defines volunteers as those who provide service to religious, charitable, or other nonprofit organizations without expectation of compensation and without coercion or intimidation (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.; Nonprofit Risk Management Center, 2020). Others define volunteering similarly by focusing on the non-coercive nature, without expectations of payment or benefits, conducted through or on behalf of a formal organization and with the intention of improving society beyond their personal or family needs (Smith & Stebbins, 2016).

Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996) describe the definition of volunteering as focusing on 4 dimensions, those of choice, rewards, structure, and beneficiaries. Volunteers either have free will (e.g., are searching for opportunities) in a volunteer decision, are relatively uncoerced (e.g., are asked personally or recruited), or have an obligation to participate (e.g., for a class grade, or part of an organization that requires community service). Rewards for those participating in volunteer service are generally grouped in four categories: (1) no reward (altruism), (2) reimbursement of expenses, (3) monetary stipends, and (4) occupational or academic rewards such as job salary, internships/graduation requirements, course/assignment grades (Cnaan et al., 1996; Hodgkinson, 1995; McBride, Gonzales, Morrow-Howell, & McCrary, 2011; Rogers, Miller, Flinchbaugh, Giddarie, & Barker, 2021). They may either volunteer for a formal organization (e.g., Meals on Wheels) or volunteer informally (e.g., carrying in groceries for an elderly neighbor or mowing the lawn for a recent widower). The primary beneficiaries of the acts may be strangers, friends or family, or it can also benefit the individuals themselves (e.g., building a neighborhood park that benefits the volunteers' children).

We take a more expansive approach to the definition of volunteering, more in line with what nonprofit organizations consider volunteers (i.e., non-paid staff). As such, our definition of volunteers includes all the aforementioned groups, regardless of the motive (e.g., altruism) or situation (e.g., court-mandated requirements).

2. Societal impacts of volunteering

Attracting, motivating, and retaining volunteers is a time consuming and, at times, costly endeavor for both volunteers and the organizations that utilize them (Rehnborg, 2015; Snyder & Omoto, 2008). While there are many similarities to human resource management (structure, training, motivation, oversight, legal responsibilities, to name a few), there are just as many differences as well (how to motivate without paying a salary, increased turnover, youth (minor) and senior (retired) volunteers, group volunteers, court-mandated volunteers, etc.). Volunteering is not just a feel-good activity, it has a significant impact on the American (and worldwide) economy. According to the independent federal agency, Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), one third of

American adults volunteered in 2017 (CNCS, n.d.). Overall, more than 77 million individuals contributed nearly 7 billion hours of volunteer service worth an estimated \$167 billion dollars (CNCS, n.d., 2017).

The causes with the most volunteer participation were religious organizations (32%), sports/hobby/culture & arts (25.7%) and educational or youth organizations (19.2%) (CNCS, 2017). Demographic volunteer statistics show that women volunteer more often than men, and that working parents volunteer more than non-working or stay-at-home parents. Gen-X volunteers account for the largest percentage of volunteers (36.4%) but Baby Boomer volunteers account for the highest number of hours and therefore the highest dollar value (2.2 billion hours for an estimated \$54.3 billion value) according to the CNCS (n.d.). Volunteering has other impacts on the national economy, with significant increases in likelihood of volunteers being able to obtain paid employment (27%), and more than twice as likely for volunteers in rural areas or volunteers without a high school diploma to obtain paid employment (CNCS, 2017, p. 3). Communities also benefit from volunteer activities through improvement in social capital, economic benefits such as improved upward mobility, and even improved health outcomes (CNCS, 2017, p. 5; see also Putnam, 2000). In the next section, we review the volunteer motivation literature.

3. A review of the volunteer motivation literature

Volunteer motivation research has a distinctly interdisciplinary landscape. It has been studied by researchers in disciplines ranging from sociobiology, psychology (e.g., evolutionary, developmental, social), economics, sociology/social work, political science, public affairs/public administration, business management/organizational behavior, as well as nonprofit and philanthropy (Koehler & Rainey, 2008; Mirabella, Hoffman, Teo, & McDonald, 2019). Disciplinary focus regarding volunteer motivation range from social morality and development (e.g., developmental psychology) to comparing rational choice, affective bonding, and normative conformity as motives (e.g., sociology) to public service duty-based (Perry & Wise, 1990) and social capital (Putnam, 2000) (e.g., nonprofit and public administration).

Across these different perspectives we deduce four central motives: (1) prosocial motivation, (2) solidarity and socialization, (3) self-maximizing, and (4) affective connections. Later, building on these motives, we incorporate them into our framework as part of the value images individuals consider when deciding whether or not to volunteer. In the following paragraphs, we discuss each motive and subsequent findings from various disciplines.

3.1. Prosocial motivation

Prosocial behaviors are broadly defined as behaviors related to helping others, and are often a key focus within research on volunteering and nonprofits through the emphasis on altruism, concern for community, and improving the well-being of others and society (Brookfield, Parry, & Bolton, 2018). Prosocial behaviors include not just donations of time through volunteering, but also donations of money, goods such as food or clothing, and blood donations. Activism, such as social change advocacy, protests, and political engagement, is a form of prosocial behavior, receiving increasing attention to engagement through social media and online/virtual participation (Chou, Hsu, & Hernon, 2020; Mathews & Kling, 1988; Slattery, Finnegan, & Vidgen, 2019).

Prosocial behavior research has often focused on implicit versus explicit motivation as well as intrinsic/altruistic motivations vs extrinsic/egoistic motivations. In relation to volunteering and public/nonprofit organizations, prosocial behavior research is grouped under public service motivation (PSM) theory which suggests that individuals are often motivated by intrinsic elements of duty, service, and empathy for others rather than extrinsic rewards such as money (Perry & Wise, 1990). Implicit, or unconscious, behavior motivations may be influenced by spontaneous needs, through environmental factors such as parental/family engagement in volunteering, or subtly through in-group peer pressure (Aydinli et al., 2016; Aydinli, Bender, Chasiotis, Cemalcilar, & van de Vijver, 2014). In contrast, explicit motivations are frequently situated in intentional decisions, consciously chosen goals, and often linked to long-term, sustained volunteering (Aydinli et al., 2016; Schultheiss & Brunstein, 2010).

3.2. Solidarity and socialization

Socialization and interpersonal connections are vital to the understanding of volunteer motivation as it connects altruistic and self-maximizing as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Volunteering provides opportunities to meet new people, to build social networks, to enhance skill development, and to find common cause with like-minded individuals (Fashant & Evan, 2020; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2019; Lindemeier & Dietrich, 2011; Nelson, 2018; Pajo & Lee, 2011). It provides outlets for intrinsic motivations such as self-esteem development and empowerment (Stukas, Hoyer, Nicholson, Brown, & Aisbett, 2016) as well as extrinsic motivations through avenues such as resume building and reputation management (Fashant & Evan, 2020; Nelson, 2018). Solidarity and socialization motivations are situated in the individual and activity choices made in personal time (Mojza, Sonnentag, & Bornemann, 2011) as well as from the organizational perspective as volunteering and civic engagement are increasingly included as elements of HR practices (Rodell, 2013).

3.3. Self-maximizing

While the heart of volunteer motivation theory is often focused on the altruistic nature, there is a strong pragmatic realization that effective programs must also accommodate self-interested “egoistic” motivations that ultimately serve to help the common good (LeRoux & Feeney, 2015, p.152–156). Egoistic motives correspond to the “rational” or “utility maximizing” motives within PSM theory

(Perry & Wise, 1990, p. 368) and include motivations such as career building and skill development, human/social capital and networking building (Pajo & Lee, 2011; Rogers et al., 2021). Stukas et al. (2016) call these “other-oriented” and “self-oriented” motivations, with their research showing that “other-oriented” motivated individuals were more likely to report positive impacts on their well-being, self-esteem, higher satisfaction, and more social connectedness. While research has indicated that intrinsic motivations such as duty, service, and empathy are often primary motivations within the volunteering/nonprofit sector, much like Maslow (1943), individuals must have sufficient extrinsic rewards (i.e. salary/benefits/safety) to meet their basic needs, even if their overall primary motivation is rooted within intrinsic rewards.

3.4. Affective connections

These motivations are generally linked to traditional and nostalgic motivations, emotional connections, and overlapping with both implicit and social motivations connected to family, friends, faith, and community (Agostinho & Paco, 2012; Lindemeier & Dietrich, 2011). Strong faith-based volunteer traditions, such as the high volunteer rates of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) members, are also connected with these affective, emotional, and faith-based traditional motivations (Clerkin & Swiss, 2013; Curtis, Cnaan, & Evans, 2014). Nostalgic motivations are often rooted in the emotional connections built through shared experiences and culture, whether in the family/social realm or the HR realm through organizational culture (Allen & Shaw, 2009).

Thus, with this rich, interspersed history of research across multiple domains and disciplines, volunteer motivation cannot be adequately described or explained by one particular frame or discipline. There may be multiple underlying motives that describe how or why people volunteer. Social scientists have had little consensus on how or why volunteer motivation is formed and this has led to many content or exploratory factor analyses without theoretical foundations guiding this preliminary evidence (Curtis et al., 2014; Harrison, 1995). For example, the Volunteer Function Inventory (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996) is among the most cited of these analytical approaches; yet, scholars typically find disparate underlying factor structures (Curtis et al., 2014).

However, regardless of their perspectives, scholars agree there are overlapping motives; it is often the intersection of these motives that drive volunteer motivation decisions. For example, in their study of LDS volunteers, Curtis et al. (2014) found five factors including theological motivations, promoting good over evil, social motivations, personal or congregational life of the individual, and emulating the actions of others. Even when multiple motives are presented, as in the Volunteer Function Inventory or in the Curtis et al. (2014) study, the results are not consistent nor generalizable. While this lack of consensus presents a challenge for volunteer motivation researchers, it also presents an opportunity.

In this paper, we move the discussion away from altruism, social morality, and other domain-specific topics and theories. Our primary interest concerns volunteer motivation as a decision-making process. We are not the first researchers to try to move the conversation from content to process perspectives. In a seminal paper on volunteer motivation, Harrison (1995) created the theory of episodic volunteer motivation by using insights from the theories of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) to describe how and why individuals volunteered at a homeless shelter. Harrison (1995) found that attitude or subjective expected utility, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and moral obligation were related to volunteer intentions. However, he notes that his theory may not be applicable for more experienced volunteers as it may be a more script-driven decision as veteran volunteers may be less aware of alternative activities when deciding.

We move beyond Harrison (1995) and propose that image theory may offer valuable insights and a more comprehensive perspective on both well-established and newly minted volunteers. Additionally, our perspective differs from Harrison's theory in that we assume System 1 (i.e., intuitive choice) is equally likely to generate a volunteer decision as System 2 thinking (i.e., rational, deliberative choice). We acknowledge that much of our decision making is intuitive; in fact, a manager's (and individual's) greatest challenge is to know when to switch between System 1 and System 2 decisions (Bazerman & Moore, 2013). In the next section we describe the basic components of image theory. Then, we introduce the construct of shocks from affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), event system theory (EST) (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015), and the unfolding model of turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Finally, we integrate these concepts to develop a theory of volunteer motivation that offers novel insights to advance the study of the phenomenon.

4. Image theory and volunteer decision making

Image theory provides an alternative view of decision making from the more rational, utility-maximizing approaches proposed in economics. Developed by Beach and Mitchell (1998), this theory was first formulated in response to the observation that there was a gap between more normative, rational decision-making models and the behavior of actual decision makers. Its premise is this: Individuals create an image of what they want their future to be and goals and actions are adopted to ensure that image becomes a reality. In contrast to the systematic, methodical, and analytical characterizations of decision makers described in normative models, Beach and Mitchell (1998) developed a more descriptive explanation based upon observation and induction. Image theory has been used to explain a wide range of decision making phenomena including auditing, planning, supervision, job search and job selection, client selection, the effects of organizational culture on decisions, consumer decisions and social responsibility, marketing and communication strategies, and employee turnover (Beach, Mitchell, & Lee, 2013).

Image theory provides broad explanations for decision making in a variety of different contexts and outcomes (Beach & Mitchell, 1998; Schwartz & Te'eni, 2001) and can be classified as a general theory. We use image theory to help us build a more middle range theory of volunteer motivation. In contrast to general theories, middle range theories offer explanations of a particular outcome. In this paper, we focus on the volunteering outcome. Image theory defines decision alternatives as plans of action for attaining a goal. It

proposes that decision making involves individuals comparing alternative plans of action against three sets of internal criteria: (1) their values, (2) their existing goals, and (3) their ongoing plans. Using these three criteria, individuals will test these decision alternatives for compatibility with the criteria. Plans that survive rejection when compared against the three sets of criteria are adopted and implemented. Similarly, decision makers choose to continue a course of action by forecasting the likelihood that continuance will lead to future goal achievement.

Image theory is built upon three basic components (images): (a) value images, (b) trajectory images, and (c) strategic images, which form the internal criteria for decision making. Additionally, the theory proposes two main types of decisions: (a) adoption decisions, and (b) progress decisions. Lastly, the theory proposes two processes or tests for screening possible decision alternatives: (a) the compatibility test, and (b) the profitability test.

In the following sections, we discuss the three images (value, trajectory, and strategic) for their relevance and use within our process model of volunteer motivation. The value image explains “why”, the trajectory image explains “what”, and the strategic image explains “how”.

4.1. Value image

Value images are based upon individual decision makers' principles—what they believe they should do and how they believe people should behave. They are self-evident truths that are important to individuals and guide their behavior. These principles can range from the general to the specific and from the critical to the mundane (Beach & Mitchell, 1998). Principles provide a basis for determining what goals to strive for and what are acceptable ways of pursuing those goals. As an example, a potential volunteer may have a value toward serving others that might be stated as “I should do good for others” or “It is my religious obligation to help people in need.” These values form one basis for judging the merits of a particular course of action. As described earlier, much of the volunteer motivation literature has focused on this particular component of decision making. Thus, we incorporate the previous values or motives including PSM, solidarity/socialization, self-maximizing, and affective connections. However, values provide only one set of criteria for judging a course of action. Decision makers also have goals they are trying to achieve.

4.2. Trajectory image

The trajectory image represents an individual's agenda of goals in a given decision context. These goals represent desired future states and fulfillment leads to satisfaction. Some goals are derived from principles (e.g., “I want to do good for others”) whereas other goals arise from problems encountered in the environment (e.g., “A tornado has wiped out my community and I have an opportunity to help”). Trajectory images in the context of volunteer decision making describe goals that volunteering will or will not help achieve. Additionally, coordinating work and non-work goals may lead to goal conflicts that must be resolved. As an example, a potential volunteer may have a goal of “providing a comfortable living for my family” while simultaneously having a goal of “doing good for others.” Consequently, trajectory images provide a second set of criteria by which a course of action can be judged; that is how well the course of action helps individuals reach their goals. While goals may favor particular courses of action, implementation is achieved through plans and tactics.

4.3. Strategic image

The strategic image represents an individual's plans (sequences of activities) and tactics (actual behaviors implementing those activities). Strategic images in the context of volunteer decision making describe what it takes to implement a particular course of action. To implement the goal of “providing a comfortable living for my family,” an individual may choose to work late and take on additional assignments. To implement the goal of “doing good for others,” the same individual may volunteer at church on weekends. In evaluating different alternatives, decision makers judge their ability to implement them effectively and synchronize across various goals. The strategic image is important for any behavior, but specifically for volunteering. An individual may have an overarching principle or value (e.g., altruism) that creates a goal (e.g., I want to help others who struggle financially as I have struggled), but lack the plans and tactics (e.g., volunteering to teach a financial literacy class for a local nonprofit). Values, goals, and intentions matter little if there are no concrete plans to “live out” those values and achieve those goals.

4.4. Compatibility and profitability tests

The value, trajectory, and strategic images form the three sets of cognitive structures/criteria by which particular courses of action are judged. But how are decisions made? Image theory describes the *compatibility test* as the process by which alternatives are compared to the value, trajectory, and strategic images in reaching an *adoption decision* (whether to adopt a potential goal or plan) or a *progress decision* (whether to continue implementing existing goals or plans) (Beach, 2013; Mitchell & Beach, 1990). In a volunteer context, an adoption decision is framed as a choice of (a) whether to volunteer or not, and (b) which nonprofit organization and job should be chosen. If a particular course of action is compatible with all three images, it passes the *rejection threshold*, meaning it is either chosen if it is the only alternative to exceed the threshold, or will be further screened if there is more than one alternative. Incompatibility on any individual image will lead either to a revision of the image or a rejection of the alternative. In progress decisions, individuals are forecasting the future and the ability of a particular decision alternative already adopted to continue leading ultimately to goal accomplishment.

According to the theory, decisions are selected based upon their not being rejected in the compatibility test. Therefore, a single alternative that survives the rejection threshold will be adopted. In the volunteer context, this means for example, that if the Red Cross is the only option considered *and* it survives the screening process, an individual will volunteer at the Red Cross. On the other hand, if several options survive the rejection threshold, other processes are invoked to make the decision. For example, either the rejection threshold can be raised or different alternatives can be compared based upon their relative merits (the *profitability test*).

The profitability test is only invoked for the situations where more than one alternative meets the rejection threshold. How do individuals employ the profitability test? It depends on both the decision maker and the decision context. They may choose to incorporate intuitive choice, relying on System 1. Or, they may utilize a more rational approach such as importance weighting where they determine criteria, weight them, rate alternatives, and use a weighted average to determine the best alternative that utilizes System 2 (Bazerman & Moore, 2013). For example, let's say that several alternatives to volunteering have met the rejection threshold and the compatibility test. At this point, these alternatives must be assessed using the profitability test. One individual decides to pick the volunteer opportunity where a friend already serves as a volunteer (i.e., intuitive choice). Another individual picks the one volunteer opportunity among many that best fits personal criteria (e.g., fits with work schedule, adds to skill set, friendly people) based on a weighted model.

Sometimes decision makers may be faced with a familiar situation from which they can draw upon past experience to aid in selecting a response. If situations are similar enough to those confronted in the past, a *policy* (decision based upon previous experience to deal with whatever is demanded) can be used thereby eliminating the need for deliberation in decision making. For example, every time a natural disaster occurs, some individuals will invoke the policy (based on past experience) of volunteering time to help clean up.

We believe that image theory is useful for explaining the processes of deciding whether to volunteer or not, which volunteer opportunity to choose, and whether to continue volunteering once a choice has been made. However, it does not explain what activates or arouses an individual to consider the possibility of volunteering. Next we borrow the construct of *shocks* from the unfolding model of voluntary turnover (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Inderrieden, 2005; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Morrell, Loan-Clarke, Arnold, & Wilkinson, 2008; Niederman, Sumner, & Maertz, 2007) as well as affective event theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and event system theory (EST) (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015) to explain three of four possible paths leading an individual to choose to volunteer.

5. A process model of volunteer motivation

Our overall model can be viewed as organized around three stages: (1) initiation, (2) choice, and (3) continuance. The initiation stage describes the process that moves an individual from a steady state of not volunteering to one of considering volunteering as a course of action. The choice stage describes the process that explains how individuals decide whether to volunteer or not and which volunteer option to choose. Finally, the continuance stage describes the process that explains how individuals decide whether to persist in volunteering after they have selected, for example, a volunteer job at a nonprofit organization. See Fig. 1.

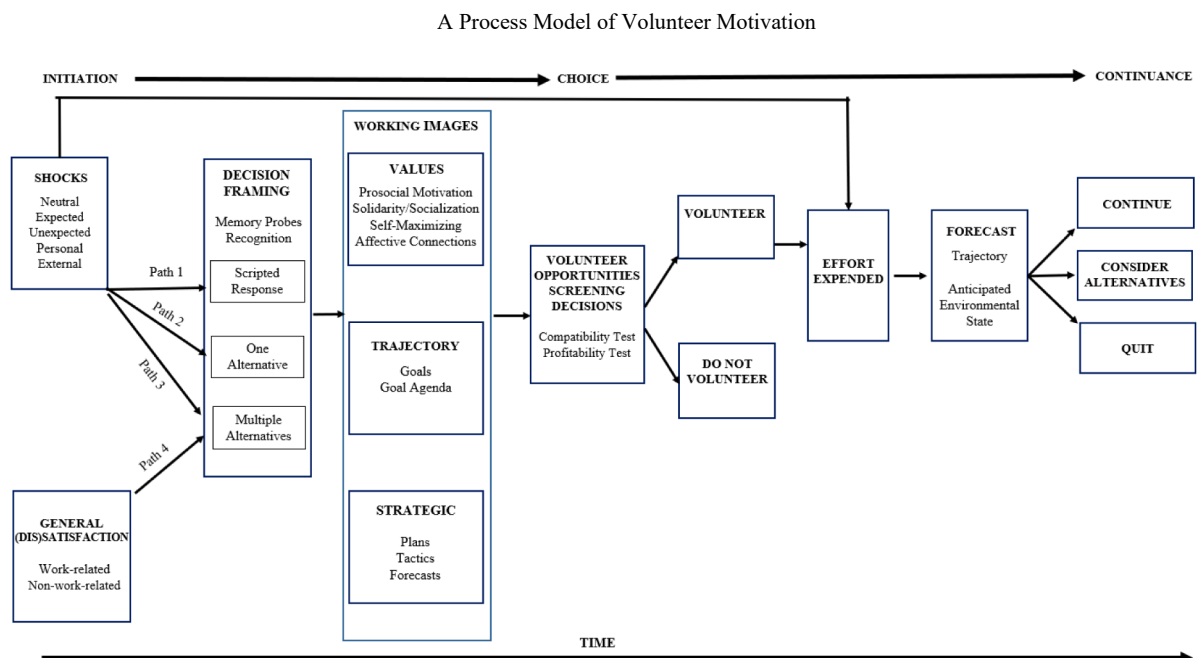


Fig. 1. A process model of volunteer motivation.

5.1. Initiation stage

Volunteering is initiated either suddenly as the result of a shock that jars an individual out of a state of complacency with a current situation or more gradually as a result of an assessment of general work or non-work satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In either case, individuals frame the decision based upon their ongoing flow of experience. This contextual knowledge provides a backdrop to consider the events that led to the present and the constraints on what can be done. The three cognitive structures discussed in the image theory section (value images, trajectory images, and strategic images) are invoked and are analogous to filtering information searches from a larger overall set on a computer to a smaller subset of those that are particularly relevant to the current search. The value, trajectory, and/or strategic images that are relevant to the volunteering situation are filtered from a larger set of images to form a subset of working images for a particular volunteer decision. These working images become the criteria by which volunteer opportunities are compared for compatibility.

5.1.1. Shocks

The model begins by drawing upon the construct of “shocks” described in the literature on the unfolding model of turnover (Holtom et al., 2005; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Morrell et al., 2008; Niederman et al., 2007), as well as affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and event system theory (EST) (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). A shock to the system is a distinguishable event that jars individuals toward deliberate judgments about volunteering and may lead them to taking action. A shock is an event that can be either positive, neutral, or negative that initiates individuals' thoughts about volunteering.

Shocks initiate action. They force people to start thinking about a specific decision alternative such as volunteering. Shocks also explain how the availability heuristic can bias volunteer judgments, as well as create empathy for others. First, shocks are vivid, recent, or novel events that are easily recalled (i.e., ease of recall bias) and/or reside in certain memory structures (i.e., retrievability bias) (Bazerman & Moore, 2013). The availability heuristic explains how personal experiences can shape the options considered and narrow decision framing (Heath & Heath, 2013). For example, most individuals make ‘whether or not’ decisions (Heath & Heath, 2013) and the decision to volunteer is likely similar. This narrow framing may limit alternatives considered.

Second, shocks may be more likely to create empathy for others. In the fundraising literature, motivation to donate either time (volunteer) or money (fundraising) is often linked to how individuals connect with the request – either through empathy or identification. Empathy theory proposes that giving behavior, such as charitable giving or volunteering, is a form of prosocial behavior whereby compassion and concern motivate individuals to help others in need (Verhaert & Van den Poel, 2011). For some, this empathy to help others is motivated through the ability to imagine being in the same situation or because they can identify with those in need (Chan, 2021; Havens & Schervish, 2001). Similarly, others are motivated because they, or someone close to them, received help in the past. Prince and File's (2001) donor typology identifies these people as “repayers” (e.g. Hurricane Katrina assistance recipients who then donate to assist future natural disaster victims). Organizations recruiting for volunteers or donors seek to connect with individuals through emotional narratives disseminated through personal and peer networks and, increasingly, through social media and internet connections (Einolf, Philbrick, & Slay, 2012).

This may help explain why many people may be predisposed toward volunteering, but never take action on their predispositions until a shock occurs. A shock is an event that generates information or provides meaning to individuals that is sufficiently jarring such that it cannot be ignored. However, not all events are shocks. An event is not a shock unless it produces volunteer-related deliberations that involve the prospect of seeking out volunteer opportunities.

A shock can be any expected or unexpected change to individuals' ongoing social systems that shakes them out of a steady state or challenges their status quo of remaining on the sidelines and not volunteering. The social and cognitive context of the shock provides a frame of reference in which individuals interpret it, consider it, and determine whether it can be responded to immediately (e.g., enacting a predetermined script to volunteer at a specific nonprofit organization) or whether it requires further processing to discover an appropriate response. Shocks that initiate thoughts toward volunteering may be expected, such as a school project that requires a volunteer service component, a corporation that requires volunteering five hours a month as part of the job requirements, or when an individual retires and suddenly has free time. Shocks also may be unexpected, such as when a brother is diagnosed with leukemia, a tornado wipes out a nearby town, or an individual is laid off from work. Any of these events—either expected or unexpected—may be sufficiently jarring that they initiate individuals to consider volunteering. We propose that different types of shocks occur with varying frequency and differentially affect the images (value, trajectory, and strategic) causing individuals to assess the compatibility of the images in seeking out volunteer opportunities.

Table 1
The process model decision paths.

Attributes	P1	P2	P3	P4a	P4b
Initiating Event	Shock	Shock	Shock	(Dis)satisfaction	(Dis)satisfaction
Script/Plan	Yes	No	No	No	No
Image Violation	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dis(satisfaction)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alternative Search	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Offer/Likely Offer	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Time	Very Short	Short	Long	Medium	Long

5.1.2. General satisfaction and dissatisfaction

The second way in which individuals initiate their volunteerism may come from a reassessment of work or non-work satisfaction. Not every shock will result in volunteer deliberations nor will every volunteer decision be the result of a shock in an individual's life. When individuals experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction at work or in life, this may lead them to seek volunteer opportunities to capitalize on their extra time/energy (e.g., satisfaction) or compensate for what is missing in their current jobs (e.g., dissatisfaction). For example, an individual who is satisfied either at work or in life may decide to foster a child after realizing there is extra energy and bandwidth available. Likewise, an individual with a depleted job design may turn to fostering a child as a way to find meaning in an area of life other than work.

For this path, there are two sub-paths: (a) consideration of one alternative and (b) consideration of multiple alternatives. These sub-paths are similar to paths 2 and 3 in terms of how they work throughout the rest of the model. Again, the difference concerns whether or not there is only one option to be considered or multiple options. Please refer to [Table 1](#).

To summarize, volunteering is initiated as a result of either a shock that jars the individual from the status quo or a more gradual, random, or incremental process of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that causes individuals to seek outlets for fulfilling unmet or under-met needs. However, this only explains what arouses individuals to consider volunteering. Further explanation is needed to understand where individuals choose to volunteer, how much effort they expend, and what makes them want to continue.

5.1.3. Decision framing and working images

The ways in which individuals consider volunteering may be initiated by a shock or a general affective response to professional or personal conditions. This part of the process determines how individuals make sense of those life experiences and they translate into one of four different paths (see [Table 1](#)).

In the first three paths, individuals experience shocks or triggers as initiating events, with the remaining path (P4a & P4b) emanating from (dis)satisfaction in work or personal life. However, how individuals frame the decision varies greatly. Below, we discuss each of the four paths and the decision frames including memory probes and recognition of patterns involved as well as individuals' working images (values, trajectory, strategic) and how they are affected.

5.1.3.1. Decision path #1: a script-driven volunteer decision. In the first decision path, a shock to the system occurs to individuals and causes them to think about the decision to volunteer. This event must be significant enough to initiate mental deliberation. For example, individuals experience or observe something that they may (or may not) have experienced or seen in the past.

Next, the individuals use general and personal decision frames to interpret the shock and its surrounding circumstances ([Lee & Mitchell, 1994](#)). In the general decision frame, an interpretation is provided by culture and societal norms. This helps individuals interpret the shock on some key dimensions (e.g., novelty, favorability, etc.). In a personal decision frame, individuals must determine what is involved in the decision. Is there an obvious response based on past actions or rules that individuals have generated from observing others or from their own knowledge? Regarding the immediate reactions to the shock, individuals differ based on their personal characteristics and past experiences (e.g., someone who has lived on the streets would likely display more empathy toward nonprofits helping the homeless). An individual's decision frame, therefore, is a significant source of how the shock is interpreted.

Lastly, individuals search their memory to reflect upon prior decisions that were made, rules, learned responses, and circumstances that surrounded previous shocks. If (a) they determine that the shock is identical to one or more shocks that have occurred in the past, (b) that decision can be used to inform the current decision frame, and (c) if the previous decisions were appropriate, a match is said to occur. If the match occurs, an individual will participate in very little mental deliberation and the scripted response to the shock is that the individual volunteers. This decision path includes three steps: (1) a shock, (2) a match with a rule or previous decision or action, and (3) a script-driven decision.

For individuals experiencing this decision path, the previous decision (and subsequent action) that created the "match" has already been assessed based on the value, trajectory, and strategic images. This is why this path takes less mental deliberation and can occur quickly. Individuals have already assessed this criterion for the current decision and can move straight to considering volunteer opportunities.

For example, an individual who has experienced homelessness is asked by a friend to volunteer for a homeless shelter (i.e., a shock). It causes the individual to consider volunteering as an option. Through the general and personal decision frame, the individual must process the nature of the shock. A general decision frame might help an individual assess the novelty (e.g., helping the homeless to become more employable) and favorability (e.g., neglecting some much needed leisure time). However, using the personal decision frame, individuals may have an obvious response (volunteer at a local homeless shelter) based on their past actions or rules or personal knowledge (e.g., personally living on the streets). This path asserts that experiences shape volunteer motivation and reaction to specific jarring life events. The emphasis is on the decision frame as individuals can quickly probe their memory and recognize a script for how to make this decision. The individual has already determined that the script accommodates the values, trajectory, and strategic images.

5.1.3.2. Decision path #2: a push volunteer decision. As opposed to Path 1, where decision-making is heavily guided by memory and past experience to guide action, Path 2 focuses on those situations where individuals do not have past experience to help guide a decision framing match. This is what distinguishes path 1 from path 2. Additional mental deliberations are required because the situational constraints are new. There are no personal or situational experiences that generate a script for the individual to follow. For the individual, it becomes the binary choice of volunteering or accepting the status quo (i.e., not volunteering). It is a single judgment with no specific volunteer opportunities in mind.

In this path, individuals reassess their decision frame to determine if the shock fits their value, trajectory, and strategic images. The value image determines how individuals will integrate their values with the shock. With the trajectory image, individuals make judgments about how their personal goals can be integrated into the shock. The strategic image, or the goal-oriented plan, ensures individuals' current activities and efforts are goal-directed.

First, individuals assess the nature of the shock and consider how well volunteering aligns with the working images. When individuals are faced with the decision to volunteer and there is no scripted response, they must determine if their value image (e.g., I value helping others), trajectory image (e.g., I want my children to help others), and strategic image (e.g., I need to find an important cause that I can support with my time) are all aligned. If these images align with the decision of volunteering, then individuals will likely volunteer. In contrast, others may assess the value (e.g., I value my leisure time), trajectory (e.g., I want to provide for my family financially, psychologically, and emotionally), and strategic (e.g., I need a job promotion and/or more vacation time to provide for my family) are all aligned with the decision of maintaining the current course of action of not volunteering. However, if the value image (e.g., I value compassion), trajectory image (e.g., I want to spend more time with my children), and strategic image (e.g., I want to spend more leisure time with my family) are not aligned, individuals will change some of the images and it will change the decision to volunteer or not based on which images are altered. Individuals might find ways to change the trajectory image (goal) and strategic image (mechanism of achieving the goal) of providing for their family to include serving the target population or issue of interest (e.g., volunteering with nonprofits focused on conserving environmental resources).

While assessing the value, trajectory, and strategic images, individuals must determine if the status quo is more aligned with their images. For some individuals, these working images “rule” in favor of the status quo. By status quo, we mean not volunteering and that includes the activities that already preoccupy the time. For example, rather than volunteering, the individual may spend the time taking a child to the park, hosting a dinner party for friends, learning how to knit, or working on a special project for work. Any assessment of the working images will lead to an assessment of other ways that time could be used (i.e., opportunity costs).

5.1.3.3. Decision path #3: a volunteer pull decision. Unlike decision path #2, individuals taking path #3 frame the shock, decisions to be made, and surrounding circumstances as a choice between the status quo (i.e., not volunteering) versus volunteering for one or more specific nonprofits in. Individuals judge the shock based on the value, trajectory, and strategic images for multiple alternatives.

Because individuals are considering both the decision to (a) volunteer or not volunteer and (b) the specific volunteer opportunities that arise, this decision path is more complicated than decision paths #1 and #2. Similar to decision path #2, if all of the images fit and “rule” toward not volunteering, then individuals will decide to maintain the status quo and not volunteer. If they “rule” toward volunteering, then the individual will volunteer. A judgment of compatibility may or may not prompt a search for volunteer alternatives. However, if individuals' images do not fit, then they will produce either a change in the images or create some level of disaffection. Individuals who survive a tornado may change their goals around helping others and that experience of relying on the kindness of strangers may serve as the catalyst for them to find volunteer opportunities to help survivors of future natural disasters (e.g., Red Cross). For some people, determining the ‘right’ volunteer opportunity is extensive (e.g., using volunteermatch.org to locate specific opportunities). Others may satisfice and volunteer for the first nonprofit they find (availability bias) that passes the compatibility test.

If the images are not changed, then individuals must evaluate more carefully their specific alternatives. To assess these volunteer opportunities, the value, trajectory, and strategic images are once again utilized. In the first set of judgments, specific alternatives will either survive or be deleted. Individuals evaluate whether or not the volunteer opportunities can be integrated into, or fit with, the three images. If individuals judge that any (or all) of the images do not fit, the alternative will be dropped. However, if the judgment is a fit, this specific volunteer opportunity will survive into the second round of decisions.

When only one volunteer opportunity survives the prior rounds of judgments, the final set of decisions deals with comparing the expected benefits of the last option versus the status quo. If the current inaction provides greater expected benefits (e.g., more leisure time, less time pressure), then the individual will maintain the status quo and not volunteer. If the surviving option generates more benefits to the individual than the status quo, then the person will volunteer. If multiple options exist at this stage, then individuals will use one of several possible strategies for making a choice: (a) aided analytic—e.g., decision analysis, (b) unaided analytic—e.g., balancing pros and cons in one's head, or (c) unanalytical strategies—e.g., imagining possible scenarios if one were to choose this option, coin tossing, asking for advice, etc. (Beach, 1998).

For example, a person receives an unexpected or unsolicited volunteer opportunity. The shock is an invitation to volunteer for a specific nonprofit; the individual determines whether or not the offer is worth seriously considering. The first decision is whether or not this opportunity is attractive. Furthermore, this may lead to investigating other opportunities for volunteering. For this decision path, several alternatives worth considering meet the first set of fit judgments and a second round of fit judgments begins where all alternatives are subjected to more scrutiny. These surviving alternatives are subjected to a more rational analysis in the third round of judgments. An individual who invokes path #3 may be content with inaction and not volunteering but may on the other hand be stirred to action by the presentation of the alternative to volunteer for a specific nonprofit.

5.1.3.4. Decision path #4: an affect-initiated volunteer decision. Unlike prior paths, decision path #4 has no shock or trigger that jars individuals (i.e., as in decision paths #1 and #2) or emphasis on the alternatives (i.e., as in decision path #3). Over time, individuals will gradually come to reassess their perspectives on volunteering. Decision path #4 focuses on life as an ongoing and emerging process with little delineation or attention to shocks. Life, including family and work, are viewed as relatively stable. Some people may reevaluate the purpose of their lives over time. Rather than responding to a shock, these individuals will reassess their inaction or

status quo gradually, routinely, casually, or perhaps even randomly.

This path may be initiated in one of two ways. First, either individuals or the environment can change over time; this results in one of the images no longer fitting. Lack of fit between any of these images will lead individuals to determine the sufficiency or insufficiency of expected life satisfaction. If a lack of fit exists and continues, the image is either changed or life dissatisfaction results. Second, individuals may shorten their mental deliberations and focus on their affective responses. Individuals may not use the images but rather gradually become dissatisfied. For example, a financially secure retired senior citizen may seek volunteer opportunities to occupy time once spent doing meaningful work.

Within decision path #4, there are two sub-paths. In sub-path #4a, individuals do not search for specific alternatives. This is more of a satisficing decision in that the first volunteer opportunity that presents itself within a certain area of interest will do (e.g., the first nonprofit that is mentioned when discussing with a friend or the first Google result). There is no extensive search for all of the volunteer opportunities that meet the criteria of the area of interest (e.g., homeless shelter). However, with sub-path #4b, the individual is careful to consider the programs offered to the target population and/or environment (e.g., what does the homeless shelter offer?), the type of volunteer jobs available (e.g., I enjoy cooking. Can I cook the food for the homeless?), the flexibility of volunteer hours (e.g., can I volunteer after my shift at work?), etc. Through logical analysis and determination of the fit of the three images, individuals will determine the best volunteer opportunity for them.

Much of the volunteer motivation literature has focused on how people can volunteer to fulfill different psychological functions (Clary et al., 1998) such as to demonstrate a concern for others, to advance one's self-concept, to enter a new career, to gain or use a skill set, to alleviate peer pressure, or to mitigate feelings of guilt or shame. Traditional volunteer motivation theories are best categorized through this decision path if there was no shock to initiate volunteering into the decision set. The routine, random, or even gradual inventory of one's life purpose as well as work and family goals can generate volunteer outcomes. For example, if an individual decides to pursue a career in accounting, then that person might volunteer for a local accounting club to learn the specifics of the profession and skills that will be useful in this future career. No shock has occurred but rather the individual decided that accounting was an area of interest.

Over time, individuals realize that volunteer opportunities afford meaningfulness, broader social networks, and knowledge, skills, and abilities that may not be realized in gainful employment (Geroy, Wright, & Jacoby, 2000). According to Grant (2012), "the design of work may have a substantial impact on the motives that individuals experience in their initial volunteering episodes" (p. 594). Using the meaning maintenance model (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), Grant (2012) contends that when individuals do not have enriched jobs, they are more likely to seek that enrichment through volunteer opportunities.

5.2. Choice stage

A decision to volunteer may rarely involve the process described by more normative approaches such as those that propose utility maximizing functions where alternatives are located, compared against a set of criteria, and then their subjective expected utility is calculated resulting in a clear choice. Instead, a more likely scenario is one in which only *one* or a relatively few volunteer options are presented and considered, and rather than maximizing utility (which cannot be achieved when the full set of options is not considered), decision makers choose options that are not rejected by the compatibility test. Thus, two volunteer choice situations may occur.

5.2.1. Volunteer opportunities and screening decisions

Individuals must determine how to pick among alternatives, especially if multiple alternatives are presented. Alternatives are always plentiful, but decision makers do not necessarily do their due diligence in understanding their alternatives.

5.2.1.1. Scenario 1: single volunteer option considered. If a single option is presented and considered, individuals compare that option to their working images (value, trajectory, and strategic). If the option is not rejected when compared against each of the images (i.e. clears the rejection threshold), then the option is adopted. For example, a friend calls to encourage you to volunteer for the Red Cross after a flood devastates a nearby town. You compare the Red Cross volunteer option against your value, trajectory, and strategic images. If it is not rejected, you agree to take the volunteer opportunity.

5.2.1.2. Scenario 2: more than one option passes the compatibility test. A more complex decision situation occurs when more than one option passes the compatibility test. One way decision makers may deal with this situation is to raise the rejection threshold so only one option survives. Alternatively, decision makers may employ the profitability test. This approach is affected by characteristics of the choice, characteristics of the environment in which the choice is embedded, and characteristics of the decision maker to arrive at a decision. For some individuals, this may involve a sophisticated decision analysis, for others it may involve balancing pros and cons in their head, and for still others it may lack analysis at all and involve a coin toss or getting advice from a friend (Beach, 2013). For example, three volunteer opportunities survive the compatibility test: one at the Red Cross, one at the American Cancer Society, and one at the local food bank. After considering the pros and cons of each alternative, the individual chooses the Red Cross option.

5.2.2. Volunteer/do not volunteer

Based on the rejection and threshold tests, individuals will make a determination regarding whether or not volunteering is a viable alternative. Volunteering means that they find a nonprofit job where their shock/general (dis)satisfaction has led them and it meets their values, trajectory, and strategic images. A decision to not volunteer means that the individual has potentially experienced some of

these steps (e.g., shock), but there is a potential problem with the compatibility of images.

5.2.3. Effort expended

In this part of the process, individuals determine how much effort to expend. Shocks have an indirect (through the entire process) and direct relationship with how much effort is expended by the volunteer. Several theories explain how the nature of shocks and triggers may affect effort expended. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) proposed that work events can elicit specific affective responses in their Affective Events Theory (AET). Ballinger and Rockmann (2010) discuss anchoring events as shocks or triggers that are encoded in autobiographical memory and provide guidance on future actions within the context of a social exchange with another party. Further, event system theory (EST) contends that events are salient when they are novel, disruptive, and critical (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). All these theoretical perspectives assert that events are motivating, especially in determining the amount of effort expended. Some criteria to be considered include: time, skills, etc. For example, individuals who have experienced a tornado in their communities are willing to expend a great deal of effort toward helping neighboring communities facing a similar plight. Since the memories of those experiences are indelible, individuals are willing to expend a great deal of effort (e.g., traveling for days) to help others. On the other hand, students who volunteer in response to a school requirement may exert minimal effort. Different types of shocks lead to different levels of effort expended.

5.3. Continuance stage

The continuance stage reflects what Beach et al. (2013) describe as a *progress decision*. Progress decisions are concerned with the success of the implemented plan in its ability to move individuals toward their goal. This stage entails assessing the compatibility of the desired goal and the forecast of what will happen if the individuals continue implementing the plan. Further, they will decide between continuing with their current volunteer arrangement, finding new alternatives (e.g., new volunteer jobs within the same organization or new organizations), or quitting. Next we discuss the forecast and alternatives considered based on that forecast.

5.3.1. Forecast

At any point after individuals have chosen to volunteer, they may assess the situation and forecast the future to determine whether or not to continue volunteering. Essentially, volunteers are asking themselves, what is the anticipated or likely result if we continue to implement this plan (i.e. continue volunteering at this organization)? This assessment consists of testing the compatibility of the forecasted future if the plan is fully implemented against the trajectory image (the agenda of goals individuals desire to fulfill).

5.3.2. Continue/consider alternatives/quit

Compatibility between the anticipated future and the trajectory image will lead individuals to continue on with their volunteer position at the nonprofit organization. On the other hand, incompatibility between the anticipated future and the trajectory image will lead to either finding a substitute volunteer opportunity (i.e. one that passes the compatibility test), or if no substitute can be found, quitting the volunteer position currently occupied.

5.3.3. Process model summary

In summary, there are four paths in which individuals may decide to volunteer. In path #1, individuals experience a shock and have a scripted response. When individuals experience a shock but have no scripted response and must mentally deliberate, they are following a path #2 response. Path #3 responses involve multiple alternatives; individuals must choose (a) whether or not to volunteer and (b) for which nonprofit they will volunteer. Last, individuals in a path #4 react to general life satisfaction gradually or randomly may generate a volunteer decision. Through these prototypical paths, we can better understand how individuals decide to volunteer. The effort expended by volunteers is directly influenced by shocks and indirectly influenced through the decision-making process. Finally, the decision to continue volunteering results from a projection to the future of how well the three images (values, trajectory, and strategic) are aligned for specific individuals.

6. Implications

We suggest there are three major implications for our process model of volunteering for nonprofits and HR professionals alike. First, volunteer recruitment can be improved by targeting individuals who have experienced similar shocks and triggers as those individuals who are served by the nonprofit. As discussed above, shocks are particularly salient due to the availability heuristic (e.g., ease of recall and retrievability bias) and they create or trigger empathy for others (e.g., fundraising research based on empathy theory). Thus, nonprofits might focus their attention on volunteer recruitment of those who are adept at the specific challenges the target population will face and who are prepared to offer their services. For HR professionals, it is important to understand how potential shocks may affect employees as they may translate to collective action within the organization. Organizations may reap benefits by “rallying” behind these employees on both the individual level through increased motivation/satisfaction and the organization level through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

Second, nonprofit organizations can frame the volunteer decision and job as being compatible with the existing images. That is, nonprofits can find creative strategies to emphasize and reinforce the ways in which the images align. For example, individuals who value family time might be encouraged to bring their children along to simultaneously mentor a less fortunate child as well as their own. Not only can a nonprofit help align those images in creative ways, they can also foster family traditions that may transcend initial

volunteer relationships. This may engender prosocial motivation, affective connections, and solidarity/socialization. HR departments may want to reframe the idea that volunteering is separate from work; volunteering can meet both the organizational and nonprofit goals in light of individuals' images. Those self-maximizing motives can be associated with job advancement and career development based on organizational reframing.

Third, nonprofits can increase the probability that they will be considered by individuals through offering a wide range of volunteer opportunities including short-term/long-term, skilled/unskilled, individual/group, and in person/virtual. This will increase the chances of moving individuals past the compatibility and profitability tests. Thus, we suggest nonprofits and HR specialists focus on innovative mechanisms by which individuals can volunteer, especially given the changing dynamics of a post-COVID world. HR benefits when employees volunteer (Rodell, 2013) and therefore, making volunteer opportunities more accessible and autonomous will enhance the likelihood employees will volunteer.

7. Conclusion

In this article, we make three primary contributions to the literature on volunteer motivation and generate several general propositions. First, our model of volunteer motivation differs significantly from other theories by taking a more process-oriented approach and focusing on three stages of volunteer motivation that take place over time: initiation, choice, and continuance. Most of the traditional volunteer motivation theories have focused on either role identity through volunteerism (Grube & Piliavin, 2000) or functionalism (Clary et al., 1998)—how people can and do perform the same actions (e.g., volunteering for the animal shelter) to serve different psychological functions. Our theory of volunteer motivation is based upon image theory (Beach, 1998; Mitchell & Beach, 1990), affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), and event system theory (EST) (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015) which enhances our understanding of *why* individuals choose to volunteer. Thus, the first proposition:

Proposition 1. Existing models of volunteer motivation fail to address the process by which volunteering enters the decision set.

Second, the process model of volunteer motivation addresses the exogenous factors that influence motivation by focusing on the situational characteristics that may influence an individual to choose to volunteer. Scholars have categorized *work* motivation theories into two types: endogenous and exogenous (Grant & Shin, 2011; Katzell & Thompson, 1990). Endogenous theories focus on the psychological (i.e. internal) mechanisms that influence motivation. Exogenous theories focus on the “levers” and contextual influences that can be changed and altered. Previous theories of *volunteer* motivation are more endogenous in nature because they focus on the psychological reasons why individuals would consider volunteering. The process model of volunteer motivation provides a more comprehensive understanding by addressing both endogenous and exogenous factors that influence individuals to volunteer. This leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 2. Situational constraints and contextual influences must be given consideration as potential explanations for volunteering to be considered in the decision set.

Third, we introduce the shock construct to the volunteer motivation literature. Previous theory and research on volunteering is noticeably lacking in identifying what factors cause individuals to move from a steady state of not volunteering to a new state of considering it. The process model of volunteer motivation accounts for the events in an individual's life that may lead a person to volunteer. Personal shocks include dealing with the loss of a family member to a rare disease, living on the streets, becoming an “empty nester” or retiree, surviving a traumatic experience, or fostering a child (e.g., a close family member fostering/adopting a child). These shocks have the potential to change an individual's decision frame regarding volunteering. Job-related shocks also affect decision frames. For example, unethical behavior at work (e.g., when an organization takes on a client who pollutes) may trigger an individual to volunteer for a ‘green’ nonprofit (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Abusive supervision at work may trigger an individual to volunteer for a women's and children's shelter. This suggests the intriguing possibility that employer-sponsored volunteering may be a means to compensate for a number of organizational failings and thereby enhance retention and contribute to employee well-being. Thus, the following proposition:

Proposition 3. Shocks, including those that are positive, neutral, and negative, can precipitate mental deliberations about volunteering.

Understanding volunteer motivation is increasingly related to human resource activities, both in terms of understanding individual motivations and decision-making frames, as well as the increasing use of volunteering as an element of the workplace environment. Increasingly, businesses are utilizing volunteering as team building exercises to improve overall employee morale and job satisfaction (Pajo & Lee, 2011; Rodell, Breitsohl, Schröder, & Keating, 2016). These practices may be corporate-sponsored, with paid time off or other incentives, or corporate volunteering with employees volunteering as groups, often including their families (Pajo & Lee, 2011; Rodell et al., 2016). This builds solidarity and socialization among the participants as well as for the organization itself, helping build a socially responsible reputation through community civic engagement (Grant, 2012; Pajo & Lee, 2011). Thus, the following proposition:

Proposition 4. Human resource managers can integrate volunteering and civic engagement as extensions of traditional human resource practices impacting employee motivation, recruitment, and retention.

The process model of volunteer motivation offers new directions for research. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods could be used to refine the various components of our model. Interviewing new volunteers at nonprofit organizations

to ascertain the process they used to decide (a) if there was an event that caused them to start thinking about volunteering and if so, (b) probes that establish characteristics of the shocks (expected/unexpected, personal/job-related, positive/neutral/negative) would provide a starting point in understanding what initiates the volunteer motivation process.

To further validate qualitative findings, large-scale surveys could be administered across a wide range of nonprofit organization types to provide a more complete picture of how well the theory describes the actual volunteer decision making process. Shocks may have stronger effects among people with specific characteristics: religious or spiritual affiliations (e.g., congregation members who are asked to assist Habitat for Humanity), membership in other nonprofit organizations known for their community involvement (e.g., Junior Achievement), enrollment in classes requiring service (e.g., service learning projects where extra credit is given to those who volunteer), or social ties with avid volunteers (e.g., friends who actively recruit volunteers for their cause). These moderators may increase the amount and duration of shocks that generate volunteering as a potential decision and action as well as influence the amount of effort expended. These shocks may culminate in group pressure (e.g., social networks, religious affiliation) or be more circumstantial as those listed above (e.g., hurricane, loss of loved one to cancer, working for an organization that pollutes).

A better understanding of how individuals decide whether to volunteer or not, decide where to volunteer, determine how much effort to expend, and decide to continue or not, will have many practical benefits for nonprofit organizations who rely on volunteers to help accomplish their objectives. Recruiting practices can be targeted and tailored to accommodate individuals who enter the process from each of the four prototypical paths we described. Additionally, designing volunteer jobs that provide a variety of options that are compatible with different individuals' value, trajectory, and strategic images will yield positive performance outcomes and facilitate the conditions necessary for volunteers to want to continue volunteering over time.

Nonprofit organizations face a difficult and continuing challenge of achieving strategic and operational goals. They often have multiple stakeholders with multiple goals to achieve. This is further constrained by funding limitations that can restrict their degrees of freedom in providing goods and services to their clientele. As a consequence, utilizing volunteer labor offers a flexible and cheaper source of workers that can both complement and supplement paid staff in nonprofit organizations. However, to achieve both effective and efficient utilization of this volunteer labor pool requires closer attention to the dynamic and multifaceted process by which individuals decide to volunteer, and once they have made that decision, providing opportunities that allow volunteers to fulfill their motives while at the same time fulfill the needs of their organizations. This article provides a beginning roadmap for understanding these processes.

Volunteers, and volunteer motivation, are traditionally viewed as the purview of nonprofits rather than in connection to for-profit business. Given that definitions of volunteering are generally centered on a lack of expectation of compensation, there is often natural resistance to the connection of volunteering with human resource management. Even within nonprofit organizations, management of programs often separates HR (paid) and volunteer (unpaid) into separate functions. But both human resource management and volunteer management focus on overlapping elements of recruiting, hiring, training, placing, managing, and (occasionally) terminating individuals. Additionally, research has shown that volunteering by employees can have positive benefits for employees in the workplace as well as improved corporate social responsibility (CSR) reputations for the organization (Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2021; Pajo & Lee, 2011). As such, volunteer motivation is both connected to, and an emerging focus for, HR managers in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

In this article we have proposed a new way of viewing volunteer motivation and decision making. Our theory is built upon the more general foundation of image theory. Looking through these lenses yields a more nuanced and complete view of a phenomenon that is an important part of individual and organization life.

Credit authorship contribution statement

Andrea R. Neely: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – reviewing & editing; **Mark L. Lengnick-Hall:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – reviewing & editing; **Michelle D. Evans:** Writing – original draft, Writing – reviewing & editing.

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