The Unique Value of Volunteering for Recipients of Support: an Experimental Approach

Introduction

The upbringing of children is a complex issue. In contrast to what people might think, not only parents or caregivers are involved in this process, but also many other parties. Informal networks (i.e., family, friends and the neighborhood) play a supportive and crucial role in raising children (Dewey et al., 1988; de Winter, 2000, 2007). However, in western societies, this role of informal networks has decreased in recent years (Hoek, 2008; Schuyt & Schuyt, 2006). As a result, parents increasingly rely on more formally organized institutions such as schools, day-care and human service organizations (governmental or not-for-profit) for providing parental support. This shift in balance makes it important to gain a better understanding of how clients (i.e., children, adolescents, but also their parents) can benefit the most from these services.

One likely factor to affect the quality of services provided is that the support for children, adolescents and their parents can come from paid workers as well as volunteers. An obvious rationale for the use of volunteers is that it is a cost-effective way of delivering services (Brudney, 2011). But in doing so, organizations tend to overlook that volunteers might actually provide a value to clients that differs from paid workers. Intriguingly, this potential unique value of volunteers for clients has not only been overlooked by organizations, but also by scholars.

In this article, we aim to address this gap in the literature by comparing and examining the value of volunteer workers and paid workers for clients (i.e., children, adolescents and their parents). Based on previous research and a conducted experiment among students of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, we will demonstrate that specific qualities of volunteers can sometimes result in more positive perceptions, evaluations, attitudes and reactions of clients.

The difference between volunteers and paid workers

Before we will zoom in on the unique value of volunteers in comparison to paid workers, it is important to discuss how volunteers actually differ from paid workers. First of all, volunteers can be defined as individuals who donate their time, skills, or services to an agency or organization without obligation and without receiving direct financial compensations for their work (Cnaan et al., 1996). Volunteering therefore differs from paid work, because volunteering is an act of free will, with no expectations of monetary rewards. At the same time, the division of tasks and responsibilities between volunteers and paid workers seems to be a complex issue, as their roles within organizations can be similar or complimentary, but also completely different (Handy et al., 2008).

Furthermore, paid workers and volunteers not only differ in the actual tasks they perform, but also in how they psychologically approach these tasks (Allen, 1987; Pearce, 1983). As stated by Laczo & Hanisch (1999, p. 459, following Allen, 1987; Pearce, 1983), *"holding a paid job and volunteering are, by nature, different processes, and the two likely represent very different psychological approaches to participation in an organization."*

Volunteers often have different reasons for joining organizations, such as identifying with core values of the organization or a need for having meaningful social interactions. Volunteers might also care strongly about being recognized and valued by the organization, and when volunteers' expectations are not met, their participation will likely decrease or might even lead to withdrawal from their organization (Farmer & Fedor, 1999). Additionally, there is empirical evidence that suggests that volunteers might be motivated by different needs. Boezeman and Ellemers (2009) showed that the job attitudes of volunteers and paid workers are affected by satisfaction of the three important human needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (derived from Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, 2000). Importantly, whereas the job satisfaction of volunteers was primarily predicted by satisfied relatedness needs (i.e., having meaningful relations with others), paid workers primarily derive their job satisfaction from satisfied autonomy needs (i.e., having a certain degree over their own affairs). Thus, volunteers appear to driven more by relational concerns.

Given that volunteers might perform different tasks (and/or perform those tasks differently), that they are driven by different needs and personality attributes, and that they are not paid for their services, it stands to reason that volunteers are also perceived and evaluated differently by clients (i.e., the recipients of support) than paid workers (Ellis, 2010; Ronel et al., 2009).

Experimental results of the perceived difference between volunteers and paid staff

To examine whether clients really perceive and evaluate volunteers and paid staff differently in practice, an experiment was conducted under students of the Rotterdam School of Management, the business school of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. 122 respondents (51.7% male) participated in this study, with a mean age of 20.7 years old. These respondents were presented with the following scenario: they were asked to imagine being a student (of this university) that was having difficulties with concentrating on studying due to some developments in their personal life. Consequently, their study results were below expectations. They had had a meeting with their student counselor, they had been assigned to a mentor program that was designed to support students with personal and study-related problems. Upon reading this scenario, they were introduced to the volunteer/paid worker manipulation. Half of the participants read that their mentor had volunteered to become a mentor and was unpaid. The other half of the participants read that their mentor was paid and hired by the university. We then introduced them to our measures that focused on participants' perceptions, and evaluations of, and attitudes and reactions to their mentor.

Client perceptions of volunteers

First of all, we examined how clients perceive those who help them. According to Ames, Flynn and Weber (2004), the perceived underlying motives of people's actions are important predictors for how we evaluate these persons. Weber (2001) made a distinction between three possible underlying motives that explain how people decide to engage in social decisions (e.g. helping): *affect-based, cost-benefit* and *role-based* decision making.

Affect-based decision making takes place when the helper decides to act based on positive feelings toward the recipient. Cost-benefit decision-making occurs when the helper deliberately weighs potential rewards and costs of the helping behaviour for him/herself. Finally, role-based decision-making emerges in contexts in which helping is in line with the organizational or formal role of the helper. Thus, when trying to understand the helpful actions of others, "we often pay close attention to whether others decide to help from the heart (affect), from the head (cost-benefit), or by the book (roles)" (Ames et al., 2004, p. 472).

When the helper decides to act based on positive feelings towards the client, it indicates that the helper does this out of intrinsic and genuine concerns. In contrast, , when someone helps because he/she will get something in return (like cost-benefit analysis suggests), or because it is line with his/her organizational role, this is more likely to be interpreted as a helper acting out of obligation (Ames, Flynn and Weber, 2004). in line with this, Allen and Rush (1998) distinguish between altruistic motives and instrumental motives. Thus, (perceived) altruism might also be an important element of the voluntary relationship rather than the relationship with paid workers. Indeed, Haski-Leventhal (2009) argues that altruism and volunteerism are inevitably related. There seems to be strong similarities between the personal traits of altruism and helping others/volunteering (Haski-Leventhal, 2009). According to Ronel (2006), clients often perceive volunteers to be altruistic, even when volunteers do not purely act out of altruism. Taken together, we expected that volunteers would be more likely to be perceived as altruists and helping out of positive affect rather than out of instrumental motives or role obligations.

Experimental results

In our experiment we included several items that were combined into three different measures: *altruism, affect-based helping and role-based helping*. First of all, we found that participants who read about the volunteering mentor perceived their mentor to be more altruistic (e.g., willing to do things that are not part of their tasks/in their own time) than participants who read about a paid volunteer. Second, participants attributed more positive affect (i.e., more sincere and dedicated support) to the volunteer mentor.

Finally, the participants more strongly believed that the paid mentor was helping them primarily because it was the mentor's role, or because the mentor got something in return for his/her help (i.e., role-based, or instrumental helping). Taken together, these findings were in line with our predictions: clients attribute more positive affect and altruism to volunteers. In contrast, they attribute more role-based or instrumental helping to paid workers.

Client Evaluations: affect-based trust, and competence based trust

Because recipients make different attributions about the underlying motives of volunteers- and paid helpers' actions, it follows that recipients might also evaluate volunteer and paid helpers differently (Ames et al., 2004). Indeed, when recipients perceive volunteers as acting out of genuine and altruistic concerns rather than instrumental concerns or role obligations, they will likely also have more positive evaluations of and attitudes toward volunteers compared to paid workers (Allen & Rush, 1998; Ames et al., 2004; McCullough et al., 2001). McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larsson (2001) argue that people are more grateful when receiving benefits from people who intentionally are willing to put in effort and costs (e.g., time) without their effort being determined by a role-based relationship with the beneficiary.

Not only might volunteers be perceived as altruistic and that they might cause more positive affect and evaluations in clients, they also might add value by being perceived as a trustworthy party. Trust has been defined as a "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). So, trust gives individuals a sense that they will not be taken advantage of by the other party (Porter et al., 1975) and that the other does what is expected rather than what is feared (Deutsch, 1973). Many scholars state that trust is an important force that shapes and smoothens human interactions (e.g., Fukuyama, 1995; Hardin, 2002; Kramer & Tyler, 1996), and numerous benefits of trust for individuals as well as organizations and society have been found (Kramer & Cook, 2004). In the specific context of childrearing, trust might particularly play an essential role. On the one hand, a child is often dependent on caregivers for developing trust in others.

According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1982), if children successfully develop trust they will feel safe and secure in this world. And on the other hand, the development of trusting relationships not only is important for children, but also for their parents. After all, parents sometimes have to depend on daycare centers, schools and after-school programs to provide a safe and protective learning environment for their children (Gilligan, 1998). Given the (inter)personal and vulnerable nature of such interactions, trust should play a crucial role in the relationships between children and caregivers (paid and unpaid).

Empirical evidence in the social-psychological literature (McAllister, 1995) shows that trust can have *cognitive* and *affective* foundations (Lewis & Wiegert, 1985). Cognition-based trust involves a calculative and instrumental assessment of information (Chua et al., 2008). Beliefs on competence and responsibility (Butler, 1991; Cook & Wall, 1980) as well as reliability and dependability have been found to be important elements in the development (and maintenance) of trusting relationships (Zucker, 1986). In contrast, affect-based trust involves empathy, rapport and self-disclosure (Chua et al., 2008). More specifically, affective foundations of trust are derived from the emotional bonds between individuals (Lewis & Wiegert, 1985), for instance when people invest emotionally in relationships, express genuine care and concern for the welfare of the other party, and believe in the intrinsic value of such relationships (Pennings & Woiceshyn, 1987; Rempel et al., 1985). Not surprisingly, the difference between cognition-based trust and affect-based trust has respectively been compared to trusting with the *head,* and trusting with the *heart* (Chua et al., 2008). Cognition-based trust and affect-based trust differ experientially and have distinct antecedents and outcomes, and thus have to be regarded as distinct forms of interpersonal trust rather than a higher level of trust (Drolet & Morris, 2000; Kramer, 1999; McAllister, 1995). However, this does not mean that these two types of trust are not related. Rather, it has been argued that some level of cognitive-based trust may be necessary for affect-based trust to develop (McAllister, 1995). As a result, affect-based trust is sometimes regarded as a more special and a less superficial type of trust than cognition-based trust. Furthermore, it appears that affect-based trust is more stable, enduring and generalizable over situations (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister,

1995). Therefore, organizations that provide services in the context of child rearing should particularly benefit from stimulating affect-based trust.

However, given the special and relational nature of affect-based trust, it might be hard for organization to develop such enduring and stable trust relationships with clients. Several scholars provide reasons to believe that interactions with volunteers might particularly provide foundations for affect-based trust. First of all, volunteers are more likely to be attentive to the relational aspects of their contacts with clients (Nelson, 2000, in Netting et al., 2000). Second, the altruistic nature of the work of volunteers who donate their time out of free will without receiving monetary rewards might play a key role. In a similar manner to how perceived motives behind other people's actions affect evaluations and perceptions (Ames et al., 2004), the underlying motives of the actions of relationship partners also provide an important foundation for affect-based trust (McAllister, 1995). Research on attribution theory has shown that when displays of interpersonal care and concern are perceived as personally chosen rather than role described, this can be critical for the development of affect-based trust (Clark et al., 1986; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelly, 1979; Rempel et al., 1985). Taken together, the above suggests that volunteers might be more likely than paid professionals to build affect-based trust in clients.

Experimental results

We measured affect-based trust with several items. First of all, we found that participants with a volunteer mentor perceived that they could express more freely their ideas, feelings and expectations to their mentor. They also were more willing to open themselves to volunteer mentors than to paid mentors and felt a better emotional connection. Furthermore, the participants experienced a far greater distance between themselves and paid mentors than between themselves and volunteer mentors. Finally, we also found that participants with a volunteer mentor felt more that their mentor truly listens to what the participant has to say. Taken together, these findings indicate that clients perceive more affect-based trust with volunteer mentors than with paid mentors.

Whereas volunteer mentors appear to build more affect-based trust in clients, the opposite seems true for competence-based trust. Indeed, participants with a paid mentor perceive their mentor to be more competent than participants with a volunteer mentor. Furthermore, participants with a paid mentor believe that their mentor has more knowledge to help them than participants with a volunteer mentor. Finally, we found that participants with a paid mentor believed that their mentor was more committed to protecting sensitive information than participants with a volunteer mentor. Overall, it appears that participants experience more affect-based trust with volunteer mentors, but more competence-based trust with paid mentors.

Recipients (behavioural) reactions to volunteers

In the previous sections we proposed and showed how recipients might perceive and evaluate volunteers more positively and develop more affect-based trust relationships with volunteer helpers compared to paid workers. Because of this, it stands to reason that clients also react more positively to volunteers compared to unpaid workers. Indeed, given that they perceive volunteers to be willing to spend their costly free time with them, recipients might be more motivated to reciprocate the behavior of volunteers (McCullough et al, 2001). Moreover, when recipients of help belief that helpers relate to them in a non-calculative and affectionate manner, recipients likely have a greater willingness to interact and cooperate with the helper, and continue this interaction in the future (Ames et al., 2004). Likewise, we expect that clients might sometimes be more open to the influence of the volunteer compare to the paid worker, for instance by being a positive role model.

<u>Experimental results</u>

In our experiment the participants had to indicate the extent to which their mentor had an influence on them. Participants with a volunteer mentor perceived their mentor to have a slightly higher influence than participants with a paid mentor. We also look at the willingness to cooperate with a mentor. Participants with a volunteer mentor were more willing to cooperate with their mentor than respondents with a paid mentor. Thus, our findings suggest that clients are sometimes more willing to accept influence and are more likely to cooperate with volunteers compared to paid workers.

Peers and non-peer helpers

It is important to note that -in addition to manipulating whether the mentor was paid or a volunteer- we also manipulated whether the mentor was a peer or not. Peer mentors were students of the same university, while non-peer mentors were not students.

The reason for doing this, is that peer-to-peer relationships are often seen as valuable in interactions with volunteers. That is, an important aspect of peer-to-peer relationships is that peers share the same background in terms of age, experience, illness, worldview, neighborhood or recreational pursuit (Brown & Bakken, 2011; Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011). This social similarity between individuals has been found to positively influence trust development (McAllister, 1995). According to Laurens (2009) peers can also serve as role models, because they understand those with whom they share the same background. Therefore, peer coaching can be considered an important success factor (Nichols, 1997) in the development and upbringing of children. We therefore expected that the positive effects of a volunteer helper relative to the paid helper (e.g., perceived altruism, affect based trust, cooperative relations) would be even more pronounced for the peer volunteer.

Unfortunately, in contrast to previous studies, our findings on this matter were inconclusive. This could be explained by our manipulation: the only information we provided about the peers and non-peers was that they were also students or not. Previous studies that looked at peers, often used a more specific and less abstract type of peers in a much stronger situation (e.g., ex-gang members that now work as a community helper).

Conclusion

Previous research on the value of volunteering mainly focused on the cost-effectiveness and the value for society and volunteers themselves. However, the unique value of volunteering for clients has been overlooked by many scholars. In this paper, we aimed to address this gap in literature by comparing the value of paid workers and volunteers for clients. Following insights from the psychology literature, we argued that different characteristics of volunteers and paid workers might affect perceptions, evaluations, attitudes and the behaviour of clients.

As can be concluded from the results of our survey, clients do perceive a difference between paid and unpaid helpers and sometimes grant more value to unpaid helpers in several areas. First of all, we looked at affect-based helping, role-based helping and instrumental based helping. Our research shows that clients perceive more altruism and more 'helping from the heart' when they are being helped by a volunteer than when they are helped by paid workers. In contrast, they feel that paid workers more likely help because it's part of their role and use cost-benefit decision making in helping them.

Second, we looked at affect-based trust and competence or cognitive based trust. As our experiment showed, we can say that participants perceive more affect-based trust with volunteer mentors. In contrast, they perceive more competence based trust with paid mentors than with volunteer mentors. A possible explanation is that clients feel that the paid mentor is a trained professional, which can be linked with the role-based helping. Finally, we examined client's reactions to volunteers. Clients were less influence by paid workers and more willing to cooperate with volunteers. This could be explained by the higher affect-based helping and affect-based trust that clients perceive while being helped by a volunteer.

To conclude, our findings show that volunteers can sometimes have an unique and additional value for clients compared to paid workers. This unique value seems to be of a psychological nature: the fact that volunteers act out of free will without receiving a monetary reward for their work has positive effects on the perceptions, evaluations and reactions of clients. Of course, this does not imply that the role of paid workers becomes redundant. In fact, our research also shows that clients often have more trust in the competence of paid workers. Indeed, paid workers might be better qualified than volunteers in certain instances, for instance in complex situations (Netting et al., 2000). Ultimately, the question should not be how we can replace paid workers by volunteers, but how organization can apply volunteers and paid workers together in the most efficient manner for not only organizations, but also for their clients. We hope that the present study offers some interesting first answers on this question.

The research that is proposed in this article is part of a larger project on the influence of volunteers in the upbringing of children. Therefore, the focus of the paper lies on how the support of volunteers and paid workers affect children and their parent. We believe however that the mechanisms that are proposed in the article should also be relevant for the value of volunteers in more general (non-childrearing) contexts. Naturally, the present article only takes a first step towards a better understanding of the value of volunteers for client and more literature needs to be reviewed as well as more research needs to be conducted. However, this research provides a very important first step for conducting further interesting research.

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