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Is a social marketing framework the key to promoting volunteer participation?

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Abstract

This paper explores the suitability of a conceptual social marketing model, the MOA (motivation, opportunity and ability) framework (Rothschild, 1999), to volunteering to determine whether it has the potential to promote volunteering with its associated socially desirable benefits. In doing so, the individual components of the model are discussed from a social marketing perspective and communalities in the volunteering research highlighted. This discussion culminates in the presentation of an adapted MOA framework, the practical implications of which for volunteer-involving organisations are briefly discussed and an agenda for future research proposed.

Keywords: volunteering, social marketing, MOA framework

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Introduction

This paper explores the suitability and application of a conceptual social marketing model, the MOA (motivation, opportunity and ability) framework (Rothschild, 1999), to volunteering to determine whether it has the potential to promote volunteering and the socially desirable benefits associated with this prosocial behaviour. In doing so, a brief background on the concepts of volunteering and social marketing is provided. Subsequently, each of the individual components of the MOA model is discussed in detail.

Volunteering

Formal volunteering, which takes place through an organisation, is defined by Volunteering Australia (2005, p.1) as:

An activity which takes place through not for profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- *to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;*
- *of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;*
- *for no financial payment; and*
- *in designated volunteer positions only.*

Formal volunteering incorporates diverse activities and a range of settings. In 2006, 5.2 million Australians volunteered (34% of the population) (ABS, 2007), predominantly in sport, recreation and other community settings. This rate of participation has been steadily increasing since the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted their initial Voluntary Work Survey in 1995. A participation rate of 24% has increased to 34% in 2006 (FaHCSIA, 2008).

The traditional, more researched, view of volunteering is that of the volunteer making a commitment to service an organisation(s) on an ongoing and regular basis. A more temporally based alternative to traditional volunteering has emerged in recent years. Macduff (1991) first coined the term 'episodic volunteering' to refer to one-off volunteering assignments that offer a flexible relationship with an organisation. Current trends overwhelmingly suggest that work-life balance issues (from employment, family, leisure) are increasingly affecting the time both current and potential volunteers can commit to volunteering (ABS, 2007; Merrill, 2006). A clear picture is yet to emerge as to what extent motives are shared for people undertaking traditional versus newer forms of volunteering. A UK survey has discerned that ongoing, regular volunteers show a broader range of motivations for volunteering, as opposed to episodic, occasional volunteers who indicate fewer reasons for their uptake of volunteering (Hutin, 2008). Researchers have found, however, that volunteers are rarely purely altruistic in their motives for volunteering, rather they expect to benefit in some way from their activities (Moore, 1985). As such, the term *pro-social* is often used in preference to altruism as it suggests that volunteers are socially minded but also expect to gain from their activities (Pearce, 1993).

Social marketing

The conceptual framework for this study is based on social marketing. Social marketing aims to promote positive social change at individual and group level. While some programs focus on changes at the group level, there is recognition that individual action is at the heart of successful social marketing programs (Pannell, 1999). The concept of social marketing has been applied to a diverse range of social issues (Donovan and Henley, 2003), including pro-environmental behaviour change programs (Altman and Petkus, 1994; Kotler, Roberto and Lee, 2002), anti-smoking (Hastings, 2003) and children's' health (Meyer, *et al.* 2004). The MOA framework involving motivation, opportunity and ability was proposed as a guiding model for social marketing interventions (Rothschild, 1999). Andreasen (2002) has advocated that social issues could be identified in terms of whether they are a motivation, opportunity, and/or an ability type problem and complementary interventions can be designed for the individual, community or at the overall program level. Researchers have examined individual components of the model, (Cameron and Pierce 1994; Osbaldiston and Sheldon 2003; Pelletier 2002; Pieters 1991; Pieters *et al.* 1998; Robben and Poiesz 1993; Ryan *et al.* 2003; Ryan and Deci 2000; Simmons and Wildmar 1990; Urdan 2003); however, few have examined the model in its entirety. Binney (2007) tested the MOA model in relation to a pro-environmental behaviour change intervention and found that it provided an understanding of the interactions that can lead to a durable behaviour change. As suggested by Andreasen (2002), there are possibly other applications for the model. To this end, the components of the MOA model will be examined in turn and their relevance for promoting volunteering discussed.

Motivation (M)

Motivation is an integral component of the MOA framework and the study of motivation has direct relevance and application in current social change research (Reeve, 2001). The following discussion will consider the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of motivation as they have been applied in relation to social marketing. Extrinsic motivation can be defined as the type of motivation that is controlled by externalities that are not part of the activity or behaviour they are influencing (Petri and Govern, 2004). The use of incentives to encourage and discourage behaviour is well established in social marketing (Kotler, *et al.* 2002). Some classic extrinsic incentives are financial rewards and the use of more subliminal incentives such as guilt, the chance to impress others, such as neighbours, and social recognition in the community. However, Dwyer, *et al.* (1993) reported that incentives and disincentives were not effective in producing long-term socially desirable behaviour change in targeted audiences.

Intrinsic motivation is defined as enacting behaviour for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable external consequence (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Research has shown that intrinsic motivation is positively related to durable behaviour change (Binney, 2007; McKenzie-Mohr, *et al.* 1995; Osbaldiston and Sheldon, 2003; Ryan, Erickson and DeYoung, 2003; Seguin, Pelletier and Hunsley, 1999). That is, those who are intrinsically motivated are encouraged to act by the actual task itself and perform well because they enjoy the behaviour or the challenge of completing the task. With intrinsic motivation, the underlying motives for the behaviour are fully internalised by the individual (Deci and Vansteenkiste, 2004). These individuals believe that the behaviour is interesting, enjoyable, challenging and provides inherent satisfaction. But not all tasks can provide intrinsic motivation and in these situations other motivation types such as extrinsic may be more appropriate.

Volunteering is an activity that has been the focus of research examining the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Pearce (1983) found that volunteers working alongside paid staff were more likely to report social and service motives as being important to them, rather than an intrinsic motivation of finding the work itself interesting. It has been suggested that intrinsic motivators are of the greatest importance in attracting volunteers, but extrinsic factors may be equally important in retaining volunteers (National Trust, 1997). The inconclusive nature of this research suggests there is scope to include both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in any conceptual model that seeks to explain and promote volunteering.

Opportunity (O) and Ability (A)

An individual may be motivated; however this motivation may not lead to a behaviour change if there are constraining factors such as low opportunity. In a social marketing context, opportunity occurs when the individual is not limited in their desire to act by factors in their external environment (Rothschild, 1999). These aspects include information, time, financial resources and outside controls. Similar facilitating and inhibiting factors are highlighted in research on barriers to volunteering. Lack of time has been overwhelmingly cited as the main barrier to volunteering (Holmes, 2008; Sundeen, Raskoff and Garcia, 2007; Musick and Wilson, 2008). Kohut (1997) found that twice as many adults in full-time employment wished to have more time to volunteer. Paid work is not, however, the only factor which may reduce time available to volunteer. Other barriers include time spent commuting (Putnam, 2000), family commitments (Musick and Wilson, 2008) and time constraints in retirement (Holmes, 2008). Poor health is also a major barrier to volunteering (Sundeen, *et al.* 2007). The use of information in promoting social marketing interventions is particularly important and its impact can be increased by the use of a relevant and credible information source (Dearing, *et al.* 1996). Informing current and potential volunteers about how to overcome barriers to volunteering in order to participate is also important, especially since some constraints to volunteering may be perceived rather than actual (Lockstone, *et al.* 2009; Warburton, Paynter and Petriwskyj, 2006).

Ability comprises the knowledge and skill set of the individual and is related to the observed behaviour (Pieters, *et al.* 1998). Although an individual may have the intention, or motivation, to behave in a socially desirable way, a specific behaviour may not occur if their ability is inadequate for the required task. Therefore inadequate skills can be a barrier to performance of socially desirable behaviour (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000). Lack of skill, perceived and actual, may also be a barrier to volunteering. Studies have shown that those with a higher human capital (higher incomes, professionals, highly educated) are more likely to volunteer (Freeman, 1997; Miller McPherson and Rotolo, 1996; Tang, 2006). This is not to suggest that low skilled workers and the unemployed are unsuited to volunteering, rather the pathways for them taking up the activity may not be as obvious to them or straightforward. Research establishing links between various socio-economic factors and volunteering is far from conclusive (Rochester, 2006) and often fails to provide little more than descriptive insights. The issue of skills as a barrier to volunteering may gain even greater prominence in years to come given that the increasing regulatory environment governing many volunteering-involving organisations (e.g. non-for-profits) is leading to the professionalisation of volunteering practice.

Socially Desirable Behaviour - Volunteering

In the context of the current paper, the socially desirable behaviour being promoted is volunteering. In both its ongoing and episodic forms, the potential impacts of volunteering in terms of generating positive social change are many. Not only does the volunteer directly benefit from the activity (e.g. building social networks, skill development), but by the formal definition of volunteering (Volunteering Australia, 2005), other parties also benefit as a result of the volunteers' actions (e.g. the direct recipients of volunteers efforts, their host organisations and the community in general). Building on Putnam's work (2000), volunteering has been viewed as a key generator of social capital, a resource which like physical and human capital, can be used by both individuals and communities for good.

As discussed above, the components of the MOA model provide an understanding of the process involved in enacting socially desirable behaviour changes. The social marketing research informing each component shares commonalities with the findings of volunteer research relating to motivation and barriers to participation. As such, at face value there is reason to expect that application of the MOA framework has the potential to assist in promoting volunteering as an activity and the desirable benefits associated with this prosocial behaviour. Table 1 has been adapted from Rothschild's (1999) framework to suggest how these components can be combined. The model provides a basis of screening or segmenting potential volunteers and assisting those organisations (e.g. non-for-profits, government) with an interest in securing volunteer resources at an operational and policy level to better target their resources towards those prone to adopt this behaviour. For example, different appeals could be made to prospective volunteers based upon whether they are firstly motivated to volunteer and subsequently have the opportunity and ability to do so. In considering motivation, appeals could be designed around either or both intrinsic and extrinsic motives, keeping in mind that the motives that initially attract volunteers may not be the ones that sustain them in the activity.

According to the proposed model, the next barriers to adopting the behaviour change to volunteering, by those who are motivated, may be explained by opportunity and ability. Those who are motivated and have the opportunity and ability are 'prone to volunteer', unlike those for whom the latter two components are absent who are considered 'unable to volunteer'. This segmentation provides a worthwhile and tenable focus for those organisations seeking to recruit motivated people to volunteer, who for perceived or actual reasons do not feel they currently have the opportunity or ability to do so. The next major category comprises of those who are unmotivated to volunteer. This group presents the most barriers that need to be overcome and as such are likely to be 'resistant to volunteer'. Transforming this group to level two or three of the MOA framework may require more resources than volunteer-involving organisations are prepared to invest in order to bring about a behaviour change for them to become volunteers.

Table 1: MOA framework and volunteering

Level	Component		Status
1	Motivation		
	YES – Intrinsic	✓	(Motivated, proceed to Level 2)
	YES - Extrinsic	✓	(Motivated, proceed to Level 2)
	YES - Intrinsic & Extrinsic	✓	(Motivated, proceed to Level 2)
	NO	✗	(Resistant to volunteering)
2	Opportunity		
	YES	✓	(Motivated & opportunity, proceed to Level 3)
	NO	✗	(Motivated, currently unable to adopt)
3	Ability		
	YES	✓	(Motivated, opportunity & ability, prone to volunteer)
	NO	✗	(Motivated, opportunity, currently unable to adopt)

Conclusion and future research

The current paper applies a social marketing framework to volunteering to explore whether it has the potential to assist in promoting this prosocial behaviour with its associated socially desirable benefits. At face value, communalities in the social marketing and volunteering literature appears to suggest that testing of the adapted MOA framework (Rothschild, 1999), proposed in its exploratory form in Table 1, may deliver on this potential.

The implications of applying this framework in practice, once tested, is that it offers a behavioural basis for not-for-profits and other volunteer-involving organisations to segment potential volunteers and in doing so, potentially a means for them honing their recruitment and training efforts towards securing people prone to take up volunteering, whether it be on an ongoing or episodic basis.

The social marketing and volunteering literature provides insights into some of the theories and associated instruments that can be drawn upon from both spheres to test the various MOA constructs. Binney (2007) used Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-determination Continuum of Motivation as a basis for examining the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for land managers adopting a pro-environmental behaviour change intervention. Pearce's (1983) study applied Staw's (1976) sufficiency-of-justification hypothesis to explain the intrinsic motives of volunteers working alongside paid staff. A well-tested instrument for exploring volunteer's motivations that could be used in the current context is the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) developed by Clary, *et al.* (1998). This approach recognises that volunteers get involved in the activity for a range of reasons, reflecting different psychological functions, which may change over time. Moving on, the opportunity and ability components could benefit from visiting what work has been done on examining constraints or barriers to leisure participation. Volunteering, in particular has long been associated with the leisure discipline (Henderson, 1981), as its unobligated nature means it shares common motives for participation with other leisure experiences (Cuskelly, Harrington and Stebbins, 2003; Holmes, 2003). Research on constraints to leisure participation dates back several decades, with a well developed constraints typology (Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson and Godbey, 1991) and testing mechanisms (Hubbard and Mannell, 2001; Son, Mowen and Kersetter, 2008). Regardless of the lens adopted, social marketing, volunteering or leisure participation, all these literatures can blend together to assist in promoting positive social

change at individual and group level, something which the adopted framework in the current paper ultimately aims to facilitate.

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