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Exploring the Nature of Volunteer and Leadership and Its Implications for Sport Management

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the role of leaders of sport organizations from the perspectives of rank-and-file volunteers. Specifically, the study explores which factors are important in leading volunteers and how rank-and-file interact with their leaders. **Research design, data, and methodology:** This study reviews a comprehensive literature on volunteer and leadership theories which are trait theory, behavior theory, and contingency theory. Given the comprehension of prior structure of knowledge on leadership, the study provides a structure of knowledge on volunteer and leadership in sport context and discusses managerial implications for leaders in sport organization. **Results:** With an exploration of sport leadership, this study proposes a volunteer classification model which presents four-volunteer types: professional volunteer, company volunteer, general volunteer, and school volunteer. Furthermore, this study discussed managerial implications for sport organization leaders. **Conclusions:** Paid employees may be prepared to accept a job and its requirements mainly due to economic benefits. Volunteers, however, do not pursue economic benefits through their activity. Different types of motivation between paid employees and volunteers bring to surface how a leader influences volunteer effectively. A conceptual volunteer clarification model could be examined in real world situations. Insights for future studies were discussed.

Keywords: Volunteer, Leadership, Volunteer Classification Model, Leadership Theories, Sport Organization

JEL Classification Code: L20, L30, I18, I19, J24, J28

1. Introduction

Leadership has long been recognized as a critical component that influences organizational culture and its members' behavior (Farrell, 2018; Sarros et al., 2002; Vito, 2020). The primary reason that scholars have been attracted to leadership studies may lie in the belief that leadership contributes to enhancing organizational performance with strong associations with other individual, organizational and contextual variables including learning, motivation, achievement, satisfaction, organizational structure, culture, and so on (Arif et al., 2019; Farrell, 2018; Zaccaro et al., 2018). Over the past 20 years, leadership theory and research has been constantly evolved and applied to a various sport sector with a multilevel approach (Elgar, 2016; Ibrahim, 2016; Kovach, 2018). It is judged that leadership is a significant construct in sport organizational behavior model and it is still important in that leadership frequently predicts organizational outcomes, members' satisfaction, turnover rate, and other indicators in sport context (Elgar, 2016; Zaccaro et al., 2018).

Although there are various definitional approaches to leadership, prior organizational behavior literature is in agreement with the following characteristics of leadership: 1) leadership is a behavioral process; 2) leadership is interpersonal in nature; and 3) leadership influences and motivates members toward group and organizational goals (Arif et al., 2019; Aslam et al., 2022; Barbuto & Xu, 2006; Farrell, 2018; Vasquez et al., 2021). There are

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four major theories concerning leadership: the trait theory, the leader behavior theory, the situational leadership theory, and new or current leadership theories. Although each has taken a distinctive rationale to explain leadership, all of them share a similar perspective on three characteristics of leadership discussed above.

Given the significance of leadership in sport, sport management studies have applied leadership theories to sport organizations (e.g., athletic departments or national sport organizations) and their leaders (e.g., team managers or coaches) (Doherty, 1997). For instance, Kovach (2018) examined trait theories, behavioral theories, path-goal theory, exchange theory, and transformational leadership in sport achievement contexts. Ibrahim (2016) explored managerial leadership by reviewing several theories including trait theory, behavioral theory, situational contingency theory, situational leadership model and transactional/transformation approaches to leadership. Given this, he discussed managerial leadership functions traits and skills, effective managerial leadership styles and challenges in sport organization.

Scholars have recognized the importance of volunteers and employees in sport organization. To date, however, there has not been enough efforts of comprehensively applying leadership theories to sport volunteer and leadership studies (Peachey et al., 2015). If any, those studies have concentrated on volunteer leaders who have central positions in the given organizations. This study aims at examining the role of leaders from a perspective of rank-and-file volunteers. Specifically, the study explores which factors are important in leading volunteers and how rank-and-filers interact with their leaders. Given the purpose of the study, this paper is composed of two main parts: understanding the volunteer and applying theories to sport organization. This section provides a comprehensive review of volunteer and suggests a volunteer classification model we developed via a review.

2. Understanding the Volunteering

2.1. The Value of Volunteering

In 2021, more than 60.7 million Americans volunteered through an organization which contributes \$122.9 billion in economic value (United States Census Bureau, 2023). Prior literature posits that volunteering for sport society provides benefits for three major stakeholders: volunteers, organizations, and society. From the volunteers' position, the significance is found not only in developing a variety of skill for communication, teamwork, leadership, public speaking, accounting and organization management, but also in building job opportunities, psychological rewards including mental wellbeing, a sense of part of a team, and a sense of achievement and so forth (Cho et al., 2023; Nichols et al., 2019). From the perspectives of sport organizations, volunteering represents a cheap source of work, mostly in the fields where there are several reasons for the work not being done by professionals, or possibly where it saves time for the employees who can more intensively perform other activities (Eva et al., 2014). It is of economic significance not only in costs and expenses in the non-profit organizations' management, but also on the macro-economic level (Eva et al., 2014). From the marketing point of view, sport organizations are able to create goodwill via the media and build a positive image, which can be used in acquiring new volunteers and in generating new forms of stimuli for them (Eva et al., 2014). Given this, sport organizations posit that paid and unpaid volunteers are important for the economic sustainability of a worldwide model of sport (Economic Dimension of Volunteering in Sport, 2023). Given the tangible and intangible rewards volunteers and organizations gained, consequently, society could be a final beneficiary. It is reasonable that a multilevel of societal values are facilitated through interactions among rewards sport volunteers and organizations gained above.

2.2. Volunteer vs. Paid Employees

Who is the volunteer and how volunteers differ from paid employees? A sport organization often operates based mainly upon five types of personnel, which include full-time employees, part-timers, volunteers, consultants, and outsourcing companies. Volunteers in sport can be defined as dedicated and interested individuals who donate their time, services, skills, and talents to a sport organization for no monetary compensation (Stebbins, 2013). Providing service without any monetary payment best distinguish volunteers from paid employees (Overgaard, 2019; Stebbins, 2013). Different from other types of personnel, volunteers can quit at any time if they are not satisfied or appreciated, if they feel that their efforts have no positive impacts, or if they are unhappy in any way (Willems & Dury, 2017).

Despite this clear distinction between volunteers and paid employees are considered to represent a given sport organization to the general public as well as to the organization's constituencies. Volunteers, therefore, need to be trained and motivated if a sport organization wants to make their service quality stable. Volunteers need to be motivated just as much as any paid employees do, although the ways to motivate volunteers can be different from those to encourage full- or part-time employees (Clerck et al., 2021).

The reason why effective leadership is more important for managing volunteers is that they need to be motivated by other means, not by monetary incentives. The conventional approaches to managing paid workers, therefore, must be considerably modified in the case of volunteers. Chelladurai (2001) argues that motivating volunteers and coordinating their activities is a significant component of sport management. In order for a leader to influence volunteers, s/he needs to understand their characteristics, such as different levels of skills, personalities, and motivations.

2.3. Classification of Volunteers

A volunteer may participate in an organization for several reasons such as learning and growing, helping others, cultivating friendships, using present skills and learning new skills, gaining work experience, repaying a debt to society, using leisure time more effectively, and so on (Chelladurai, 2001). For instance, some volunteers may have higher needs for their growth and power in an organization than for any other factors. Such a variety of needs in volunteering are related to different types of motivations. Caldwell and Andereck (1994) suggest three categories of motivation or incentives for volunteering: purposive incentives, solidary incentives, and material incentives. First, purposive incentives refer to those motivations to do something useful and contributing to society. Second, solidary incentives concern those motivations for social interactions, group identification, and networking. Finally, material incentives refer to tangible rewards such as perks and memorabilia.

A sport organization should consider the interests and abilities of individuals as well as tasks to be performed (Noordegraaf & Çelebi, 2015). The notion of matching individual needs to the jobs is essential to managing volunteers in sport organizations (Chelladurai, 2001). Some volunteers have desires for more challenging tasks like coaching a team, while others prefer to handle simpler and more routine tasks. It should be the major responsibility of the manager to assigning proper tasks to individual volunteers so that they can find the tasks challenging and satisfying.

Goals specify a direction for action and the specific quantity of work to be accomplished and, thus, they are one of the most important factors to evaluate organizational performance (Ayega & Muathe, 2018). Every sport organization has its own goals and objectives. The ultimate reason for an organization to recruit, train, and sustain volunteers is to achieve its goals. If an organization does not lead its volunteer members to its goals or if the volunteers have little interest in achieving the organizational goals rather than their own objectives, there will occur some goal conflicts between the organization and the volunteers (Englert et al., 2020). Another effort for an organization or its leaders should make, therefore, is to transfer individual goals to the organizational goals.

This study posits that volunteers are divided into four different categories: professional volunteer, company volunteer, general volunteer, and school volunteer. This classification of volunteers is based upon two criteria: the extent to which a volunteer possesses the job skills necessary for achieving organizational goals and objectives and level of motivation, as Figure 1 illustrates. Here, motivation can be defined as one's willingness to make efforts toward organizational goals as well as individual needs, as Robbins (2005) indicates. Likewise, the concept of motivation in this classification scheme is expanded to include both organizational and individual goals, and this approach is different from what Caldwell and Andereck (1994) define as volunteer motivation. Volunteers with high motivation should possess all the three elements: individual efforts, commitment to organizational goals, and strong individual needs. In this sense, the model of volunteer classification presented here helps to better understand the main characteristics of volunteers. We can also apply different leadership theories to each of the four types of volunteers.

- I. Professional Volunteer: Volunteers with high skills and high motivation (e.g., the committee members of a volunteer organization, volunteer coaches, or volunteer team doctor).
- II. Company Volunteer: Volunteers with high skills but low motivation (e.g. sponsor company volunteers or less motivated professional volunteers).
- III. General Volunteer: Volunteers with low skills but high motivation. Most rank-and-file volunteers can be included in this category (e.g., parking ushers or crowd-control volunteers)
- IV. School Volunteer: Volunteers with low skills and low motivation. Volunteers in this category tend to quit their jobs more easily than other types of volunteers.

| | | Volunteer Motivation | |
|-----------------|------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| | | High | Low |
| Volunteer Skill | High | I. Pro-Volunteer | II. Company Volunteer |
| | Low | III. General Volunteer | IV. School Volunteer |

Figure 1: A Volunteer Classification

2.4. Volunteer Satisfaction and Performance

If volunteers are one of the human inputs into a system, volunteer satisfaction and performance can be considered to be a way to evaluate organizational performance. A volunteer organization is dependent largely on the type of the task assigned and on the level of satisfaction that members derive from the task (Chellardurai, 2001). While the performance aspect is easy to measure because most organizations have clear standards, volunteer satisfaction is more difficult to assess because the degree of satisfaction is a matter of subjective evaluation. Volunteer satisfaction dimension can be divided into twelve sub-factors: work itself, task achievement, task convenience, stress factors, family, supervisor (instrumental), professionals, social acceptance, client, recognition, supervisor (expressive), and other volunteers. These factors can be employed as the yardsticks to evaluate individual satisfaction level. Both the unique and general characteristics of volunteers may bring both challenges and benefits which a sport organization and its leaders should deal with. Based upon the understanding of volunteers discussed so far, the next part will address a variety of leadership theories which are applicable to the different types of volunteers.

3. Theoretical Perspectives on Leadership and Its Implications for Sport Managers

Leadership is defined as the ability to influence a group or an individual toward the achievement of goals (Robbins, 2005). As mentioned above, effective leadership can enhance the organizational effectiveness such as high employee satisfaction. In this section, this essay will raise the following questions: How can we lead volunteers to commit to organizational goals while helping them satisfying their individual needs? What is the most appropriate leadership style in managing volunteers? And, finally, which leadership theory is the most illuminating for leading volunteers effectively? To answer these questions, four main leadership theories will be introduced and each of them will be connected with each of the four types of volunteers.

3.1. Trait Theory and Implications

The trait theory of leadership mainly concerns the personalities, and social, physical, and intellectual traits that differentiate leaders from non-leaders (Northcraft & Neale, 1994). The main components of leadership traits include three broad types: First, there are some unique physical factors such as height, weight, physique, appearance, and age. Second, researchers have examined ability characteristics such as intelligence, fluency of speech, scholarship, and knowledge. Finally, there are a wide range of personality features such as introversion-extroversion, dominance, personal adjustment, self-confidence, interpersonal sensitivity, and emotional control (Bryman, 1986).

The main concern of trait theorists has been which types of traits make effective leaders different from less effective ones or rank-and-filers (Tosi et al., 1994). For instance, effective leaders may be those who have strong ambition and energy, the desire to lead, self-confidence, intelligence, and job-relevant knowledge. Although these trait theories have been criticized by other leadership theorists, some recent studies have provided strong evidence that people, who are high self-monitors and who are highly flexible in adjusting their behaviors in different situations, are more likely to emerge as leaders in groups than low self-monitors (Robbins, 2005).

Although most people volunteer in the status of employees, some volunteers work in some leading positions. If a sport organization needs volunteer leaders such as athletic committee members or coaches, it should find out the type I volunteers, so-called professional volunteers. If the selected person is closer to the type II, the company volunteer, the organization should have the plans to motivate her or him. For instance, if s/he is motivated mainly by her or his own needs, the organization should try to make her or his individual needs into compatible with

organization goals and objectives.

3.2. Behavior Theory and Implications

Inconsistent findings from studies based upon the trait theory and its failure to consider leader-behavioral and situational factors made trait theories incapacitated in the middle of 1950. Leadership scholars turned into behavioral theories of leadership that focus on the specific leader behaviors distinguishing leaders from non-leaders. The main difference between trait and behavioral theories lies in their underlying assumptions. Trait theories assume that leaders are inborn, while behavior theories emphasize the possibility that leaders can be trained and educated. Representative of the studies based upon the behavior theory are Ohio State studies, Michigan studies, and the managerial grid.

Ohio state studies sought to identify independent dimensions of leader behavior. After reviewing over thousand dimensions, they narrowed these dimensions into two categories: initiating structure and consideration. The former refers to the extent to which a leader is likely to define and structure his or her role and those of subordinates in the search for goal attainment. The latter refers to the extent to which a person is likely to have job relationships that are characterized by mutual trust, respect for subordinate's ideas, and regard for their feelings. Leader shows concern for followers' comfort, well-being, status, and satisfaction. In conclusion, these Ohio state studies suggest that the high-high style generally produce positive results, although there have been found many exceptions indicating that situational factors need to be integrated into the theory (Robbins, 2005).

Michigan studies' concepts are also similar to those of the Ohio state studies. They proposed two dimensions of leader behavior: employee orientation and production orientation. Most importantly, these studies demonstrated that an employee-oriented leader has higher performance effectiveness than a production-oriented leader. Employee-oriented leaders are also associated with higher group productivity and higher job satisfaction (Robbins, 2005).

Blake and Mouton proposed a managerial grid based on the styles of "concern for People" and "concern for production." This model consists of a nine-by-nine matrix outlining 81 different leadership styles. Blake and Mouton concluded that the best manager has a 9/9 style (team management) rather than a 1/9 style (country club management), 9/1 style (authority-obedience), or 1/1 style (impoverished management). Their argument, however, has been criticized since there is little evidence that a 9/9 style is most effective in all situations. If we apply this grid to the four types of volunteers, we may find more proper matches between the two.

As Robbins (2005) point out, these behavioral studies emphasize concerns for tasks and people. These four type of leadership styles may be finely linked into four types of volunteers. The high-high leadership style of the Ohio State studies and a 9/9 style in the managerial grid will well match the type I volunteer in our model, if we do not consider other situational factors. The effective leader behavior such as high-high and a 9/9 leadership style leader may lead type II, III, and IV volunteers into type I volunteer. On the other hand, there seems to be somewhat different position with the results of Michigan studies, which focus on employee oriented leader achieving better group performance than that of product-oriented leader. However, if its research were designed for the individual performance rather than group, it may create the same results as the other behavioral studies.

3.3. Contingency Theory and Implications

The earlier research efforts discussed so far were successful in identifying and describing the relevant categories of leader behavior. Leadership theorists, however, have found that certain leader behaviors may be more effective in some situations and less effective in others (Tosi et al., 1994).

Under what circumstances would a given trait or behavior lead to better group performance and employee satisfaction? This is the central question of so-called situational theories or contingency theories. The main variables in these theories include the degree of structure in the task being performed, the quality of leader-member relations, the leaders position power, subordinates' role clarity, group norms, information availability, subordinate acceptance of leader decision, and subordinate maturity (Robbins, 2005). Several representative theories in this category are: Fiedler model, McClelland's model of managerial motivation, Hersey and Blanchard's situational theory, and path-goal theory.

Fiedler's contingency model is based upon the hypothesis that effective groups depend on an appropriate match between a leader's style of interactions with subordinates and on the degree to which the situation gives control and influence to the leader (Robbins, 2005). Fiedler believes that an individual's leadership style is fixed, suggesting that the leadership style of an individual can be evaluated through the least preferred co-worker (LPC) questionnaire. Through the LPC questionnaire, three situational criteria--leader-member relations, task structure, and position power-- can be matched with the leadership style. He demonstrates that task-oriented leaders tend to perform better in the situations that are either very favorable or very unfavorable to them. Relationship-oriented leaders, on the other hand, in moderately favorable situations.

In conclusion, we can change a leader to fit the situation or the situation to fit the leader. This can be done by restructuring tasks or by increasing or decreasing the power that the leader has to control various factors such as salary increase, promotions, and disciplinary actions (Robbins, 2005). Although the logic of the LPC is somewhat problematic, Fiedler's theory is useful especially in that it introduced the notion of contingency that different styles of leadership can be more successful in some organizations than in others (Northcraft & Neale, 1994). The type I volunteer (high-skills and high-motivation) in our model tends to provide very favorable situations, while the type IV volunteer (low-skills and low-motivation) is likely to contribute to very unfavorable situations. More task-oriented leaders, therefore, are more appropriate for leading the type I and IV volunteers. More relationship-oriented leaders may be more effective in managing other two types of volunteers who may provide moderately favorable situations.

Different human needs differently influence human behaviors. These needs can be divided into three categories: needs for affiliation, needs for achievement, and needs for power (Chelladurai, 2001). First, needs for affiliation refer to the desire to be liked and accepted by the group. A manager with high needs for affiliation may be less effective since s/he may easily compromise on various group rules in order to satisfy each employee's needs (Chelladurai, 2001). Second, needs for achievement can be defined as "the desire to do something better or more efficiently than it has been done before" (McClelland & Burnham, 2008). McClelland and Burnham demonstrate that high needs for achievement is more appropriate for an individual business or small firm because the success of small organizations often depends on the individual manager's ability or skill. Third, needs for power refer to "a desire to have impact, to be strong and influential" (McClelland & Burnham, 2008). These various types of human needs can apply to volunteers as well as to leaders. As mentioned earlier, individual needs are one of the most important factors to motivate volunteers. Effective leaders, therefore, need to identify volunteers' individual needs correctly and, further, encourage them to develop other needs in order to motivate volunteer members more successfully.

Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory places its emphasis on the followers. They argue that successful leadership can be achieved by selecting a right leadership style and the effectiveness of leadership depends largely upon the followers' actions of readiness (Robbins, 2005). Here, the two dimensions of leadership (i.e., task-oriented and relationship-oriented) proposed by Fiedler are further elaborated. Specifically, each dimension is divided into two levels, high and low, creating a total of four leadership types: telling (high task-low relationship), selling (high task-high relationship), participating (low task-high relationship), and delegating (low task-low relationship) (Robbins, 2005).

The concept of readiness, which refers to the extent to which people have the ability and willingness to accomplish a specific task, consists of a total of four stages from R1 to R4. People in the stage R1 are neither competent nor confident. People in the stage R2 have been motivated but currently lack the appropriate skills. In the R3 stage, people are able but unwilling or too apprehensive to do what their leader wants. Finally, people in the stage R4 are both able and willing to do what is asked of them. Hersey and Blanchard insist that, when the four types of leadership (i.e., telling, selling, participating, and delegating) are appropriately connected with each of these stages, leadership can be most effective.

This theory of leadership seems to be most appropriate for being applied to the four types of volunteers this essay has proposed. More specifically, delegating leader behavior may be appropriate for leading the type I volunteer, while participating behavior is more proper for the type II. Selling leadership may be effective for managing the type III, whereas telling behavior is more benefiting the type IV volunteer.

The path-goal theory, meanwhile, posits that a leader's behavior is agreeable to subordinates insofar as they view it as a source of either immediate or future satisfaction (Robbins, 2005). In terms of followers' view, House identifies four types of leadership behavior: directive leader, supportive leader, participative leader, and achievement-oriented leader (Luthans, 1995). A leader may use these different types of behavior according to different situations. There are two situational variables counteracting leadership behavior: environmental contingency and subordinate contingency factors (Robbins, 2005). Although the path-goal theory needs further elaboration, it provides an important finding that a leader will be perceived most favorably by his/her subordinates and have a continuous influence on them, when the leader meets the needs and values of subordinates and the requirements of a specific work situation (Luthans, 1995).

Effective leaders, therefore, should well understand various factors relevant to subordinate satisfaction. For instance, managers of sport organizations should try harder to identify volunteer satisfaction factors since volunteers often have a much wider variety of unique needs than do paid employees. In addition, they should help volunteers integrate their personal needs into organizational goals.

3.4. Contemporary Leadership Theories and Implications

As Chelladurai (2001) points out, existing leadership theories have been criticized in that leader's act is constrained by situation with focusing on the transactional nature of leadership, which guides or motivate their followers in the direction of established goals (Chelladurai, 2001; Robbins, 2005).

According to Robbins (2005), more recent leadership theories tend to de-emphasize the theoretical complexity, while considering leadership from the “average person on the street” view (p. 369). Theories of charisma leadership and transformational leadership especially represent this new trend of leadership theories. House suggests that charismatic leaders can be characterized by self-confidence and confidence in subordinates (Luthans, 1995). From charismatic leaders, followers can make observations of such attributes as heroic or extraordinary leading abilities (Robbins, 2005). Different from the traditional trait theories, the theory of charismatic leadership focuses more on the relationship between leaders and followers (Bryman, 1986). According to Conger and Kanungo, the key characteristics of charismatic leaders can be divided into seven: self-confidence, vision, ability to articulate the vision, strong convictions about the vision, behavior that is out of the ordinary, perceived as being a change agent, and environmental sensitivity (Robbins, 2005). Charismatic leadership, currently, is regarded as one of the important options for the radical change of an organization.

Leaders who possess charismatic attributes may be successful in motivating all types of volunteers. The charismatic style of leadership can be especially effective in empowering the type II and IV volunteers by providing a clear vision and showing the ways to achieve it. Charismatic attributes can also be helpful for sustaining the high motivation of the type I and II volunteers.

The five attributes that transformational leaders may possess: attributed charisma, idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Doherty, 1997). Robbins (2005) characterize transformational leaders as those who individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders also have clear visions, the ability to convince their member toward the visions, and confidence to achieve the visions (Chelladurai, 2001). As such, transformational leadership is a comprehensive concept of new leadership.

These current theories of leadership illuminate the role of leaders in leading and transforming ordinary volunteers to high-skilled and highly motivated “new” volunteers which can be categorized as type I in our volunteer classification model. The ability to transform volunteer into better volunteer position is important. The elements consisting of transformational leadership may influence the low type of volunteer II, III, IV to move type I because such elements are closely related to volunteer motivation as non-monetary stimulus.

4. Conclusion

Paid employee might be prepared to accept a job and its requirements due to mainly economic benefits. Volunteers, however, do not pursue economic benefits through their activity. Such somewhat different type of motivation between paid employee and volunteer arises the issue that how a leader influences volunteer effectively.

For next study, this conceptual volunteer clarification model may be experimented in real situation. In addition, the task potential substitutes for and neutralizers of leadership such as work, worker’s task, or organization (Robbins, 2005) may be reviewed with this model to see if highly motivated and skillful volunteer, type I, is influenced by leader behavior or not. Finally, other reward systems or goal setting theory to motivate volunteer to pursue organizational goals as well as individual goals will be useful to improve this volunteer clarification model.

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