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**Motivations and Perceived Organizational Climate Among  
Volunteers of Italian Red Cross**

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**Abstract**

What really motivates a person to do voluntary work is a complex question. However, understanding these motivations can be very useful to voluntary organisations in attracting, placing, and retaining volunteers. According to the functional approach to voluntarism, people engaged in similar acts may have different underlying motivations for doing so. The Volunteer Function Inventory model catalogues six functions of voluntarism which are correlated with volunteer's goals, benefits, and motives. Participants in this study were 112 volunteers of the Italian Red Cross (Sicilian section). The results indicated that the values function motivated to voluntarism more than other functions. The Self-centred functions were valued less incisive. The organizational climate was positively evaluated.

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**1. Introduction**

An increasing number of people all over the world spend substantial amounts of their time and energy helping others. Voluntarism essentially consists of devoting time and work to various causes. It is one of the many and varied manners in which people try to do good for others, their communities, and society at large

The literature highlights the importance of dispositional and situational variables, and emphasizes the distinction between the instrumental and hetero-centric (other-centred) motivations. The former is aimed at satisfying personal needs, while the latter serves to satisfy altruistic needs: people engage in unpaid helping activities, known as voluntarism, to enhance the well-being of others and their own, as well as that of the community where they live (Omoto, & Snyder, 1995).

Voluntarism regards the instances and organisations in which people provide assistance to others, but they do not receive any compensation and obviously, have not been coerced. Thus, we can think that voluntary work is a form of pro-social action (Penner et al., 1995) in which people actively, and without obligation, seek out opportunities to provide non-monetary assistance to others in need (Snyder, Omoto, 2009).

Why are an increasing number of people engaging in unpaid aid activities? What are the motivations that people prompt to become volunteers and sustain their efforts over time?

We adopted a functional approach to understanding the motivations that induce people to voluntarism and maintain their attempts over time (De Palma, 2004; Finkelstien, 2009). Voluntarism is a multidimensional

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phenomenon it is a form of action which implies various motivations (Omoto & Snyder, 2000) and quality organisational climate (Pearce, 1994; Tagiuri, 1968).

Because a great deal of volunteering involves providing direct service to other people, there is a strong association between volunteering and altruism. Altruism implies social reciprocity and civic engagement (Penner, Dovidio, et. al., 2005); in fact: “Volunteering is a form of altruistic behaviour” (Musick, Wilson, 2008: 3). However, the process of unpaid helping benefits others as well as themselves; thus, voluntarism is a combination of altruism and selfishness (Midlarsky, 1991).

We utilized a functional approach (which has a long history: James, 1890) to understand the motives behind volunteering work (Smith, Bruner & White, 1956; Katz, 1960). We started from an important aspect (highlighted by functional analysis) for which different people can perform the same actions which may serve different psychological functions for different people. Thus, according to functional approach to voluntarism (Clary & Snyder, 1991), people engaged in similar or equivalent acts may have different underlying motivations for doing so. This approach emphasizes a multi-motivational perspective, because whether certain volunteer tasks can serve different functions (e.g., expression of values, career developing) for different individuals, and whether people prefer tasks that match their volunteer motivations (Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005) these attitudes or behaviours may satisfy different motivational functions.

The Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI; Omoto & Snyder, 1993 ) model catalogues six functions of voluntarism: *values, understanding, career, social, protective, and enhancement* (or *esteem*).

First is the *values* function: the subject is dedicated to helping others and so, more generally, contributes to the welfare of his or her own community.

*Understanding* is the second function for which voluntarism gives an opportunity to learn, understand, practice, and apply skills and abilities. In fact, engagement in voluntary work is seen as a learning and a self-development exercise.

The *Career* function is the third function in which voluntarism may open doors to new careers, serve to increase one’s job perspectives, or serve as “stepping stones” to employment.

An other important function is the *social* function. An individual engages in voluntarism due to strong normative or social pressure, or to get along with the others in his or her reference group. This function highlights the extraordinary need for the individual to respond to the expectations of the others.

A fifth function of voluntarism is the *protective* function, whereby a person seeks to reduce feelings of guilt about being more fortunate than others, or to escape from one’s own problems by engaging in volunteer work. According to scientific literature, this function could be likened to the ego-defensive function (Katz, 1960) and the need to express feelings of personal (Schwartz, 1970) and social responsibility (Francies, 1983).

Finally the sixth function is the *enhancement* or *esteem* function, in which voluntarism serves to enhance one’s self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-improvement. The results of some studies have shown that committing to volunteer actually increases self-acceptance (King, Walder, & Pavey, 1970).

These motivations are associated (matched/mismatched) with volunteer’s goals, benefits and motives (Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005).

The researches show a strong correlation between the presence of positive organisational climate and positive motivation and satisfaction (Pettigrew, 1990; Katz & Khan, 2004). The organisational climate is a “quality of the internal environment of an organization that is experienced by its members, influences their behaviour, and can be described in terms of the values or a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the organisation” (Tagiuri, 1968: 27). A positive organizational climate enhances and enables good work, positive relationships and satisfaction; instead, negative or poor climates often leave their voluntary workers dissatisfied. Because feelings are facts (Lewin, 1935), good interpersonal relationships and a healthy climate can help people to increase their own motivation to serve through voluntarism.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Aims and Hypothesis

This study had two objectives. On one hand, we wanted to examine the different motivations underlying voluntarism beginning from the Volunteer Process Model (Omoto & Snyder, 1993) theoretical perspective. We

explored the reasons for choosing to volunteer as well as the reasons for sustaining voluntary involvement, the quality of their volunteer experience. On the other hand, we hypothesized a relationship between motives in volunteer and perceived relational climates: more specifically, we hypothesized that a better perceived relational climate could be related to a more positive motivation.

## 2.2. Participants and procedures

In this study, the participants were 112 volunteers belonging to the Italian Red Cross (IRC, Sicilian section). 30.4% men vs 69.6% women, their ages ranging between 20 and 79 years, with a mean age of 39.57 years and a standard deviation of 12.4 years. Regarding educational levels, 25.9% had elementary studies, 58.9% secondary studies, and 15.2% had tertiary education. Regarding voluntary work, 32.1% were engaged in health-care work, 28.6% was engaged in various services (e.g. food distribution, health education, etc.), 21.4% were engaged in civil protection (emergency and ambulance service), 17.9%, and finally, is engaged in the traditional patient transport service.

The conditions of the questionnaire administration were agreed upon with the Sicilian section IRC to cause the least possible interference in its working. Thus, participants filled in a questionnaire during monthly team meetings, in small group settings alone with the researcher in order to guarantee the reliability of the results.

## 2.3. Materials

The instrument was a self report questionnaire which included the following measures:

*Relational climate.* The perception of relational climate was measured by four 5-point Likert scales, ranging from -2=*strongly disagree* to +2=*strongly agree* (indifference threshold = 0, for all scales).

*Quality of personal voluntary experience.* This representation was measured by three 100-point feelings thermometers (that we had reduced to 7-point scale) and by one 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree* (indifference threshold = 3) (e.g. “How I am satisfied with the relationship colleagues with?”).

*Motives to voluntarism.* In order to measure underlying motivations for volunteering, according to a functional analysis of voluntarism, the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) was used. The VFI examines what volunteers are interested in receiving from their volunteer experience (goals and motives), matching motivation with volunteering benefits (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996). The VFI analyzes the aspects through six motivations which are the reasons for volunteering: *Values* (e.g.: “I volunteer because I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself”), *Understanding* (e.g.: “I volunteer because volunteering lets me learn through direct hands-on experience”), *Enhancement* (e.g.: “I volunteer because I feel that volunteering is a feel-good-experience”), *Social* (e.g.: “I volunteer because my friends volunteer”), *Career* (e.g.: “I volunteer because I feel that I make important work connections through volunteering”), and *Protective* (e.g.: “I volunteer because volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems”). Each construct is measured with five items and individuals respond to each item rated along a 5-point Likert scale, anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, based on how important each reason is to him or her.

## 2.4. Results and Discussion

Taken together, data showed a height average ( $M=4.00$ ) *Values* function, which was evaluated as the biggest reason for volunteering. The *Enhancement* and *Understanding* values were considered discreet ( $M=3.67$ ,  $M=3.46$ ). *Social* values received a score just above the indifference threshold ( $M=3.14$ ); *Protective* values was estimated just under the same threshold ( $M=2.87$ ). *Career* values was a function that least motivated volunteering (Table 1).

Table 1 Volunteer Function Inventory (1-5 point scale)

Items	M	DS	Alpha
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<i>Career</i>	1.96	1.06	.89
<i>Social</i>	3.14	.90	.74
<i>Values</i>	4.00	.68	.57
<i>Understanding</i>	3.46	.84	.70
<i>Enhancement</i>	3.67	.89	.77
<i>Protection</i>	2.87	1.03	.77

Several strong and positive correlations were observed. The *Career* values was negatively correlated to age ( $r = -366$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Volunteer Long Service live ( $r = -296$ ,  $p = .002$ ), IRC long service live ( $r = -343$ ,  $p < .001$ ), cooperation level ( $r = -277$ ,  $p = .003$ ), and good perceived relationship with users ( $r = -350$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The *Career* values was estimated more by the volunteers who were engaged in back office services (e.g.: training or telephonic services) ( $M = 2.37$ ) than who were engaged in ambulance services ( $M = 1.50$ ) ( $p = .024$ ).

Perceptive relational climate was good and supporting. Regarding climate, the great importance assigned to cooperation between colleagues ( $M = 6.20$ ) was the most important result.

The relationship satisfaction with users was good ( $M = 5.87$ ) as well as the relationship among colleagues ( $M = 5.81$ ); lower, but still relatively high, was the relationship with the leaders (*Items 1 e 4*:  $M = 5.70$  e  $M = 5.76$ ) (Table 2).]

**Table 2 Perceptive relational Climate (1-7 point scale)**

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>
1.Satisfaction with quality coordinators relationship	5.70	1.45
2.Importance level for the cooperation between colleagues	6.20	1.09
3.Satisfaction with quality colleagues relationship	5.81	1.24
4.Satisfaction with quality users relationship	5.87	1.16
5.Satisfaction with the recognition by the leaders	5.76	1.225

Significant differences emerged in relation to gender and to service type. Females were more satisfied than males concerning the recognition of their work by the leaders ( $M = 5.96$  vs  $M = 5.29$ ,  $p = .007$ ). The voluntaries engaged in social welfare services were more satisfied with coordinators relationship than those who were engaged in back office and civil protection services ( $M = 6.33$  vs  $M = 5.26$  and  $M = 5.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those who worked in welfare services gave more importance to cooperative relationships than those involved in back office services ( $M = 6.56$  vs  $M = 5.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The volunteers engaged in welfare services were satisfied with the relationship between colleagues more than those engaged in protection civil services ( $M = 6.35$  vs  $M = 5.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### 3. Conclusions

We carried out an investigation on the voluntarism with regard to the motivations, perception organizational climate, and representational framework.

The results confirm the prevailing literature (Romano, & Todaro, 2010; Omoto, & Snyder, 1995; Clary et al, 1998) about the important role played by altruistic motivations. Actually, the *Values* function, or looking after and helping others, was more highly valued than other functions. The participants had a good representation about functions (*Understanding*, *Enhancement*, and *Social*) that can help to improve themselves and the quality of their own life. The low *Career* function score was in contrast to the literature (Allen & Rushton, 1983; Marta & Pozzi, 2007). One possible reason of this finding was the participants's age. In fact, it is probable that 40-year-old people (the mean age of our volunteers) already have stable work. This explanation was confirmed by the inversely proportional correlation between the *Career* function and long service voluntarism, long service IRC. The negative correlation of the *Career* function with quality users' relationship and satisfaction with the cooperation among colleagues should indicate an incompatibility between self-centered tasks and hetero-centric motivations. A good representation emerged regarding the perceived organizational climate; this finding confirmed our hypothesis regarding the importance of perceived relational climate in maintaining and increasing voluntary efforts.

Voluntarism is a growing multidimensional phenomenon combining altruism and selfishness. On one hand, it helps and improves the well-being of the others and their community; on the other hand, it increases personal well-being and perceived quality of life. Nonetheless it doesn't only regard the subject as an individual, but as a social

subject: in fact, a more important variable is the quality of organizational environment. A positive organizational climate enhances positive interpersonal relationships and a good quality of work; on the contrary, negative relations can induce volunteers to leave their volunteer jobs or go out and look for different voluntary organizations.

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