Literature Review: What Motivates Individuals To Volunteer

The purpose of this literature review is to gain an understanding on what motivates individuals to volunteer. To further the understanding of the topic, information from authors and research projects will be provided on the topic area, compared with one another, analysed and discussed. The purpose of this review of the relevant literature is to aid, offer clarity and a direction to continue in achieving the overall aim of understanding what motivates individuals to volunteer for The Open House Festival.

Motives for Volunteering –

There has been a vast amount of research regarding what motivates a person to volunteer. The perfect example of such research is the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), which presented six main elements that motivate an individual to volunteer; values, understanding, enhancement, protective, social and career (Clary et al, 1998). Each of these six elements, that create the Volunteer Functions Inventory, provide an insight to why an individual would decide to volunteer. Whether it is due to the values that someone may hold, the pursuit on enhancing themselves, wanting to understand people or environments, make them feel more productive, to socialise or further their career, Clary et al. (1998), offers a valuable introduction to what motivates volunteers. Other research would suggest, that unlike the six elements that make up the VFI, that there are only two main motives that affect the likelihood of someone volunteering; pleasure motives and pressure motives (Gebauer et al, 2008). The research conducted by Gebauer et al. (2008), states that both pleasure motivation and pressure motivation are the two most common factors of motivating an individual to offer their help and time to volunteer. The main difference between the two factors, pleasure motivation and pressure motivation, is that an individual who chooses to give up their time to volunteer can be described as “pro-social”, they gain fulfilment from helping, whereas pressure motivation would be heavily linked with a person that decides to give up their time and volunteer due to social-norms and wanting to fit in (Gebauer et al, 2008). Although both sources have different opinions on what motivates a person to volunteer, there are similarities. The key comparison is that both sources conclude that there are underlining dominators which motive people to volunteer, whether they are selfless acts to provide help and gain a better understanding of people and environments, or acts that are focused of self-betterment and adhering to the social norms (Clary et al, 1998 & Gebauer et al, 2008).

Due to the vast amount of information that is available on the chosen topic, volunteer motivation, it is crucial to analyse and discuss as much relevant information as possible to gain a true understating of the topic. Another prime example of research relating to why people are motivated to volunteer is, the Self Determination Theory (SDT). The main premise of the Self Determination Theory is to understand the needs of people and their tendencies to want to improve themselves and grow as a person (Ryan et al, 1997). The SDT identified that the three decisive elements that result in an individual choosing to volunteer are; the needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. (Ryan et al, 2000). The first need, competence, identified by the SDT refers to the willingness of an individual to want to reach goals, perform to a high standard and challenge themselves. Secondly, autonomy refers to the yearning of a persons need to take ownership of their actions and to take part in something because they

want to and that they know it is the right thing to do. Finally, relatedness is the sense of connecting with different people and wanting to offer help to people and situations (Huang et al, 2019). The key purpose of the SDT was to identify underlining reasons to why someone would choose to give up their free time and volunteer. The research concludes, that if a person's basic psychological needs are met, then the determination, willingness and motivation to volunteer will increase (Deci et al, 2002). The research that created the Self Determination Theory is extremely valuable to the overall aim of understanding what motivates volunteers, as it provides an insight to what drives people to volunteer and what they seek to gain from their volunteering. The information that the SDT offers can also be compared to what has been previously discussed. Whether it is the Volunteer Function Inventory, pleasure and pressure motives or the Self Determination Theory, the linking factor is that for an individual to be motivated to volunteer there must be an incentive to offer help to others or to better themselves (Clary et al, 1998., Gebauer et al, 2008., Ryan et al, 1997).

There have been various reasons and theories presented related to why someone would be motivated to volunteer. Another relevant and insightful view on why an individual would choose to volunteer, is the theory of altruism and selflessness (Rehberg, 2005). The focal point of this theory is that the primary motivation which results in somebody choosing to volunteer is due to the fact that they want to help others (Bang et al, 2009). The idea that an individual would be motivated to volunteer solely on the basis that they want to offer their time and assistance to help others, is not a new idea. The theory that Rehberg (2005) offers can be linked to the research conducted by Gebauer et al. (2008), where pleasure motivation was discussed. As the central point of pleasure motivation is focused on the fulfilment that individuals gain through helping others, it is clear to see the comparison between both theories to volunteer motivation (Gebauer et al, 2008., Rehberg, 2005). Other research based on volunteer motivation presents alternative reasons to why an individual would decide to volunteer. Research that has been conducted by, Yeung (2004), highlights various motives related to volunteering, including altruism, socialisation, self-centred interests and to seek emotional support. Due to the wide range of motives presented by Yeung (2004), it suggests that what motivates someone to volunteer fully depends on that individual, their personality and what they want to achieve through volunteering. The elements of Yeung's (2004) research can be compared with all the research that has been previously discussed, due to the range of motives that the research has presented. When comparing the research, it is clear to see that there are two main dominators which motivate an individual to volunteer. Firstly, there are selfless and altruistic motives behind volunteering, such as helping others, understanding people and environments, and wanting to make connection with people. Whereas there are also selfish and egotistical reasons to why someone would volunteer, such as wanting to fit in, adhering to social norms and seeking to better themselves or their careers (Clary et al, 1998., Gebauer et al, 2008., Ryan et al, 1997., Rehberg, 2005., Yeung, 2004).

Additional research on the topic of volunteer motivation, concludes that there are similarities to the Volunteer Functions Inventory's six main aspects that motivate someone to give up their time and volunteer (Clary et al, 1998). The research, that was conducted by Peterson (2004), implies that the six key elements of volunteer motivation are; altruistic, social, ideological, status reward, materialistic, or based on time. Elements of Peterson's (2004) research have been previously discussed, altruistic, social or ideological motives, but to be motivated due to status reward, materialistically driven or based on time, are new ideas (Peterson, 2004). To be motivated due to status reward, refers to the fact that someone would volunteer to improve their public image and be commended for what they have done; materialistic motivation is when an

individual will volunteer in the pursuit of receiving tangible benefits; and time based motivation refers to fact that someone may or may not volunteer due to the amount of free time that they possess (Peterson, 2004). The information that Peterson (2004) provides is significant, as it offers a different insight to what might motivate an individual to volunteer. Previous research would suggest that volunteer motivation is based on intangible elements, such as pressure motives or seeking to understand people (Gebauer et al, 2008., Clary et al, 1998), this intangible motivation theory can be linked with status and times based motives, but the fact that someone may be motivated to volunteer due to materialistic wants is a new and interesting insight to volunteer motivation (Peterson, 2004). It raises new questions and will be useful to help understand what motivates the volunteers of The Open House Festival.

Motivation to Volunteer at Events and Festivals –

To gain a further understating to why someone would dedicate their time to volunteer it is crucial that information on event-based motivation is analysed and discussed. As the overall aim is to understand what motivates the volunteers of The Open House Festival, it will be useful and insightful to review the literature and research that is linked to the motives behind individuals volunteering for events and festivals.

The perfect example of research which served the purpose of discovering the motives of volunteers at events and festivals, is the research of Barron et al. (2011). The research project set out with the aim pf exploring the motive for volunteering at Edinburgh's International Music Festival. The conclusion of the research induced that although there were aspects of altruistic motives but the overriding motivation for volunteering was to gain valuable work experience and enhance their CV's (Barron et al, 2011). This is an interesting insight to the motives of event-based volunteering, and it can be heavily linked with theory that has been previously mentioned. The notion of volunteers being motivated due to the desire of furthering their career opportunities was discovered when discussing the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al, 1998). The fact that an individual would be motivated solely on the purpose of self-betterment and career enhancement offers a different point of view on volunteer motivation. As well as the research of Barron et al. (2011), there is other research that shares the same point of view. The premise of volunteers being motivated due to self-centred reasons is common in other research projects and is most evident in the research conducted by Qi et al. (2019). The research surmised that self-development can be a leading factor to why an individual would be motivated to volunteer at an event or festival (Qi et al, 2019). As events and festival are very much based on the idea of communal pride, sharing and socialising (Alexander et al, 2015), it is an interesting implication that someone would volunteer and choose to take part in such an open and sharing environment, on sole basis to better themselves. Is this the overriding motive to volunteer? What other motives lead to someone volunteering at an event or festival?