

Active Aging in Community Radio

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Abstract

Social scientists have long been fascinated about why people volunteer. Volunteers give their time to certain organisations without expectation of reward or compensation for their labour (Snyder and Omoto, 2008). The 2011 'National Survey of Volunteering Issues' suggests that the primary motivations for volunteers are a "sense of purpose" and the "difference they make to the community" (Volunteering Australia, 2011:4). While these two primary motivations may span volunteering generally, older adult volunteer motivation in the community radio sector anecdotally reveals a more complex picture. There are strong resonances between existing theoretical literature on motivations in volunteering (Clary et al., 1998) and community radio (Order, 2014b). Clary et al's work (1998) focuses on the initial motivation to volunteer and what drives continued participation. Order's (2014b) study found that the main value for participation in community radio was personal development and empowerment at a personal or group level. The purpose of this paper is to explore these broad themes in more detail. Interview data from volunteers at an exemplar community radio station is considered in conjunction with Clary et al's (1998) six motivational functions of volunteering. Clary et al's six functions provide the language and a framework to unpack personal development and empowerment at a personal and group level in the community radio sector using interview data about the participation of primarily older volunteers at Perth community radio station 6RPH (Radio Print-Handicapped). The analysis reveals a more nuanced picture of volunteer motivation for individuals. This paper argues that the development of a purposeful identity through volunteering in a community radio context is a primary motivation and consequence for older adult volunteers.

Introduction

This paper is a tribute to the now defunct community radio station 6RPH 990am Information Radio. The Perth-based Radio Print-Handicapped station unfortunately ceased broadcasting on January 18th 2015 (Taylor, 2015). One of the researchers, based at the station from 2007-2010, was consistently inspired by those who donated their time as volunteers, "Bringing Words to Life" for Western Australia's print-handicapped community. This paper is drawn from the words of those dedicated station volunteers.

6RPH was one station of a national Radio Print Handicapped network spread across major Australian cities. The network comprises 1RPH in Canberra, 2RPH in Sydney, 3RPH in Melbourne, 4RPH in Brisbane, 5RPH in Adelaide, 6RPH in Perth and 7RPH in Hobart. The first seeds of the RPH network were sown by Blind Citizens Australia which was formed in 1975 and remains the peak body for blind and visually impaired people in Australia. A major objective of the network is to improve access to high turnover print material, such as newspapers and magazines. Blind and visually impaired citizens have traditionally

used braille services; however, braille readers have tended to be few and far between and the availability of braille materials is often limited.

With the establishment of the community radio sector in Australia by the Federal Government in 1975, there was a move to utilise community broadcasting to bring printed material to a wider audience than the reach of braille and talking books. Community radio as a service combined the immediacy of a daily newspaper and the reach of radio broadcasting to provide listeners with that day's paper, that day. Furthermore, it reduced the information time gap that tended to dominate print-handicapped people's news-life and meant that listeners could access whole newspaper articles as opposed to the normal ruthlessly edited radio news on other stations. In addition, listeners were given access to a range of mediums and content including books, magazines, sport and gossip.

Participation of the audience community as volunteers in the station operation is normally an objective of community radio stations (Order, 2014a: 393). The value of volunteer participation has been detailed by community media theorists such as Forde, Meadows and Foxwell-Norton (2002: 56-57), Rodriguez (2001: 3), and Van Vuuren (2006: 381) who have explored volunteer participation in relation to the facilitation of citizenship, cultural identity and empowerment at a personal level. Van Vuuren (2002) also offers the production of social capital as a further refinement of the participatory value in volunteering for participants. The benefits of community radio may reside less in the broadcast message and more in its community development functions (Van Vuuren 2006: 381).

990 6RPH Information Radio was unique in the community radio sector in that it was unable to engage the print-handicapped community as participants in the station as broadcasters. Print-handicapped people were represented on past committees at the station; however, participation by the print-handicapped community had obvious logistical challenges. Indeed, there was little enthusiasm for encouraging community participation within the station and the community themselves had not expressed any interest. This mutual lack of enthusiasm was presumably due to the inherent logistical difficulties in the print-handicapped audience participating in the station as volunteers. Furthermore, 6RPH saw itself as less of a radio station and, in the words of one staff member, more "a service provider to the print-handicapped community. Radio is just the medium we use" (RPH6). In contrast to most community radio stations, the issue of community participation was a low priority at 6RPH. Thus, since members of the print-handicapped community were not able to participate in their own radio station, it begged the question of who comprised the 100-plus cohort of broadcasting volunteers that kept 6RPH on the air for 24 years as well as their motivations for doing so. Table 1 (6RPH Volunteer Roles and Ages) provides some answers.

Table 1: 6RPH Volunteer Roles and Ages

Roles, Ages, Period of Volunteering	Approximate number in a week	Approximate percentage of station staff	18-40 years	40-65 years	65 + years	POV <1 year	POV 1 - 5 years	POVⁱ > 5 years
Readers:	87	77%	12	48	27	19	30	38
Announcers:	11	10%	8	2	1	5	4	2
Technicians:	4	4%	2	0	2	1	2	1
Researchers:	10	9%	0	1	9	0	2	8
Totals:	112	100%	22	51	39	25	38	49

The data in Table 1 was supplied by the volunteer manager in October 2006 and is typical of the human resources breakdown over the life of the station. Most volunteers are aged over 40 years and fulfil the role of station “readers”. Only 19 per cent of station volunteers are under 40 years of age. The table shows that most volunteers have been committed to the station for a long time. The station’s human resources breakdown invites a question about what motivates older adult 6RPH volunteers. One might assume that the motivation of community broadcasting volunteers results from their overwhelming sense of social responsibility. In other words, volunteer motivation may result from a desire to help the print-handicapped community or give back to their wider community. As will be discussed below, one-on-one interviews with 6RPH station volunteers certainly revealed that a sense of social responsibility was a motivating factor; however, the picture painted by volunteers in their own words is more complex. To provide a framework for understanding the motivations of volunteers at 6RPH from interviews, we now discuss volunteering and community media literature.

Volunteering

Volunteering is defined by Snyder and Omoto (2008: 3) as “freely chosen and deliberate helping activities that extend over time are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation and often through formal organizations, and that are performed on behalf of causes or individuals who desire assistance”. While this definition is helpful, Snyder and Omoto caution that volunteering in the real world can fall outside some of the key characteristics they mention. For example, volunteering does not always occur within a formal organisation and indeed, some volunteers do not “freely choose” to give their time (Brunell et al., 2014). Some so-called “volunteers” do so as a requirement of education or work and are

better termed “involuntary volunteers” (Planty et al., 2006). Needless to say, those who give their time to individuals or organisations for little, if any, monetary reward are increasingly being recognised for their contribution. A 2013 Comparative Non-Profit Working Paper on paid and volunteer workers in non-profit organisations stated that across the thirteen countries where data was available, non-profit workers comprised 7.4 per cent of the total workforce including 5.2 per cent being for paid workers and 2.2 per cent for volunteers (Salamon et al., 2013: 2). The same report valued volunteer work at an average of 4.5 per cent of gross domestic product for the fifteen countries surveyed (Salamon et al., 2013: 3). The monetary value of volunteer contributions in Australia between 2006 and 2007 was estimated to be \$14.6 billion dollars (ABS, 2009). Volunteering therefore involves a large proportion of the total workforce and contributes much to the domestic and global economy.

Australia has increasing levels of volunteer participation. The 2008 volunteering trends report showed consistent increases in volunteering participation from 24 per cent of the population in 1995 to 34 per cent in 2006 (Volunteering in Australia, 2008: 3). In 2010, Volunteering Australia found that 36 per cent of Australians or 6.1 million people over the age of eighteen volunteered. This was a significant increase upon the 2006 figure of 5.2 million people. A 2010 Australian Bureau of Statistics report on volunteering provides an updated picture of the volunteer workforce in Australia. Volunteers tend to have a paid job, most have children living at home and most live outside of capital cities (ABS, 2010). Volunteers were also highly represented in the age groups from 35-44 and 65-74. Between 2006 and 2010, volunteers over the age of 45 have increased in all age groups; 45-54 year old volunteers have increased from 39.3 to 43.7 per cent, those aged 55 to 64 from 32.4 to 42.5 per cent, those aged 65 to 74 from 32.6 to 36.9 per cent and 75-84 from 22.4 to 27.6 per cent (ABS, 2010: 9). In Western Australia the rate of volunteering has increased from 25 per cent in 1995 to 34 per cent in 2010 (ABS, 2010: 18). The highest rates of volunteers are in the age groups over 35 years of age (Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008: 22) and were in organisations devoted to sports/recreation (13 per cent), education/training (11 per cent), religion (6 per cent) and community/welfare (5 per cent) (Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008: 23).

Considering these high levels of volunteer participation in Australia and the need for non-profit and community organisations to attract and retain such a workforce, there is clearly a need to understand what volunteers gain from giving their time. Wilson (2012: 198) argues that current research supports the assertion that volunteering can improve mental and physical health and protect against illness. However, this depends on the personality of the individual and the context of their volunteering. Anderson et al’s (2014) study on “senior” volunteerism found social, physical and mental benefits that militated against the risk of dementia. The suggestion that volunteering can have positive impacts on the mental or physical well-being of individuals has been of keen interest to those interested in “active” and “successful ageing” (Wilson 2012: 201) and is of particular interest to this study because of the older demographic of volunteers involved.

Volunteering can also play a vital role in what Ping-kwong Kam describes as “realising productive ageing” (Kam, 2012: 112). Kam proposes a theory of senior volunteerism based on empowerment and identity

formation. Volunteering amongst senior citizens has an empowering effect, where, as Kam explains, “older people are enabled to counteract their negative self-evaluation, reduce their sense of powerlessness and enhance their feelings of worth and self-efficacy” (Kam, 2012: 113). Volunteering can be seen as a substitute for the loss of roles including parenting or paid employment that accompanies ageing, a continuation of previously held behaviours or patterns and as a way of “restructuring social roles and recycling role skills” (Kam, 2012: 116). Kam therefore emphasises the positive value of volunteering for senior citizens. Volunteering can challenge the stigmas and stereotypes of ageing while encouraging community engagement and social cohesion.

This theory of senior volunteerism around empowerment and identity formation is the general starting point for this study. Can the empowering effect of volunteering, specifically in older adults, be described in more detail; specifically for this work, in the context of community radio? One influential approach has been to investigate the motivations of volunteers using a functional analysis. Snyder (1993) developed a functional analysis to explore the underlying factors in people’s behaviour, an approach later applied by Clary et al. (1998) to volunteerism. Clary et al. (1998: 1517) sought to investigate why similar acts of volunteering result from variations in motivational processes and how the functions of volunteering encourage the initial decision to volunteer alongside continued participation.

Clary et al’s functional approach to volunteering motivation encourages a complex analysis of why people engage in volunteering activities. Moreover, Clary et al’s approach can be practically applied, as they explain:

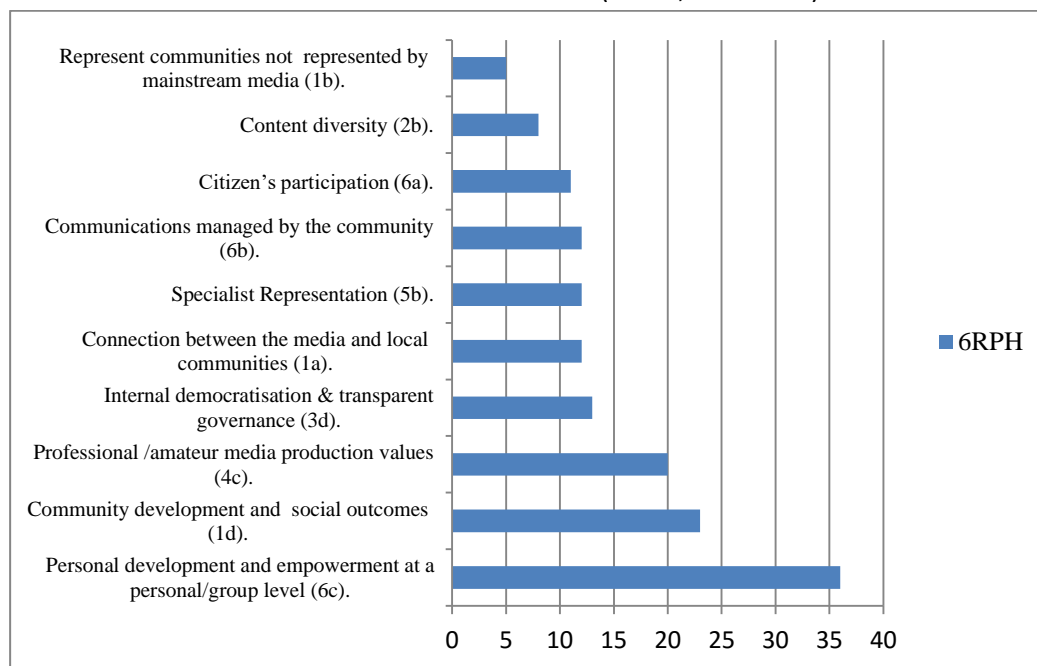
That people can be recruited into volunteer work by appealing to their own psychological functions, that they will come to be satisfied volunteers to the extent that they engage in volunteer work that serves their own psychological functions, and that they will plan to continue to serve as volunteers to the extent that their psychological functions are being served by their service (Clary et al., 1998: 1518).

Clary et al. proposes six possible functions of volunteering: values, understanding, social, career, protective and enhancement. The values function is one where volunteering allows individuals to express “altruistic” and “humanistic concerns for others” (Clary et al., 1998: 1517). The understanding function sees volunteering as motivated by a desire to acquire and express skills, knowledge and abilities. Volunteering may also serve a social function in providing opportunities to participate in activities with friends and acquaintances or in activities highly valued by others. The career function refers to the way that volunteerism might be motivated by positive impacts to one’s career or professional aspirations. The protective function is related to “motivations involving processes associated with the functioning of the ego” (Clary et al., 1998: 1518). To protect the ego, volunteering might function as a way to “reduce guilt over being more fortunate than others and to address one’s own personal problems” (Clary et al., 1998: 1518). The sixth and final function, enhancement, also relates to the ego, however in a positive way which centres on “the ego’s growth and development and involves positive strivings of the ego” (Clary et al., 1998: 1518). These six functions of volunteering provide a framework for analysing the internal or ego driven motivations of volunteers in relation to external motivations.

Community Radio and Participation

Wilson (2012) notes that the field of volunteer studies is interdisciplinary whereby scholars approach volunteering from psychological, sociological and economic perspectives. This study adds to this burgeoning field by highlighting the perspective of field work conducted by community media scholars. Volunteers are the lifeblood of a sector dominated by shoe string budgets. Without volunteers, the community media sector would not exist. Order (2013) proposes a theoretical framework of value for the community radio sector. This framework provides a meta-analysis of existing global literature including an assessment of the participation of community radio volunteers. Order's (2013) framework was tested in the field at three Western Australian community radio stations, including 6RPH Information Radio, the station of special interest to this study. When testing the framework of value, questions were asked of community radio stakeholders at 6RPH (volunteers, staff, and audience members) about their perceptions of value for the sector. Interestingly, a significant finding was that volunteers especially saw value for primarily narcissistic participation reasons, be it for themselves personally or their community (Order, 2014a). Table 2 shows the number of times that volunteers mentioned individual or personal development or empowerment in comparison to other values. During the interviews, volunteers mentioned personal development and empowerment more than 35 times. This suggests that from the perspective of the volunteers interviewed, personal development and empowerment were the dominant values of community radio. A focus on the personal benefits of community radio for volunteers has been linked to narcissism.

Table 2: 6RPH Information Radio Value Mentions (Order, 2013: 220)



With this indicated trend of narcissism among volunteers in mind from both Order (2014b) and Brunell et al. (2014), the authors of this study sought to unpack the community radio volunteer motivations at

6RPH in more detail. Order (2013) suggests that one specific value of community radio for the volunteers is:

Enhancing participants' sense of identity, personal satisfaction and education through involvement in broadcasting. [This] may also be manifested as an increased sense of political empowerment or emancipation. This may also include the development of broadcast skills through training (Order, 2013: 151).

Furthermore, Order (2013) explored the notion of value across the community radio sector, not just volunteer motivations. However, the data around participation is available to examine volunteer motivations in a more detailed fashion. This study chose to adopt Clary et al's (1998) six themes of functional analysis to delve deeper into the motivations of volunteers at 6RPH, especially the notion that participation in community radio was centred on personal development and empowerment at a personal/group level (Order, 2014b).

Methodology

In this study, the purposive goal at 6RPH was to obtain a representative volunteer sample that covered the different station roles, the period of volunteering, type of radio show, station board membership, gender and age group. It was estimated that a representative sample would require approximately twelve volunteers including three paid staff members. The paid staff members were included in the sample selection because of their extensive knowledge about the station. It should be noted that staff at community radio stations generally receive a low wage comparable to other not-for-profit organisations. Their reasons for working at community radio stations do not include substantial financial gain. Yet, there is an assumption that their motivations were similar to unpaid volunteers.

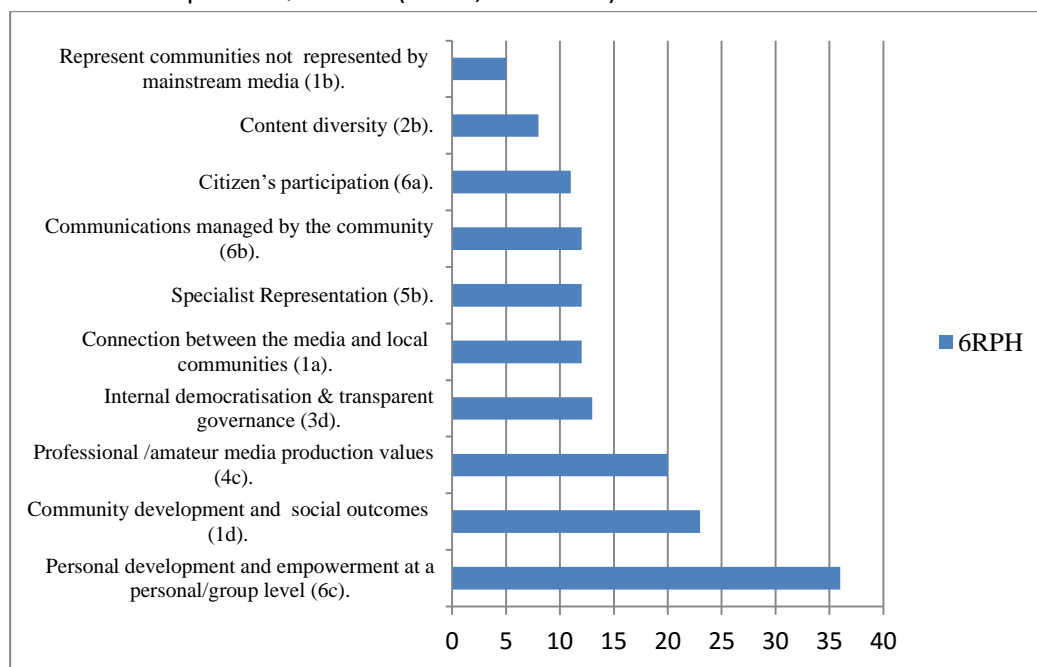
At 6RPH there were four categories of station volunteer roles, including readers (77 per cent), announcers (10 per cent), technicians (4 per cent) and researchers (9 per cent). Using these percentages as a starting point, the researchers and the volunteer manager at 6RPH constructed a twelve volunteer sample frame that represented these role percentages. Although the overall sampling method here is described as purposive, the particular starting point is reminiscent of "stratified sampling", where the larger population is sub-divided using meta-data (Neuman, 1997: 212). According to Neuman (1997: 212), this tends to produce samples that are "more representative of the population than simple random sampling". Once the approximate numbers in each role subdivision were calculated, each role subdivision sought to give equal representation by age, period of volunteering, station board membership, gender and type of show. As a third and more subjective criterion, the study sought people who were known to be articulate, especially on the subject of community radio. With such a relatively small sample frame, the study aimed to maximise the data potential of every interview.

The research approach included an element of what Neuman (1997: 207) refers to as "snowball" sampling. Respondents would often suggest other volunteers who would be knowledgeable on certain research topics. Where possible, these suggested interviewees were included, or when other potential

interview candidates declined to participate or were not available, these “snowball” interviewee suggestions were slotted in.

Interviews at 6RPH included questions about participation. This section of enquiry is relevant to this study on volunteer motivation. Table 3 lists the questions related to participation asked during each interview. This group of questions intended to uncover volunteer perceptions of their own beginnings at the station, their motivations, incentives, day-to-day experiences, their role in the station structure, any kind of empowerment, enjoyment, social needs or sense of community duty and training experiences alongside any additional information that might inform their volunteer experiences at the station. The questions were seen by the interviewer as open-ended signposts throughout the interviews. Flexibility is one of the biggest advantages of open-ended interviewing (Sarantakos, 1998: 266). The interviewer wanted to enter into the perspective of a respondent under the assumption that “the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 1990: 278). In this way, the interviewer encouraged the development of a meaningful conversation, seemingly undirected by the question list but navigated from it.

Table 3: Participation Questions (Order, 2013: 243)



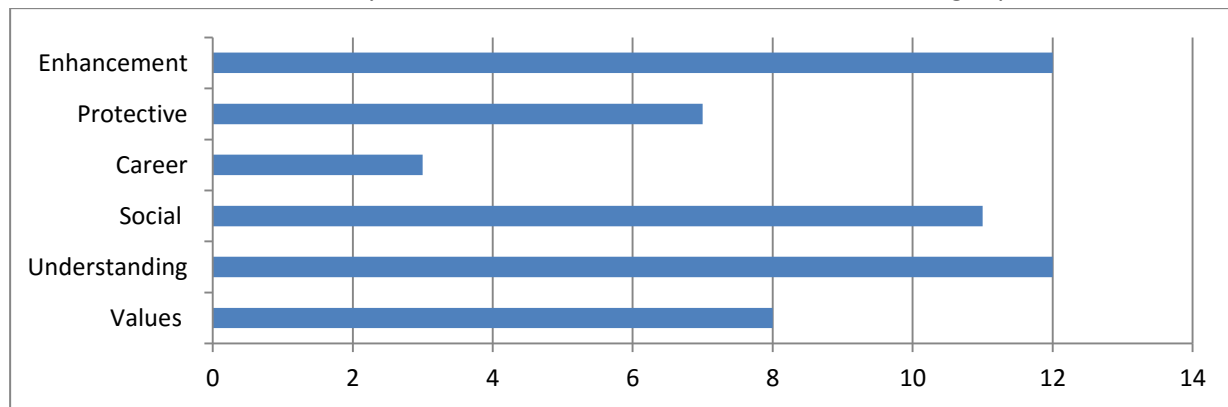
The answers to these questions were analysed using the six themes of functional analysis (Clary et al., 1998). Identification of the theory-driven themes involved two main techniques. Firstly, the recognition of “theoretical key words” from the description of the six themes (Clary et al., 1998) in the context of the interviews (Bernard and Ryan, 2003: 96), where there was obvious correlation between a participant’s meaning in an interview and a theme. Secondly, Bernard and Ryan (2003: 90) identify “metaphors and analogies” as useful scrutiny techniques for discerning themes in interviews. Participants sometimes talk about their experiences and thoughts using metaphors and analogies. Analysis then becomes a more

deductive process to recognise themes. Overall, when using either of these scrutiny techniques, the typical approach involved asking: “What is this sentence about?” (Bernard and Ryan, 2003: 91).

Results

As has been suggested by Volunteering Australia, a “sense of purpose” and the “difference made to the community” are primary motivators for volunteers (Volunteering Australia, 2011). Anecdotally, community radio volunteers have reinforced these reasons; however, a close examination of their responses to interview questions about participation suggests a broader array of motivations. Table 4 below displays the dominant volunteer motivations at 6RPH from interview data. Application of Clary et al’s (1998) functional analysis framework to interview data collected at community radio station 6RPH assists in exploring the reasons for volunteer motivation in detail.

Table 4: 6RPH Functional Analysis of Mentions Associated with the Volunteering Experience



Interviews with volunteers at 6RPH indicate that the motivations for volunteering are wider than previously theorised when examined through a functional analysis framework. Certainly, it is clear that volunteers are motivated by the pursuit of a “sense of purpose” and making “a difference to the community”. These two motivations, as identified through research by Volunteering Australia, fit under the functional analysis framework categories of “enhancement” and “values” respectively. However, “values” when read through a functional analysis framework appears to be a slightly less common motivator than “enhancement”, “understanding” and “social” drivers. Enhancement relates to the positive growth and development of the ego. This is one of the primary motivators for volunteers at 6RPH. For example, one interviewee explained their reasons for volunteering as follows:

They are fairly selfish reasons. When I am asked what I am doing in my retirement, I can promote the radio station and [say] listen to me. It has given me some purposeful identity outside being a retired person. I identify my retirement activity as reading on the radio. I am aware of the community need to help visually impaired people and this is what the station provides but I am not consciously driven by the need to help them. It is purely egotistical (RPH6).

This corroborates the importance of a sense of purpose identified by Volunteering Australia as a primary motivator; however it also shows that for this volunteer, building their own “purposeful identity” was a significant motivator. This sentiment was repeated by a number of volunteers and interestingly echoes the literature on the benefits of participation in community media. Forde, Meadows and Foxwell-Norton (2002: 56-57), Rodriguez (2001: 3), and Van Vuuren (2006: 381) have explored the enhancement of citizenship, cultural and personal identity and empowerment at a personal level for community radio volunteers. Rodriguez (2001: 18) suggests that participation in alternative media can:

Facilitate the fermentation of identities and power positions...alternative media spin transformative processes that alter people’s senses of self, their subjective positioning, and therefore access to power.

The community media themes of citizenship, identity and empowerment are inextricably similar to the volunteering sector theme of personal “enhancement” (Clary et al., 1998: 1518). As Order (2014b) has suggested previously, narcissism of community radio volunteers is seen in the community media sector and now also, via this study, through the theoretical lens of the volunteering sector.

An equal number of volunteers spoke about motivation in terms of the “understanding” function which encompasses the desire to acquire and express skills, knowledge and abilities. Volunteers explained the process of expressing their broadcast skills in a number of ways including:

There is a degree of craft involved with it (RPH3).

I just feel that I take it as seriously as if I was being paid hundreds of dollars an hour (RPH2).

I tend to look at it like a performance and I just want to improve my performance (RPH3).

I like being creative. It's some way in my world; I can be creative because I don't have it in my work thing (RPH6).

“Understanding” is also seen in the community radio literature. Issues of professionalism and production quality have been an important focus since the Australian sectors’ inception (Griffiths, 1975: 7; Hargreaves and Griffiths, 1974: 4-6) and have been explored more recently by Atton (2008: 215, 218) and Sandoval and Fuchs (2010: 142). The craft of radio has always been seen as skill that requires dedication, training and practice to produce the best possible results. Improved understanding and the development of skills are attractive to volunteers.

Interviews with 6RPH volunteers suggest that there was also a strong “social” motivation for giving their time to the station. As can be seen in Table 4 above, the “social” function was one of the three most common motivations for station volunteers. An illustrative comment for this function is as follows:

The camaraderie, the kindness and the friendship in this place is pretty unique. The moment you walk in the door, there is just a lovely atmosphere, there’s no bitchiness, there’s no fighting, it’s great. Our Christmas parties are some of the happiest I’ve ever been too, just a lovely group of people. I take it seriously, I do the best I can, I think I’ve improved. 990 [6RPH Information Radio] definitely gives me a

focus for the week. To be able to help our coordinators out is a good feeling. They are so good with managing people (RPH2).

For this volunteer, the social motivation for volunteering encompasses the enjoyment of the company of others as well as being able to assist others in the day to day work of the station. Van Vuuren (2001) has previously explored the social motivations of Australian participants within a community station and introduced social capital as a benefit for participants. Van Vuuren's (2001) study focused more on the themes of participation in networks and personal reciprocity as measures of social capital. At 6RPH, social capital appears in a similar way yet sentiments similar to the above volunteer are more common. Social capital at 6RPH was more about the enjoyable working environment than what could be gained from networking opportunities.

Conclusion

Community radio stations have long existed on shoe-string budgets where volunteers are an indirect source of income. Volunteer in-kind labour sustains a viable business model: without volunteers the community radio sector would fail. With so much importance placed on the involvement of volunteers for this sector, it is vital that individual community radio stations and their management regularly reflect on why they attract and retain volunteers. This study has investigated the motivations of volunteers at community radio station 6RPH in Western Australia. Interviews with the station's mainly older adult volunteers reveal that there is a desire to contribute to the community and have a sense of purpose, as the 2011 Volunteering Australia survey revealed about volunteers across a broad sweep of organisations. However, this study sought to explore more deeply the motivations of community radio volunteers specifically as the interview data suggested that a more complex range of motivations were at play. Clary et al's (1998) six main motivational themes of volunteering were then applied as a means to explore the interview data. Three of Clary's motivation functions were dominant: enhancement, social and understanding. It could be argued that the three main motivational factors found from interviewing 6RPH volunteers are related directly with identity development. The functions of enhancement, sociality and understanding stem from the desire for self-development and identity building in terms of personal skills, ego-development and/or social benefits. All play a role in building a "purposeful identity". Within the context of the older adult volunteer demographic, such values are important as they challenge stigmas and stereotypes attached to ageing, retirement and older citizenship. This case study emphasises the importance of exploring in-depth the motivations of volunteers, especially older adults. The results show clear similarities between motivational themes in the volunteering sector and those discussed in the community radio sector. These visible synergies can aid both sectors and illuminate strategies for volunteer management. A deeper understanding of volunteer motivations assists community and not-for-profit organisations in targeting their recruitment and developing initiatives designed to retain their volunteer workforce for the long-term. Volunteers make an essential contribution to many community and non-profit organisations, therefore understanding their motivations is essential to attracting, retaining and building the volunteer workforce.

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ⁱ POV refers to "Period of volunteering".