

An Analysis of the Motivations of Volunteers in a Short Term Environmental Project

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INTRODUCTION

This study examined the motivations and rewards expected and received by individuals who were involved as volunteer surveyors for the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario (Cadman, Eagles, and Helleiner, 1987). The Atlas project spanned five years and was conducted mainly through the efforts of over 1,300 volunteers. These people were required to undertake field investigations of the breeding bird populations across the entire province of Ontario. Two groups were defined: the intensive volunteer (those who volunteered at least 210 field hours) and the average volunteer (those who volunteered between 15 and 106 field hours).

This study examined the Atlas volunteer's participation over time, from initial involvement through ongoing involvement to disinvolvement and on to possible reinvolvement (Prus and Irini, 1980; Hall, 1983) based on the career contingency model (Becker, 1963; Blumer, 1969). The motivations, rewards, and benefits expected and received by the participants were examined according to the four stages of involvement. Sixteen motivations, benefits, and rewards were found as "conditions" (Prus and Irini, 1980) for initial and ongoing involvement. A change or modification of the sixteen conditions often began the disinvolvement process.

Additionally, the case study examined the means of participation (Prus and Irini, 1980; Hall, 1983), the attitudes of the participants towards nature (Kellert, 1980), and their birder typology (Butler and Fenton, 1986), all of which influenced initial involvement.

METHOD

The study used a qualitative approach to determine the motivations of the individuals involved with this short term environmental project. Through the use of a "long interview" (McCracken, 1988), the researcher became sensitized (Becker, 1963; Blumer, 1969) to the interdependent courses of action taken by the respondents in addition to determining what was unique about the Atlas project as a short term environmental project.

Twenty-two randomly selected Atlas volunteers were interviewed based on a pre-tested interview protocol. The motivations, satisfactions, and rewards expected and received by the individuals were determined through this process and were analysed using McCracken's (1988) five stages of analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research found no appreciable difference between the intensive and average respondent except in the original sense of willingness to commit time to the project. Of the three means of involvement examined -- accidental, seekership, and recruitment (Prus and Irini, 1980) -- the first, accidental, was not a means of involvement. The respondents were either recruited or sought involvement with the project.

The attitudes and birding typology of the respondents affected their initial and ongoing involvement with the project. According to Kellert's (1980) definitions, most of the respondents had an ecologicistic attitude towards nature. Based on Butler and Fenton's (1986) typologies, the respondents were of the lister, family birder, or the advanced watcher type.

Two situational factors, *location* and *time*, were initial motivations for the respondents. Many either lived at or had cottage properties in a location where they could survey for the project. Time was a significant factor initially and throughout the project. The respondents took the time necessary to volunteer for the project. However, some respondents did reduce the amount of time they had available to the project due to other commitments.

There were several factors which strongly influenced initial and ongoing involvement. The most important were a *sense of purpose* and *commitment*. All the respondents reported that the importance of the project itself was a key factor for initial and ongoing involvement. Through the recognition of the importance of the project, the respondents became committed to the project.

Initially, commitment did not stem from a *sense of duty*, although this factor became evident for a few respondents during ongoing involvement. Those respondents who maintained involvement from a sense of duty had also volunteered their time in an administrative capacity. This work often used far more time than the individuals involved had anticipated.

The other motivations and rewards which influenced initial and ongoing involvement included: skill use, learning, challenge, competition, family bonding, enjoyment and fun, and community and global welfare. The respondents felt that using a skill they already had (birding), learning new things about both birds and their natural environment, meeting a challenge and competing within themselves and with others, being involved in an activity that the family can participate in and above all, having fun doing it, were all important personal rewards.

A loss of any of these, especially fun and enjoyment and the sense of challenge, often began the disinvolvement process. The result was some of the surveyors either reduced or stopped their involvement with the project, while a few maintained involvement from a sense of duty. Some of the respondents became involved with the project because they wished to be involved in something that would be beneficial to the community.

Several rewards became evident only as the involvement process went on, including social interaction, agency support, and tangible rewards. Social interaction, unlike family bonding, dealt with getting involved with other people outside the family group. Most of the respondents had solitary tendencies when surveying and most did not expect to make new friends. Many were somewhat surprised and pleased when they did.

Most of the respondents did not expect to have support from the organization at the outset, but did come to expect it as the project progressed. None of the respondents, as volunteers, initially expected a tangible reward (e.g. a free copy of the final book). Some, notably those who were involved in an administrative capacity, did develop an expectation that they should receive a tangible reward. As for reinvolvement, most of the respondents would be willing to get involved in a similar type of project in the future, but few in an administrative capacity.

CONCLUSIONS

This study, through a qualitative method coupled with a conceptual framework determined a frank appraisal of an activity that affected the lives of 22 individuals. These people candidly reflected on their involvement, what they put into it, what they got out of it, how they felt about it, and enabled the researcher to glean important attitudes and expectations in context -- "knowing the actor" as Blumer (1969) demands. Additionally, the motivations, satisfactions, and rewards determined through this study could be used in another of a larger portion of this population and would be useful to those who are designing the volunteer aspects of future environmental projects.

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