The motivation of volunteers

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Abstract

Volunteers play a crucial role in contributing to the nation's economy. The media has helped to underscore the successful roles played by volunteers in national sporting competitions such as the Sydney Olympics and Melbourne Commonwealth Games. However, a larger contribution of volunteers to everyday Australian organisations goes relatively unnoticed and understudied, especially with respect to the motivation of volunteer workers. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has estimated that in the year 2000, volunteers contributed 704.1 million hours of voluntary work. What are the individual drivers that sustain this effort made continuously in Australian organisations? This paper focuses on exploring the drivers of motivation among volunteers in Australian Surf Life Saving.

Keywords: Motivation, Volunteers, Qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

The contributions made by volunteers are important. Noble (1991:1) argues that volunteers make up a large portion of the nation's most valuable asset – human resources. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has estimated that volunteers contributed 511.7 and 704.1 million hours from 1995 to 2000. This represents a 27.3% increase in the participation of volunteers over this period. The number of volunteers also increased from 19% of the civilian population volunteering in 1995 to 34% in 2000; this also takes into account the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Volunteers (ABS, 2001 Cat no, 4441.0). Removing the effects of the Olympics, a pessimistic estimate is that at least one in five Australians participates in some form of voluntary work.

Voluntary work is an important contribution to a nation's way of life. Volunteering itself is identified as a type of work or "human effort that adds value to goods and services" (Wilson & Musick, 1997: 695). Interestingly, Wilson & Musick (1997) argue that voluntary work has a market value greater than any remuneration received. Voluntary work contributes an inestimable amount of goods and services that are unseen as "volunteer work is not included in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and is therefore not part of the overall economic framework" (Warburton & Oppenheimer, 2000: 5). Volunteers contribute their time to a broad range of community activities including: sport, recreation, emergency services, health, education, arts, hobby, welfare, youth, religious, community services, culture, heritage, environmental, professional, business and union organisations (Noble 1991; Brosnan & Cuskelly, 2001). In short, the value of voluntary work is largely hidden from our national or organisational indicators.

What is interesting about the *motivation* of volunteers is that much of what is known is premised on the drivers of satisfaction and performance in the context of *paid* employees and *for-profit* organisations. Developments in motivation theory are therefore assumed to be universal or generalisable to all organisation settings. For example, a common thread among the variants of motivation theory is the role of monetary remuneration as extrinsic rewards that facilitate the meeting of basic physiological needs

(Bockman, 1971). Because volunteers are not paid, the conventional drivers of motivation cannot be assumed. In this light, little is known about the motivation that sustains the contribution of volunteers. This paper explores the motivation of volunteers. Using primary data, we attempt to build a model of volunteer motivation and reflect on current motivation theory.

VOLUNTEERING

The ABS defines a volunteer as "someone who willingly gave unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills through an organisation or group within a formal structure" (Cat no 4441.0, 2001: 1). Pearce (1993) defines a volunteer as a person who does not receive monetary payment for their work. However, this definition is quite broad and does not describe the characteristics that define a volunteer. Cnaan, Handy & Hadsworth (1996) provide a conceptual framework using volunteer experiences to define volunteers (Mesch, Tschirhart, Perry & Lee, 1998). After analysing 11 definitions of volunteers, Cnaan, Handy & Hadsworth (1996) found there are four common dimensions that define a volunteer. These dimensions are; free choice (ranging from free will to obligation to volunteer), remuneration (from no pay, expense payments to stipends), structure in which the volunteer participates (informal to formal) and beneficiaries (strangers, friends/relatives, onself) of the volunteer's actions (Cnaan et al, 1996: 371). These dimensions are important to understand as they constrain the basis in which key processes operate in motivating individuals (for further reading into the conceptual dimensions of volunteers see Cnaan, Handy & Hadsworth, 1996; Arai, 1997; Cnaan et al 1998; Paull, 1999; Cordingley, 2000).

In summary, we utilise the key conceptual dimensions of volunteers to derive our own definition for this research. Unlike Brosnan & Cuskelly (2001) who simply put the definition of a volunteer as the giving of one's time for the benefit of others, our definition explicitly addresses each conceptual component. This is an important process that focuses both the research (in terms of the conflation of processes among disparate type of volunteers) and the sampling process. ***For the purposes of this research a volunteer is seen as one who donates their time without coercion, for no monetary payment, within a formal***

organisation towards benefiting unknown others and themselves. We now turn to the contribution of content/process and functional motivation theory.

MOTIVATION AND VOLUNTEERS: CONTENT AND PROCESS APPROACHES

Limited research has been conducted into the motivation of unpaid volunteers. Most research has focused on volunteers in social services (Kemp, 2002). Less research has taken a sporting or emergency services context as the basis for study. However, the main problem with generalising the relatively large contributions made by those such as Maslow and Herzberg and others is the focus on paid workers (e.g Herzberg used accountants and engineers) to determine motivation in a work context (Wilson 1976; Chedalluarai, 1999). Despite this limitation, in this section of the paper we examine the major contributors to motivation theory.

Maslow argued that there are five basic levels of needs (physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation) arranged in a hierarchy of importance (Stone, 1998). According to Maslow "an individual cannot devote energy toward the satisfaction of needs at one level until the needs at the levels below are satisfied to a reasonable extent" (cited in Knowles, 1972: 27). Despite being widely used and the best known theory about motivation, Maslow's hierarchy approach has attracted criticism. For example, there is little research evidence to support five distinct levels of needs (Steers, Porter & Bigley, 1996; Stone, 1998). Regardless, Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains a theory that is consistently cited in major texts that cover motivation.

The hierarchy of needs has been used to explain motivation behind volunteers. Yet a fundamental problem with the application of Maslow's hierarchy to volunteers is that the physiological level is somewhat redundant. This aspect of Maslow's hierarchy of needs primarily concentrates on safety, belonging and esteem needs (Knowles, 1972). Mesch et al, (1998) argue that volunteerism, as a service to others, appeals to the esteem needs of a volunteer. They argue that self-esteem is an important variable when it comes to

retention (Mesch et al, 1998). While the relevance of Maslow's lower level needs to our study of volunteers are debatable, there is a clear significance of higher level needs such as *self-actualisation*.

Herzberg's two factor model is divided into hygiene and motivators. Hygiene factors result from extrinsic, non-job related factors that include policies, administration, interpersonal relations, status, security, and money (Wilson, 1976; Steer et al, 1996). Hygiene factors relate to dissatisfaction due to the context where work is carried out (Chelladuarai, 1999). Motivators, on the other hand, are satisfying factors and are intrinsic to the content of the job itself. These include achievement, recognition, challenging work, responsibility, growth and development (Wilson, 1976; Steer et al, 1996).

The terminology of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differs across studies. In volunteer studies they can be referred to as *altruistic* (motivators) and *instrumental* (hygiene) motivation respectively. Altruistic motivation is also an intrinsic motive in Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory (Mesch, Tschirhart, Perry & Lee, 1998). It involves a desire to help others, an opportunity for emotional association with others and to serve the community (Mesch et al, 1998; Phillip 1982). As noted by Henderson (1981), volunteers are marked by the provision of a service to others and the appreciation of personal growth. In the context of volunteering, altruistic motivation appears to be an important intrinsic motivating factor.

The role of instrumental motivation, or extrinsic hygiene factors, is not as easily applied. Instrumental motivation relates to the hygiene factors and egoist motives and primarily focuses on the self-interests of the volunteer (Horton-Smith, 1981; Mesch et al, 1998). Instrumental motivations include "learning new skills, preparing for employment, obtaining compensation, gaining an opportunity to socialise and make friends, and ensuring a constructive way to use leisure time" (Mesch et al, 1998: 4). While volunteers do not gain compensation, the potential for socialisation and meeting new friends is consistent with Mesch et al's outline of instrumental motivation. However, socialisation and learning new skills might also reflect altruistic motives among volunteers (for a more detailed discussion see Brockman 1971). We regard this

controversy as problematic but also as potentially useful in developing an understanding of motivation among volunteers.

Theories of content and process motivation, such as those developed by Maslow and Herzberg, do not easily apply to volunteers. Instead they are entrenched in, and have as a focus, the motivation of *work*. Consistent with Clary, Snyder & Stukas (1996: 486) our study focuses on "the internal, psychological forces that move people to overcome obstacles and become involved in volunteer activity". Instead of asking *why do people work*, in the context of this study we address the question of *why do people volunteer*?

MOTIVATION AND VOLUNTEERS: FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES

To address this question the functional approach to motivation theory helps in building an understanding of why individuals volunteer and what sustains their efforts. The work of Clary & Snyder, and others, has made a key contribution central to the functional explanation of motivation among volunteers. The functional approach is:

> "explicitly concerned with the reasons and the purposes, the plans and the goals, that underlie and generate psychological phenomena – that is, the personal and social functions being served by an individual's thoughts, feelings and actions" (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen & Miene, 1998: 1516)

 The functional approach asks questions such as "What function or purpose is served for a person when he or she holds a certain attitude or behaves in a certain way?" (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992: 335). Volunteers can make a choice to volunteer freely to an organisation based on their individual motivation (Lucas & Williams, 2000). Further, in terms of volunteering, people engage in volunteer work for different motivational reasons and to achieve important psychological goals (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1993; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Clary et al, 1996). Therefore this approach, among volunteers, examines what motives are satisfied, what needs are met and what goals are attained.

The various efforts of functional contributions to motivation theory for volunteers have centred on the development of the Volunteers Functional Index (VFI). The VFI is devised from a national survey conducted by Clary, Snyder & Stukas (1996) on American adults' giving and volunteering. Later it has been used to research motivation of numerous volunteers including: those over 50 years of age; volunteers and retention in policing; AIDS volunteers; gender differences amongst upcoming medical professionals; and more recently to help with the demographic profiling and establishing motives of sport volunteers (Okun, Barr & Herzog 1998, Lucas & Williams 2000, Omoto & Synder 1993, Fletcher & Major, 2004, Strigas & Newton Jackson, 2003). However, the VFI has several limitations that make it difficult to utilise in the context of surf life saving.

The VFI is an objective, self-administered survey that attempts to identify the *single most important* functional motivator. Others have argued that this is somewhat problematic when there may be multiple drivers of volunteer motivation (Clary, Synder & Ridge, 1992). Apart from the problem of the possible multidimensionality of volunteer motivation it is also a self-administrated fixed-choice survey. While the VFI draws on the strengths of an objective measure of motivation, Clary, Synder & Ridge, (1992) doubt the willingness of completion and the truthfulness of the VFI participant. Similarly we draw attention to issues of validity and the inherent weakness of objective surveys to tap into the world-views of individual actors. In the context of this study, the VFI may not be appropriate for surf lifesavers since little research has been done in this area. We feel, that on an epistemological basis, the use of interpretative and subjective methods need first be utilised in order to explore and identify the motivation and rewards that help surf lifesavers remain active members. We draw on the key contributions of motivation theory, as examined in this paper, to help explore, build, and develop an understanding of the motivation of volunteer Surf Life Savers.

METHOD: SAMPLE, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

The literature on volunteering, motivation and rewards were reviewed to determine what method was needed to gain more understanding into motivation of surf lifesavers. Grounded theory was chosen as the best method with semi-structured in-depth interviews to be conducted with surf lifesavers from two different surf lifesaving clubs. Fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted.

The idea of using grounded theory is to develop a new theory where there has been little research done in a certain area or give a new approach to existing knowledge (Goulding, 1998). Grounded theory is an interpretive approach which relies on the interpretations of the perspectives and voices of the interviewees to gain deeper understanding of the area (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Goulding, 1998).

The sample size that was chosen for this study was 20, however theoretical saturation was reached at 14, seven surf lifesavers from Noosa Heads Surf Life Saving Club and seven surf lifesavers from Sunshine Beach Surf Life Saving Club were interviewed. Snowballing sampling was used to start the research process where two surf lifesavers from each of the two clubs were chosen, contacted and interviewed. These two surf lifesavers then gave the researcher possible interviewees to contact resulting in snowball sampling. A further technique of theoretical sampling was then utilised. Open sampling was initially used to determine what factors were broadly affecting motivation and rewards to retain surf lifesavers. Using open sampling, seven surf lifesavers were interviewed, four from Noosa Heads and three from Sunshine Beach. Each interview was transcribed and then coded to obtain categories. Relational sampling was then used focusing on, firstly, new persons with different experiences to add to the emerging theory and, secondly, how the emerging categories linked to each other. Another four interviews were then conducted to gather new information and discover further new categories from the new interviewees. Finally, discriminate sampling was used, which was focused to fill in and redefine emerging categories. This sampling technique was used for the remaining three interviews in which the questions were redeveloped

to strengthen the gaps that had emerged. The interviews were transcribed. Categories and node structures were obtained using the constant comparison method (Spiggle, 1994).

Given the evolution of the sampling based on the findings, the semi-structured interview questions varied from the beginning to the end of the study. For example, initial questions – such as *How long have you been a surf lifesaver and why did you become a surf lifesaver?* As more interviews were conducted, further questions were asked including: *What keeps you coming back each year to donate your time?* or, *Have you ever thought about resigning as a surf lifesaver?* Questions were also asked regarding the emergent common themes, for example, *What type of lifestyle benefits do you get out of being a surf lifesaver?*

The constant comparison method was used to compare the interviews analytically after they were transcribed to explore the differences and similarities within each interview by applying logic and making interferences from the data (Spiggle, 1994). The similarities and differences were noted and helped to establish nodes and sub-categories. Comparison helped to guide the researcher, in terms of theoretical sampling, to find interviewees that would help to strengthen categories that had emerged (Spiggle, 1994). Constant comparison method is a part of the grounded theory process and can be examined in detail elsewhere (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

The data were analysed through the cross-indexing and comparison of data sources. Advanced analysis included the examination of gender, locality and length of time as a surf lifesaver across the coded categories. In each analysis (*e.g. between males and females*) a comparison was made of the differences and similarities in the emergent categories. This analysis was conducted to further deepen the results by analysing and discovering if categories could be further sub-divided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To facilitate the emergence of categories, as required by the grounded theory methodology, seven surf lifesavers were interviewed (four from Noosa Heads and three from Sunshine Beach). Each interview was transcribed and then categorised and coded. Another four interviews were then conducted to gather new information; new categories emerged from these interviews. Finally three further interviews, in which the questions were redeveloped to fill in and redefine categories, were conducted as noted in the method section. The constant comparison method was used to obtain the categories and node structures and to determine gaps and identify when theoretical saturation had been reached.

The results will be presented as five major emerging categories. These are (1) 'Lifestyle'; (2) 'Facilities'; (3) 'Service to the Community'; (4) 'Competition' and (5) 'Barriers and Constraints'. Interviewees comments will be used to give the reader some insight into the substance of the emerging categories.

The **Lifestyle** category contained information regarding what aspects of lifestyle of surf lifesaving that motivated individuals to volunteer. Within this category, the surf lifesavers mentioned health/fitness, socialising and area (in terms of locality where they had been volunteering) as all motivators to why they volunteer.

Facilities define features of the club that are offered to surf lifesavers. Facilities can be broken into three sub-categories: 'bronze medallion', 'club' and 'beach'. These are all facilities of the club which help motivate surf lifesavers. In this category, the beach is referred to as a key motivator to volunteer - without it, surf lifesaving could not exist.

Noosa Heads and Sunshine Beach surf lifesavers live in an area that is in close proximity to the beach; many grow up by the beach and consequently they understand the danger of drowning. This provides incentives and rewards for being a surf lifesaver. Surf lifesavers therefore give of their time to help provide beach safety, leading to the perception that they are providing a **Service to the Community**.

Interviewees regarded **Competition** as an important part of the motivation and the reasons why they remain a surf lifesaver. 'Competition' has three sub-categories: 'enjoyment', 'trips away' and 'provides a challenge'.

The final major category is '**Barriers and Constraints**'. Barriers and constraints is defined by the negative aspects that affect motivation and retention of surf lifesavers. The sub-categories within this node are 'changing laws relating to discrimination and bullying', 'time', 'ability to do as much as you can do', 'commercialisation of the club', 'beach conditions', 'people not listening', 'male dominance' and 'public liability'.

To summarise, the five major categories were 'Lifestyle', 'Facilities', 'Service to the Community', 'Competition' and 'Barriers and Constraints'. 'Lifestyle' denoted aspects of surf lifesaving that contributed to a healthy lifestyle. 'Facilities' referred to the facilities or physical aspects that the surf lifesaving club had to offer surf lifesavers to help them remain active members. The 'Service to the Community' category concerned serving and being a surf lifesaver in the community. 'Competition' referred to competition aspects that helped motivate and retain surf lifesavers. The 'barriers and constraints' category was concerned with the negative aspects that affected a surf lifesaver's motivation to remain active members.

The emergent categories are compared to the motivation literature presented earlier in the paper. In each of the following sections, the analysis of emerging categories is contrasted to a motivation theory. These include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two Factor Model, Expectancy Theory and the Functional Approach to motivation. Table 1 presents this analysis: ticks represent positive verification or validation that a relationship exists whilst a cross indicates the absence of a relationship between emergent categories and theoretical concepts.

Table 1: Cross-classification of emergent categories and motivation theory

Motivation Theory	Lifestyle	Facilities	Service to the Community	Competition	Barriers and Constraints
Maslow					
1. Physiological	√	√	–	√	–
2. Safety	–	√	√	–	X
3. Social	√	√	–	√	–
4. Esteem	–	√	√	√	–
5.Self –Actualisation	√	√	√	√	X
Herzberg					
Motivators (Intrinsic/Altruistic)	√	√	√	√	X
Hygiene (Extrinsic/Instrumental)	√	√	–	√	X
VFI					
Values	–	–	√	–	X
Understanding	–	√	–	–	-
Enhancement/Esteem	√	–	√	√	X
Career	–	√	–	–	–
Social	√	√	–	√	–
Protective	–	–	–	–	–

To further refine the analysis, the black boxes in Figure 1 indicate the importance of each component of the theory analysed. The black or darker shades of grey indicate that the component has strong relevance to the theory. The lighter shades of grey have some or weak relevance to the theory.

Figure 1: Strength of relevance of cross-classification of emergent categories and motivation theory
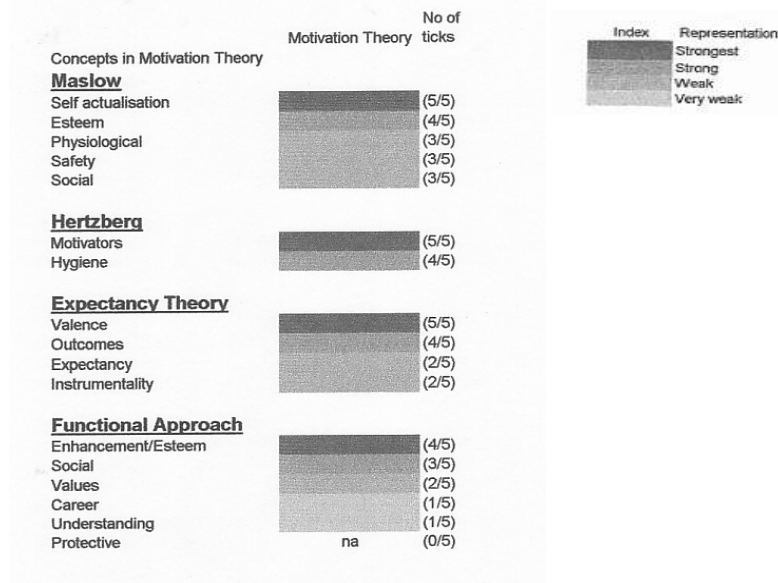

From Figure 1, primary, secondary and tertiary motivating factors that help to motivate and reward surf lifesavers can be identified. Each of these broad levels will now be discussed.

Primary Factors of Motivation

The primary factors of motivation are drawn from each of the four motivation theories discussed previously. The components that are the primary factors of motivation which help to motivate are Maslow's self-actualisation, Herzberg's 'motivators', 'valence' from Expectancy theory and 'enhancement/esteem' from Functional motivation theory. It also relates to 'motivators' as self-actualisation and enhancement/esteem are intrinsic motivators Valence is the anticipated outcomes that appear attractive or unattractive. This suggests that the outcomes of self actualisation and enhancement/esteem are more attractive in helping to motivate and reward. Intrinsic motivation, those embedded in the meaning rather than in the external value, play a crucial role in motivating surf lifesavers.

Figure Y: Key Factors of Motivation
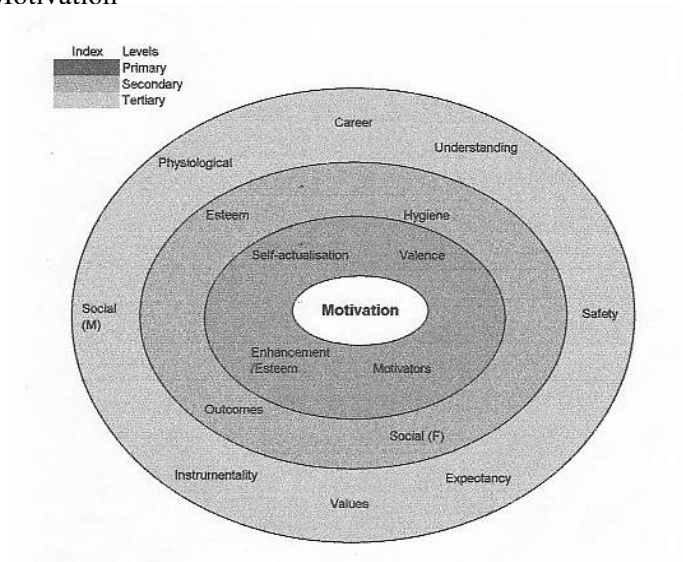
Having intrinsic motivation as the primary motivation factor indicates that the retention of active surf lifesavers is driven intrinsically by self-actualisation rather than extrinsically through financial and tangible rewards. Surf lifesavers therefore remain surf lifesavers because of the intrinsic rewards they receive, such as the self-esteem and enhancement through the ability to save beach patrons and provision of knowledge of beach conditions to protect beach patrons.

Secondary Factors of Motivation

The secondary factors of motivation are drawn from Figure Z indicated by a darker grey shading. The secondary factors of motivation comprise: esteem, hygiene, outcomes and social (Functional Approach). Social, outcomes and hygiene factors are related to the extrinsic motivating factors. Social is related to satisfying a social need, therefore becoming and staying a surf lifesaver due to family and friends. Outcomes are related to anticipated consequences that are related to the individual to do something; these are mainly extrinsic factors that provide this motivation. Esteem, according to Maslow, refers to the respect and esteem for others. Such esteem is derived from competition which in turn provides intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Secondary factors of motivation can be considered extrinsic motivators, unlike primary factors of motivation where it was intrinsic rewards, and are placed second after achieving self-actualisation. Friends, uniform, trips away and winning are all important tangible and extrinsic rewards which provide ways of rewarding and motivating surf lifesavers to remain active members. The title of Australian champion is another esteem element that is an extrinsic reward.

Tertiary Factors of Motivation

Tertiary factors of motivation are the outer and lighter shades of grey indicated in Figure Z. These factors are both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators of surf lifesavers. However, these factors are not central to existing motivation theory. The tertiary factors of motivation are physiological, career, understanding, safety, expectancy, values, instrumentality and social (Maslow).

Because of the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation this indicates that there is a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that help to motivate and reward surf lifesavers. However these rewards are not key rewards or motivators as indicated by the primary and secondary factors. Intrinsic rewards include the ability to know surf safety. Extrinsic rewards include food and drink rewards after a day volunteering.

CONCLUSION

The key factors of motivation are the primary motivators that reward and motivate surf lifesavers to remain active members. These primary motivators are related to the intrinsic motivation and rewards. The primary motivators[1] that reward and motivate surf lifesavers are self-actualisation, enhancement/esteem and 'motivators'. These motivations and rewards relate to the aspects that have the ability to increase self esteem and enhancement. Examples include becoming healthy and fit, the ability to save someone, the reward of achieving a result after all the hard training has been done (e.g. obtaining the bronze medallion).

The secondary motivating factors are extrinsic in nature, therefore are tangible motivators and rewards. These include: making new friends which provides comradeship; or a reward at the end of the volunteering days which provide recognition and appreciation; or ability to compete and become a champion. While these drivers of motivation are secondary factors they still play an important role in motivating and rewarding surf lifesavers.

Primary and secondary motivating factors, reported here, are not inconsistent with much of the contributions of motivation theory. However, two important implications of this research should be drawn out. First, volunteers are not driven purely by intrinsic motivation, as which might be thought in a variety of volunteer organisations (e.g. State Emergency Service, Greenpeace, or charity collection). Second, while income-based extrinsic rewards are clearly not relevant to volunteers – other extrinsic factors take up such roles in the constellation of primary and secondary motivating factors. Volunteers, such as surf-life-savers, provide the service that underpins salient aspects of the Australian way-of-life. This paper has explored the drivers of motivation among volunteers.

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[1] Motivators can have both a general meaning and refer to 'motivators' in terms of Hertzberg's Two-Factor Theory. To distinguish these two uses, Hertzberg's term is enclosed in inverted commas.

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