Motivation of volunteers at disability sports events: A comparative study of volunteers in Malaysia, South Africa and the United States

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Abstract

Understanding the motivation of individuals who volunteer for disability sport events is important for the continued success of these activities. Very few cross-cultural comparisons have been done to assess the motivations of volunteers at similar events. This study explored the key factors that motivate volunteers to provide humanitarian services at disability sport events in Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States. Participants in the study were volunteers at the 13\textsuperscript{th} Malaysian Paralympiad (n = 301), the first USA National Special Olympics (n= 289) and three Special Olympics events in South Africa (n=152). They were randomly contacted via direct mail or through direct distribution of surveys at the orientation sessions. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes were given to each participant to facilitate return of the mailed surveys. A modified version of the Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale (SEVMS) was used to determine the motivation of the volunteers. Frequencies, means and standard deviation were used to report on the demographic data. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess differences between the groups. Differences were deemed statistically significant at \(p<0.05\). The results indicated that volunteers were generally motivated by altruistic motives. However, while the main reason for volunteering in South Africa and the USA was to make a contribution to the community and help make the event a success, the Malaysian volunteers were motivated by self-improvement and gaining experience. Event managers can thus use a matching strategy where volunteers’ tasks could be matched with their motives in order to recruit and retain them.

Key words: Volunteer, motivation, disability, sport, Special Olympics, Paralympics, volunteerism, sport management, cross-cultural comparisons.

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Introduction

The proliferation of sport events organized for various communities has resulted in an increased demand for human resources to ensure their success, in particular for volunteer workers. The contribution of volunteers at various sport events is well-documented (Chelladurai, 2006; Cuskelley, Hoye & Auld, 2006; Green & Chalip, 1998). Volunteers play a variety of essential roles, including...