

ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERISM:
CONCERNS AND INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS

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Environmental Volunteerism: Concerns and Integrated Solutions

In today's society, environmental concerns have become topics of interest amongst schools, politics, and individuals personal interest. Global warming has become an issue of much discussion and debate, water and air pollution is a mandatory topic to be covered in schools, and habitat destruction is now known to cause the extinction of species. The list could go on about how environmental concerns have grown into serious issues of interest, and yet there seems to be a shortage of active volunteering. Understanding that a healthy environment affects everyone is only the start of the issue at hand. The real problem is that there is not enough awareness of environmental organizations efforts, therefore leading to a lack of volunteers to make their projects effective.

Not much research has been on the actual lack of awareness of environmental efforts, but most articles and studies do emphasize the importance of volunteer hours (Measham & Barnett, 2008). Educators, politicians, and professionals in the environmental field all know there is not sufficient funding in environmental efforts, along with other fields of interest, and rely heavily on a strong volunteer base. Only fifteen percent of volunteer hours go towards social services, with environmental efforts being a fraction of that, which is considerably lower than the 34 percent that goes towards religious efforts and the twenty-six toward education (Joseph, 2014). But what motivates people to put aside their own interests and volunteer? Studies suggest the best way to appeal and keep volunteers is to promote "learning and contact with nature," because it, "clearly emerged as the most important factors in volunteer motivation" (Chawla & Flanders, 2007).

Ultimately, the solution would be to raise awareness for local efforts, but doing that requires more than one disciplined approach to be fully effective. There are a few different ways to approach this problem, but psychology and economics can work together to build more

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awareness and a stronger volunteer base for local environmental efforts. Using more than one approach to solve an issue is called an interdisciplinary approach, and this approach is becoming a more desired and popular way to solve problems as the years pass (Repko, 2014).

Interdisciplinary studies is, “a cognitive process by which individuals or groups draw on disciplinary perspectives and integrate their insights and modes of thinking to advance their understanding of a complex problem with the goal of applying the understanding to a real world problem” (Repko, 2014, p. 32). Essentially, an integrated approach to solving problems is practical in most cases because it takes more than one aspect of a problem into account (Repko, 2014). This is useful in that it encourages solving a problem with multiple factors in mind instead of the usual closed minded approach.

Using psychology as an approach would illuminate insights of how to speak and appeal to the audience, identify the intrinsic and extrinsic values of volunteering, and help persuade by clearly emphasizing the benefits of volunteering. For this specific issue, psychology would be utilized to help understand the motivation behind volunteering, commitment, and how to appeal to potential volunteers.

Economics is a logical discipline to include because it incorporates business functions. One cannot help nonprofit organizations function better without understanding what already goes into them. Research on business aspects should be utilized because it would help distinguish what functions would work best for nonprofits.

All in all, it is clear that there is more than one approach to solving issues, and in this situation two disciplines could and should be used to build environmental effort awareness. An

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integrated approach to the problem would be to incorporate psychology and economic aspects into the solution to build awareness for local environmental efforts (Repko, 2014).

Psychology

The epistemology of this discipline suggests that treatments can be applied once psychological constructs and related behaviors are understood through observation or discussion (Repko, 2014).

Psychology is a good discipline to utilize because it “sees human behavior as reflecting the cognitive constructs individuals develop to organize their mental activity,” (Repko, 2014, p. 98). The epistemology of this discipline is based on conducted experiments and findings, and suggests that treatments can be applied once psychological constructs and related behaviors are understood through observation or discussion (Repko, 2014). For environmental issues and volunteering, examples of experiments include figuring out volunteer motivation and what makes volunteers stay committed. Psychology is a discipline of interest in the world of recruiting and retaining volunteers because an organization cannot hope to get and keep help if they do not understand what motivates them to work. In other words, one cannot reach a target audience without understanding how to appeal to them. Researchers agree on the importance of identifying underlying motives, what makes people stay committed, and education of the environment in the volunteering sector to help obtain future help for nonprofits.

Motivators for people entering the environmental field include helping the environment, learning, social factors, and project organization (Ryan, Kaplan & Grese, 2001). Of all the motivators, learning and contact with nature are the two most significant for volunteers (Chawla & Crashing, 2007). What drives volunteers does gradually change over time. Most volunteers

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admit that learning and environmental contact were the most important motivators initially, but later reveal that participation inspired personal growth and a sense of community amongst peers (Ryan, Kaplan & Grese, 2001).

Motivators are important, but keeping volunteers committed to the cause also merits attention since government programs rely on a strong volunteer base (Measham & Barnett, 2008). Understanding what drives volunteers is essential for building volunteer commitment in the long run. Organizations need to be careful to not abuse their volunteers and should promote community education during their involvement to retain the help (Measham & Barnett, 2008). Not all volunteers plan on consistently donating their time, and positive experiences while volunteering builds and retains commitment.

Education plays an important role for environmental volunteers since it is one of the main underlying motivators for volunteers. Learning while volunteering is important for volunteer retention, but knowledge of environmental issues before volunteering also warrants interest. Young adults are more environmentally conscious because they were taught about environmental issues in school (McDougle, 2011). Because younger generations are more aware of issues, they are more active in day to day activities that help reduce environmental issues. Learning about environmental efforts at a young age has sparked more interest in volunteering for younger generations and is clearly an important motivator for them (McDougle, 2011).

Economics

Economics is another discipline of interest when it comes to finding volunteers to help with nonprofit organizations. Economics examines how things are affected in a monetary way and, “emphasizes the study of production and distribution of goods and services with the

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individual functioning as the autonomous, rational, and self-interested actor” (Repko, 2014, p. 99). Marketing is a component of economics and plays a large role in developing awareness of environmental efforts because it is responsible for advertising and business planning. A few aspects to consider when trying to help build awareness of efforts would be to analyze the effectiveness of advertising functions, nonprofit organization marketing, and marketing strategies used for nonprofits.

Though advertising is still beneficial for spreading the word, effectiveness of advertising has decreased some over the years. The effectiveness of media outlets varies for long term and short term ads (Sethuraman, Tellis & Briesch, 2011). Short term ads present better outcomes when dispersed through television, whereas long-term ads produce better results when dispensed through print media (Sethuraman, Tellis & Briesch, 2011). Budgets may limit which media outlets can be purchased, but the general results of the study present good principles for media selection. This is important for nonprofits to consider when selecting media outlets.

Nonprofit organizations face more challenges than businesses do when it comes to marketing. Audiences have a hard time finding the value in what nonprofit organizations have to offer because most don't offer tangible goods or rewards (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991). Complexity arises for nonprofits when there are multiple goals because it is hard to find balance between all the objectives.

An attribute that makes nonprofit marketing unique is that their objective is not to maximize profits because their nonfinancial objectives are equally important. Nonprofit marketers need to target both funders and people who benefit from the cause. Another problem that nonprofit marketers face is the limited risk they can take. Private businesses often can afford

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some sort of risk whereas nonprofits can't because they do not have the funding or can survive the potential loss of resources (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991).

Though nonprofit organizations face many challenges when it comes to marketing, they recognize it can help them accomplish their mission. One aspect of a marketing approach utilized by nonprofits is customer orientation (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991). This means making it convenient for people to volunteer or donate for a nonprofit, and not necessarily what would be easiest for the staff of the organization. Another marketing function utilized by nonprofit organizations is offering funders benefits (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991). In most cases, this is simply letting donors claim the status of being a sponsor to obtain a positive company image.

Utilizing marketing functions can benefit a nonprofit organization in more ways than one. Marketing can increase ticket sales for nonprofit events, which benefits organizations by raising money for their causes. Marketing can also help build a volunteer base if they illustrate benefits, such as self-esteem or small material goods (Pope, Isely & Asamoah-Tutu, 2009). However, when it comes to marketing for nonprofit organizations, functions must accommodate the sole purpose of the mission in order to be successful (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991).

Psychology and economics both center on people, but are different because psychology works to understand humans whereas economics works to get people to act a certain way in a business aspect. Working together, psychology could be used to understand consumers so the business function of economics can be utilized fully.

Proposed Solution

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Extension is the most appropriate common ground theory for this this environmental issue because it conceptionally extends and incorporates multiple approaches that are relevant (Repko, 2014). To help environmental efforts, organizations must use extension to psychologically understand what motivates people to help and stay committed, along with economically understand how to reach new volunteers and understand the vitality of advertising the nonprofit. Building a strong marketing plan designed for non-profit organizations and utilizing volunteer insights is the best way to build organization awareness and accumulate a strong volunteer base.

Using findings from psychology studies can help highlight factors to advertise when trying to enlist immediate and future help. When trying to appeal to the potential volunteer base, nonprofits must understand motivational factors, causes behind commitment, and how to spread the general word of an organizations effort around in an appealing manor.

When it comes to appealing to people on a psychological level in the environmental field, it is important to emphasize the effects of the damaged environment and how it personally hurts them. In order for people to want to help, they need to be motivated and understand the good that could come from their help. Once enlisted, it is important to keep individuals committed to the cause. The best way to retain involvement is to promote community education on environmental matters and ensure volunteers have positive experiences. Education is the key to ensuring a future volunteer base and to keep current participants active in local causes.

Once the basic mindset is in place an appropriate marketing plan can be constructed. For this particular field of interest the general foundations behind marketing plans are altered and require careful planning. The mission is to help raise awareness of issues and build a volunteer

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base to help alleviate environmental stress. Most marketing plans orient around profit above all else, whereas environmental organizations need to target sponsors, general supporters, and volunteers. To achieve this, a few routes of communication need to be constructed and directed toward sponsors, general population, and potential volunteers.

One extremely important channel that should be initially dealt with is finding and building support amongst local businesses. With the financial support from outside companies, small nonprofits can begin their startup marketing campaign. Environmental organizations need to obtain sponsors by contacting companies, big or small, and appeal to them enough to gain support. The best way to gain these partnerships is by allowing their business to advertise through the organization or offering to stand by them to build a good company image. This phase requires negotiations, but ultimately finding and fulfilling the “what is in it for me?” question is what will solidify partnerships.

Educating people on environmental issues and spreading the word of local efforts is the next step, and the distribution methods become more complex than directly contacting companies. Sense short term advertising does best via television, and long term ads hold better retention rates when printed, it would make sense to utilize both outlets with specialized messages. Print ads would be best for general environmental education, such as fun facts to interest people, and then have a call to action at the bottom of the ad to encourage individuals to look into local efforts. Contacting local papers or making arraignments with sponsors should help with general information distribution. Television spots do better with short term ads, such as upcoming local events, but that level of advertising can be too pricy for nonprofits. A cheaper alternative to television would be utilizing online video and sharing them with local newscasts and posting on social media outlets.

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Lastly, reaching the most targeted base is the most complicated: potential volunteers. This channel is more delicate because organizations cannot complete their efforts without volunteer to carry out their tasks. Ideally, everyone has the potential to become a volunteer, but smaller organizations need to focus most of their resources on target groups with a higher rate of conversion. Education is noted as the key role of motivation for environmental volunteers, and studies have found younger generations are more actively involved because they had been educated on environmental issues in school. This means the most accepting audience for environmental volunteering is younger, more tech-savvy generations. Advertisements designed with the specific intent of enlisting help need to first be dispersed through social media platforms to reach the younger target audience, then should spread to other potential outlets once funding has grown.

Ultimately, the goal is to use psychological findings to help enhance a nonprofit organizations marketing plan. Ideally, the plan would start with finding a few sponsors that donate some type of support or resources in exchange for a good company reputation. The following step would be to educate people on the environment in hopes of sparking enough interest to consider volunteering, or at least encourage individuals to develop greener personal habits. Free media outlets, such as social networks and press releases, should be utilized for all notable announcements, whereas print and television spots should be reserved for more news worthy opportunities. Targeting the young potential volunteer base should be done through the audience's familiar media outlets, such as Twitter and Facebook. The ads should be open to any kind of help and encourage involvement with nature, internal and external benefits, personal growth, and a fun experience that helps the environment. Commitment is the final component of the plan, and the best way to build it, and ensure volunteers stay, is to make the process easy on

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individuals, learning opportunities, and make sure they enjoy spending their time helping a good cause.

The environment is something that is getting more damaged by the day, and humans are the primary cause for the deadly instability. Educating people on the earth's sustainability issues and raise awareness of local efforts should encourage people to either get involved or become aware enough to change daily habits into greener ones. Hopefully, with enough time and effort going into raising awareness, the world will slowly become a greener place.

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