Using Self-Concept Theory To Identify And Develop Volunteer Leader Potential In Healthcare

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

Resource constraints in the Canadian publicly funded healthcare system have created a need for more volunteer leaders to effectively manage other volunteers. Therefore, self-concept theory has been conceptualized and applied within a volunteer context, and the views of healthcare stakeholders, such as volunteers, volunteer leaders, and supervisors, triangulated to form an understanding of the attitudes and behaviors of volunteer leaders.

This research proposes that leaders are differentiated from others by how they view their roles in the organization and their ability to make a difference in these roles. This interpretation can be informed by self-concept theory because each individual’s notion of self-concept influences how employees see themselves, how they react to experiences, and how they allow these experiences to shape their motivation. Therefore this research asks, how are healthcare leaders differentiated from others in an organization in terms of their roles and abilities?

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Francine Schlosser, Deborah Zinni and Andrew Templer undertook a qualitative study, utilizing case study methodology, to explore the different attitudes and behaviors of volunteer leaders and followers. This allowed the researchers to profile a volunteer leader self-concept that included a proactive, learning-oriented attitude, capitalizing on significant prior work experience to fulfill a sense of obligation to the institution and its patients, and demands a high level of respect from paid employees.

The researchers first conceptualized the attributes and behaviors that distinguish effective volunteer leaders and then applied the model using a case study methodology. A hospital context was chosen because volunteer followers and leaders play a crucial role in delivering care to a broad section of society. The researchers collected data from volunteer followers and leaders and employees in a large Canadian hospital. Data were collected over two months in a series of focus groups and interviews. First, a two-hour-long focus group was conducted with volunteer leaders, followed by a second with “other” volunteers, followed by a third focus group with paid employees. The data was then content analyzed.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

This research examined the differences in attitudes and behaviors linked to the self-concepts of “effective” volunteer leaders and other volunteers. Participants differed at an individual level of self-concept in terms of:

- Their duties as volunteer leader or other volunteer, demonstrated by leaders having heightened responsibility for covering volunteer needs.
- Their active or passive views of volunteer activities relative to paid responsibilities.
- Their conflict coping techniques, specifically with leaders choosing more learning oriented techniques.
• Their sense of personal power and efficacy related to prior work experiences.

Specifically, the research found that:
• Volunteer leaders and followers were similar in their identification with other volunteers and the value they placed on serving patient needs. They were also likely to have a positive pre-volunteering experience with the hospital.
• The behaviors and attitudes of most effective leader volunteers reflected skills learned as employees and specifically knowledge of the hospital’s culture and routines
• All study participants experienced a strong relational attachment to the hospital.
• Leaders and other volunteers unanimously perceived volunteering at this organization to require a deep commitment to the patients.

In summary, the study profiled a volunteer leader self-concept that included a proactive, learning-oriented attitude, capitalizing on significant prior work experience to fulfill a sense of obligation to the institution and its patients, and demands a high level of respect from paid employees. Without effective volunteers, healthcare institutions would not successfully fulfill their societal obligations to high-quality healthcare.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research can be used by hospital administration and management. It holds implications for hospitals and other large formalized institutions in the identification and management of volunteer leaders. This research examined how volunteer leaders and other volunteers differ in their volunteer self-concept, which is important for management to be aware of.

Additionally, this research can be used as a base for future research. Researchers should build upon the findings of this qualitative research to investigate methods that might be used to measure the effectiveness of volunteer leaders and other volunteers across North America.

CITATION


KEYWORDS

Self-concept theory, volunteer leader potential, healthcare, stakeholders

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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