

Oasis Youth Center:

A Study of Motivation

Karolynn Tom

YDP 8090: Management of Staff and Volunteers

July 18th, 2017

Clemson University

Oasis Youth Center: A Study of Motivation

The success of any youth program depends on the staff and volunteers that complete the diverse tasks needed for the program and organization to operate. The tasks vary from front-line work directly interacting with young people to behind-the-scenes duties such as grant writing. The responsibilities may differ greatly, nonetheless the importance of the effective execution of each of the duties is clear. It is vital for programs that utilize volunteers to understand the new landscape of volunteerism to effectively recruit and retain people (McKee & McKee, 2012). Organizations need individuals who are purpose-driven and are motivated to complete their assignments (Thomas, 2009).

The current paper explores the motivations of employees and volunteers at Oasis Youth Center. Oasis is a youth development organization that aims to support LGBTQ youth ages 14-24 (Oasis Youth Center, 2017). According to the Oasis website, there are multiple programs that encompass regular drop-in hours, leadership development, advocacy support and HIV prevention. Oasis was founded by a group of community members in 1985 and remains largely dependent on volunteers since there are only six paid staff (Oasis Youth Center, 2017).

Literature Review

Several theories explain both employee and volunteer motivations. One theory focuses on understanding the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that are provided by a work or volunteer experience. Extrinsic rewards include tangible items such as salary, bonuses, leave accrual, and other office benefits (Thomas, 2009). Intrinsic rewards are not necessarily tangible and come from the satisfaction of doing the job well (Thomas, 2009). Thomas (2009) identified four separate intrinsic rewards, sense of meaningfulness, sense of choice, sense of competence, and sense of progress. He argues that workers today are more motivated by intrinsic rewards than by

extrinsic factors. Managers should place an emphasis on encouraging an environment that focuses on providing intrinsic rewards to increase worker motivation and engagement which begins by having a shared purpose (Thomas, 2009).

Similarly, Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959) proposed a two-factor theory of motivation which outlined two categories of influences that can affect people's satisfaction at work (as cited in Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl, and Maude, 2017). The first category, motivation factors, encompasses intrinsic aspects of the job including achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and opportunity for growth (Herzberg, 1968). In contrast, hygiene factors are extrinsic characteristics of work such as company policies, supervision, interpersonal relationships, general working conditions, job security, and compensation and benefits (Herzberg, 1968). Job dissatisfaction is associated with hygiene factors, while job satisfaction is associated with motivation factors (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg (1968) argues that managers should focus on improving worker motivation factors because it leads to longer-term impacts compared to improved hygiene factors. He also notes that managerial actions can simultaneously influence both motivation and hygiene factors.

Methods

For this study, four individuals (i.e., two staff and two volunteers), were asked to answer a set of questions via a written questionnaire. Two sets of questions were developed, one for staff (see Appendix A) and one for volunteers (see Appendix B). The questions were designed to explore the features of the respondent's experience at Oasis that could be related to their motivation for continued involvement. The questions were emailed to the study participants to complete at their convenience before a set date, three days after receipt of the questions. Included in the email was a short description of the purpose of the request. The study population

was one of convenience and selected by the author based on their knowledge of the individual's connection to the organization. For analysis, the responses were evaluated for trends. If two or more of the respondents mentioned a concept, then it was considered a trend.

Results

The results of the analysis identified several trends regarding the source of motivation for the respondents including a value in the work, positive interpersonal relationships, appreciation provided through tangible items, and quality of communication.

Examination of the responses showed that all four respondents found an altruistic value in their work with Oasis. Responses indicative of this included phrases such as “impacting issues important to me” and “making a difference.” In addition, each of the respondents had a personal connection to Oasis programming, with three out of four having been previous program participants. The fourth respondent learned about Oasis through a former partner who had been a program participant.

Another consistent factor mentioned by all four individuals was the interpersonal relationships with staff. When answering the question of “What keeps you from leaving?” both staff respondents mentioned the relationships with their co-workers. Additionally, both volunteer participants described how staff provided a positive volunteer experience by being supportive, caring, and attentive to any concerns volunteers had about their role.

An identified trend concerning the support Oasis gives to its staff and volunteers was the appreciation provided. One volunteer stated that “Oasis is pretty good about recognizing volunteers and showing their appreciation by providing food, etc.” Additionally, a staff member stated that Oasis supports its staff by providing “amazing benefits including employee assistance and generous paid time off.”

Finally, communication was mentioned by all four respondents. One staff member and one volunteer noted that improvement in communication within staff, and between staff member and volunteers would enhance their experience. On the other hand, the other staff member and volunteer respondents noted that communication was a strength in their interpersonal relationships at Oasis.

Discussion

The motivational trends identified by the analysis of the responses do not completely fit with either theory previously discussed. Both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards were identified in the responses. The intrinsic rewards acknowledge by the respondents included the value of the work which relates to their sense of meaningfulness. The extrinsic rewards found included the employee benefits and the communication policies. Volunteer recognition can be considered both intrinsic in providing a sense of competence and progress, and extrinsic in providing tangible items such as food. Additionally, the feature of positive interpersonal relationships doesn't clearly fall within either the intrinsic or extrinsic reward categories. In fact, the categorization would depend on the significance of the interpersonal relationship to the respondent (information that was not collected in the current study). If the relationship was important because it was enjoyable it would be an intrinsic reward; however, if the relationship led to a specific outcome it would be an extrinsic reward (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, if the individual found purpose in the relationship it would be considered an intrinsic reward. Alternatively, if the significance of the relationship was based on public recognition, it would be an extrinsic reward. It is interesting to note, that using these categories, interpersonal relationships might frequently fall within both categories simultaneously.

In using Herzberg's two-factor motivational theory there were three hygiene and two motivation factors identified. Interpersonal relationships, communication policies, the employee benefits, and the items given for volunteer recognition are all considered hygiene factors. The motivational factors identified were the value of the work and the act of recognition for volunteers.

Interestingly, more extrinsic or hygiene factors were identified in the analysis of responses. This seems to go against the theories proposed by Thomas (2009) and Herzberg (1968), as each identified the intrinsic or motivational factors as being more significant to work satisfaction than extrinsic or hygiene factors. In fact, good hygiene factors are typically not enough to keep a worker satisfied in their role (Herzberg, 1968). However, all the study participants had been involved with Oasis for multiple years, with three of the four becoming employed or volunteering after aging-out of program participation. While more extrinsic or hygiene factors were identified it is possible that the most important influence on the respondents was the intrinsic or motivational factor of the value of the work. This would then align with the intrinsic/extrinsic and two-factor motivation theories. The current analysis method did not include considerations for the magnitude of impact of the different factors identified.

In general, the results show that the respondents are satisfied with their experience with Oasis Youth Center and are highly motivated in their roles. The one area of improvement that was identified in the responses was communication. While half the respondents reported that communication was key to their positive interpersonal relationships, the other half of the respondents explicitly stated communication was an area of improvement for Oasis. It would be beneficial for Oasis Youth Center to undergo an evaluation of both the current internal and external communication policies. This evaluation should include input from all stakeholders

including staff, volunteers, and program participants. Results of the evaluation could include recommendations for specific training and new communication procedures and timelines.

The goal of this paper was to explore what motivates the individuals at Oasis Youth Center in their work. Several intrinsic or motivational and extrinsic or hygiene features were identified. To continue to explore this concept, the question sets should be modified to include items to inform the researchers on the level of importance of the different factors. This information can then be used to advise organizational leaders of action items to improve the motivation in their employees and volunteers. It can also be used to affirm positive practices that are already being utilized. Organizations like Oasis Youth Center have an important role in the community and need motivated and driven individuals to accomplish their goals.

References

- Alshmemri, M., Shahwan-Akl, L., & Maude, P. (2017). Herzberg's two-factor theory. *Life Science Journal*, 14(5), 12-16.
- Herzberg, F. (1968, January-February). One more time: How do you motivate employees? *Harvard Business Review*, 53-62.
- McKee, J., & McKee, T.W. (2012). *The New breed—Understanding & equipping the 21st century volunteer* (2nd ed). USA: Group.
- Oasis Youth Center (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.Oasisyouthcenter.org/>
- Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Class definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54-67.
- Thomas, K. W. (2009). *Intrinsic motivation at work* (2nd ed.) San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Appendix A

Questions Set for Staff

1. How did you hear about Oasis? What made you want to work for Oasis?
2. How long have you been working at Oasis? What keeps you from leaving?
3. What is your current role at Oasis? What are some of your responsibilities?
4. What are some of the reasons you enjoy working at oasis?
5. What are some areas that you wish would improve about your work experience at Oasis?
6. How does Oasis compare to other work environments you have been in? What makes your experience at Oasis better or worse?
7. Briefly, how does Oasis recruit, train, and retain its volunteers?
8. What does Oasis do well in supporting its volunteers?
9. What could be done differently to improve the experience for volunteers?
10. Briefly, how does Oasis recruit, train, and retain its staff?
11. What does Oasis do well in supporting its staff?
12. What could be done differently to improve the experience for staff?

Appendix B

Question Set for Volunteers

1. How did you hear about Oasis? What made you want to volunteer for Oasis?
2. How long have you been volunteering with Oasis? On average, how many hours per week or per month do you volunteer?
3. What keeps you volunteering at Oasis?
4. What are some of your roles and responsibilities as a volunteer?
5. How do Oasis staff work with you to create a positive volunteer experience?
6. What are some of the reasons you enjoy volunteering at Oasis?
7. What are some items that could be changed to improve your personal volunteer experience at Oasis?
8. What does Oasis staff do well in supporting its volunteers?
9. What could be done differently to improve the experience for all volunteers?
10. Do you volunteer at other organizations? If so, how does your volunteer experience at Oasis compare to your other experiences? What makes your experience at Oasis better or worse?