MANAGING VOLUNTEERS IN CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS USING THEIR LEVEL OF RELIGIOSITY: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: For decades, leading and managing civic organizations has been challenging because membership has been stagnant, and there is often no real leverage to get members to participate actively. As such, clubs which are formed to serve local communities have searched for new members who will become active in the affairs of those clubs, making it easier on leaders to effectively run these organizations. This study hypothesizes that an individual's level of religiosity, as measured by a developed scale, can be used, with expectations related to opportunities for service, to predict his or her level of participation. A questionnaire administered by online or paper survey to 17 Georgia (USA) Kiwanis clubs produced 313 usable responses, and analysis of these data indicate that higher levels of religiosity can predict better meeting attendance and higher participation in club service projects. These data also show that highly religious individuals join Kiwanis clubs expecting a variety of service opportunities and seem to find opportunities more appealing than they had anticipated. These findings suggest that clubs seeking new members who will be active might invite individuals in the local community who live out their religious beliefs in observable ways.

Keywords: civic organizations, Kiwanis, religiosity, leadership, volunteers, service

1   INTRODUCTION

Needs exist throughout our communities, and they can be so great, we are left wondering how we can begin to meet them all. Governments, non-government organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and religious and civic organizations all play a role in the attempt to meet these needs of society. Between some organizations struggling to find necessary funds to implement and sustain programs, to other organizations struggling to find necessary labor, oftentimes from volunteers, managers have common challenges to fulfilling the purpose for which many of these groups exist.

For instance, why is it so difficult to raise money, even in good economic times? And why is it so difficult to get volunteers and then keep them engaged? Tracey (2012) supposed that religion could be a key component in getting people to give both money and time but concluded that we do not know more about the way that religion impacts organizations because not enough research has been done to marry the two ideas. He posits that one reason is that religion is a "taboo" subject for many and people

dislike talking about it. Another reason is that many organizations today that form the subject matter for research do not enter the religious realm, making it difficult to join the two in studies.

While many civic organizations have plans for service opportunities in their local communities, it can be difficult to attract new members and keep existing members actively engaged. As such, it can be difficult for organizations to keep a steady flow of new members, since they are dependent on relationships that currently exist with current members and the willingness of those members to reach out and invite new prospects.

As a result of the challenges of getting members and then inspiring them to engage at high levels, organizations need new members to be actively involved in the activities of the organization early in their organizational affiliation and for long periods of time after joining. Thus, organizational leaders need strategies on what to look for in potential members which can reasonably predict who will be involved at deep levels over an extended timeframe. One possible strategy for recruiting new members who will be active participants in the organization is to look for potential members based on their commitment to their religious beliefs, since many mainstream religions place an emphasis on altruism and service to humankind. As such, this study attempts to determine if there is a positive relationship between a civic organization member's level of religiosity and his or her level of involvement in the activities of the civic organization.

Much of the research to date on volunteerism has been concentrated on volunteerism as a generic concept and as it is applied in generic situations. In the following literature review, we focus on the state of volunteerism, the need for more research, factors that predict volunteer involvement, volunteer and the connection between religiosity, its expression, and whether the religious person volunteers for causes and with organizations outside the typical religious context. We conclude with a focus on volunteering in civic organizations.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   *The state of volunteerism and the need for more research*

Volunteerism is loosely defined as any work that has the intended purpose of improving the life position of others but which yields no tangible benefit to the volunteer (Van Willigen, 2000; Wilson, 2000). While civic engagement and volunteerism has traditionally been strong in America, overall volunteerism has been declining over the past few decades (Putnam, 2000). This decline is largely because, unlike previous generations, people today do not settle into communities and do not develop the same ties to others in those communities. These combined factors lead to a lower sense of urgency to give time to address local needs.

Despite the decline in volunteerism in America, Karl, Peluchette, and Hall (2008) determined the amount of research on volunteerism has been increasing largely because of the growth in the number of organizations that must rely on volunteers to succeed. Organizations of all types, including Kiwanis and Rotary and other formal civic organizations, PTAs and after-school activities, cub scouts and little leagues and dance, cannot function without parents and other adults who have a passion for investing in the lives of others.

In their 1998 research, Clary, et al (1998) concluded more research was needed on the motivations behind volunteering and more specifically the link between an individual's decision to volunteer and his or her personal values, and political and religious beliefs. Lindenmeier and Dietrich (2011) reached a similar conclusion.

2.2 Factors that predict volunteer involvement

While most previous research looks at reasons why people volunteer and what those people have in common, a study by Willems and Dury (2017) explored why people choose not to volunteer. Following a number of surveys and interviews, they classified responses into three broad categories. The first category includes a lack of time, the presence of physical obstacles, and the perceived lack of skills necessary to complete the volunteer activities. The second category includes not wanting to volunteer because of the perceived lack of personal benefit, the lack of accountability or consequence for not volunteering, social obstacles that make volunteering difficult, and because of perceived stress in the responsibilities of volunteering. The final category includes not having been approached with opportunities for volunteering.

As they further explored reasons for not volunteering, Willems and Dury (2017) determined that some people experience several of these factors at the same time and find it difficult to get past those obstacles, making it critical for organizations to find ways to eliminate these obstacles. Further, they determined that organizations should do a better job of tailoring certain types of volunteer activities to certain groups, such as developing opportunities for non-strenuous activities, such as planning, leadership, or tracking, for older people who have the time to volunteer but might face health and physical challenges.

2.3 Volunteerism and religiosity

Differing conclusions have been drawn about the influence of religion on volunteering, although many studies have drawn conclusions that there seems to be a positive relationship between "religiosity" and volunteer activity.

Several studies have found it is possible to predict the level of involvement in volunteering using level of involvement in religious activities. In one study, Vermeer and Scheepers (2011) learned that a number of facets of the practical expression of religion predict participation in volunteer organizations, especially as religious activity expresses itself in social contexts. Others (see Park & Smith, 2000; Becker & Dinghra, 2001; Driskell, Lyon, & Embry, 2008; and Wang & Handy, 2014) learned that people who are active in religious activities also seek to participate in other types of volunteer activities, are drawn to some types of activities over other types, and that the more religious someone is, the more likely he or she will be to volunteer in a variety of things.

Forbes and Zampelli (2014) and Johnston (2013) found a positive relationship between level of involvement in volunteering and level of attendance at religious services. Further, how important people consider religion to be, coupled with their attendance at church-related events, positively predicted external volunteer activities. Johnston (2013) also determined that people who attend religious services at least one time each week are much more active in other volunteer activities than are those who are not religious in nature.

Similarly, Becker and Dinghra (2001) and Bryant, et al (2003) found that people who are active and regular in church attendance tend to be approached about opportunities for participating in other volunteer activities more often than those who are not active in church attendance and are more likely to participate when they are approached for help. Kim and Jang (2016) and Petrovic, Chapman, and Schofield (2018) also found a positive relationship between the frequency of attendance at religious services and the amount of time spent with other types of volunteer activities.

Two other studies (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996 and Borgonovi, 2008) showed mixed results, indicating that it can be difficult to measure exactly, because people tend to keep

their religious views personal, but concluded that when people see religion as an important part of who they are, they will volunteer more often in other things to live out these beliefs.

2.4   Volunteering in civic organizations

Most of the literature on volunteering is focused on volunteering in general, with few studies devoted to volunteering in the specific context of civic organizations. Sherr and Shields (2005) agree that there is a lack of quantitative studies related to how religion intersects with volunteering. They did, however, conduct a qualitative study with members of several Lions Clubs that found people who are active in religious activities tend to be more active in civic/service club activities. They concluded civic organization leaders should look for opportunities to bring religious-minded people into their organizations, and suggested religion provides a primary reason people have an interest in civic opportunities.

Related to that conclusion reached by Sherr and Shields (2005), there seem to be three primary links between religion and initial membership in and subsequent participation in civic organizations. The first is espoused by Wilson and Janoski (1995), who believe there is a direct link between the two, as people see volunteering as a natural byproduct of their faith and state that volunteering should occur as outward evidence of their faith. The second is championed by Clary, et al (1998), who believe there is no link between the two, as people volunteer because of a sense of obligation to society or due to personal motives. The third is held by Cnaan, Kasternakis, and Wineburg (1993), who state there is a social link between the two, as people are encouraged to extend their religious group connections into the outer world through participation in these types of activities.

From this review of applicable literature, this study attempts to fill in several gaps in the literature and make several contributions. First,

it provides a quantitative study targeted to a civic organization, which is lacking. Second, it looks specifically at how religion intersects with and potentially predicts levels of participation in that civic organization based on expectations related to opportunities to serve Third, it uses an established religiosity instrument, the Belief into Action Scale (BIAS) in the civic organization environment.

3   HYPOTHESIS

In this study, we hypothesized that level of religiosity, as measured by a developed scale (BIAS), can be used alongside an individual's expectations of opportunities for service, to predict his or her eventual level of participation in those opportunities. In other words, someone who is highly religious, and who anticipates many service opportunities in an organization, will participate more because of those two factors.

We also hypothesized that religiosity would be positively correlated with perceived benefits of participating in a civic organization.

4   METHODOLOGY

4.1   Participants

Four hundred and thirty-four Kiwanis Club members from across the state of Georgia participated in the study. Data from 313 participants (72.1%) were used; those not used were due to incomplete responses or requests from participants to not use their data. This included 233 males (74.4%), 78 females (24.9%), and two responses which declined to identify gender (.06%). The majority of participants were Caucasian (n = 291; 92.9%), followed by Hispanic/Mexican (n = 6; 1.9%), African American (n = 5; 1.6%), Asian (n = 5; 1.6%), and other (n = 4; 1.3%). Participants largely identified as Christian (n = 268; 85.6%), representing Methodist (n = 96), Baptist (n = 88), Presbyterian (n = 33), Catholic (n = 25), Episcopalian (n = 25), and Lutheran (n = 1).

Five participants identified as Jewish (1.6%), whereas 20 selected "other" (6.4%), 15 selected "none" (4.8%), and five left the question blank (1.6%).

4.2 Procedure

Prior to contacting any potential research participants, the researchers designed a survey instrument which contained questions on expectations of service opportunities before joining and realized after joining, participation in club activities, motives for joining and maintaining membership in the club, and the respondent's religiosity using the Belief into Action Scale. The study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

A list of Kiwanis clubs in the state of Georgia was obtained from the Georgia Kiwanis District Office by one of the researchers, and letters were mailed to the Presidents of all clubs which reported forty or more people on their membership roster, regardless of participation level. The letter asked the individual to present to his or her club's board of directors a proposal to participate in the research project by having the club members complete a printed survey at an upcoming meeting. Clubs that agreed to participate were asked to email the researcher with club verification that the individual was the President, that the board had agreed to participate, and the number of members who attended a typical meeting.

The researcher then mailed that number of printed surveys, plus an additional ten percent, in a manila envelope sent via USPS with a tracking label to keep up with delivery. Also included in the envelope were some sample announcements to read from the podium for several weeks before the actual survey was to be administered, a different, more comprehensive set of instructions to be read on the day of the survey, and a postage-paid reply envelope for use in returning the surveys.

Each individual survey had an informed consent page at the start of the survey. Participants were given four options: 1) they could complete the entire survey with accurate answers, 2) they could begin the survey by providing accurate answers but then decide to abandon the survey or continue with incorrect answers, 3) they could complete the entire survey with incorrect answers, or 4) they could choose to not participate at all. The final question on the survey allowed the respondent to direct whether his or her survey should be included in the final results. With this design, the individual could complete a survey with "wrong" answers so he or she would not be the only person at his or her table not participating, but then direct the researchers to ignore the data provided.

Of 42 clubs approached for participation, 25 responded by asking for more information for their boards to consider, and five of these eventually declined to participate after board consideration. As of the time that nationwide coronavirus social distancing guidelines were implemented, three boards were still considering participation but had not yet decided. The remaining 17 clubs agreed to participate in the study and were mailed surveys. Clubs were requested to administer the surveys sometime between the beginning of December 2019 and the end of March 2020. Eleven clubs completed the survey and returned the responses, and three had arranged for their clubs to participate by completing an online version of the survey administered through Google Forms as of the start of the ban on large gatherings. Three clubs were still planning to administer the survey but had not yet done so; due to COVID-19 restrictions, those clubs never did complete it. In all, 434 surveys were completed by paper or online survey, and of these results, only 313 were used for the current study due to incomplete data from 121 respondents.

4.3 Measures

The survey used in collecting data from Kiwanis clubs had three main sections. Section one asked questions related to the individual's relationship with Kiwanis. For the purposes of this study, one of them is important: each respondent was asked approximately what percentage of the club's service projects that required time outside of meetings he or she had participated in over the past twelve months. Responses from which to choose were: none; about 25%; about 50%; about 75%; and all. For analysis purposes, responses were coded as 0 through 4, respectively.

The respondent was then asked, on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), to answer these questions: "How would you have rated the importance of each of the following potential benefits associated with membership when you decided to join this club: business networking opportunities, service opportunities, and social opportunities?" and "How would you rate the actual benefits to you that have resulted from membership in this club since you joined: business networking opportunities, service opportunities, and social opportunities?" For analysis purposes, responses were coded as 1 through 5, respectively.

Section two consisted of questions that collected various demographic items, the highlights of which were reported in the "participants" section above.

4.4 Religiosity tool

Section three was the Belief Into Action Scale (BIAS), a religiosity tool developed by Koenig, et al (2015). The BIAS is based on the idea that self-report measures of "religiosity" tended to be overstated, and that the true measure of how religious an individual is more accurately demonstrated through the practical application of those religious beliefs into life choices. The researchers believed that a truly and deeply religious person would be more likely to give

faithfully to religious organizations at high levels, to hold to religious teachings and tenets and make life decisions based on them, to actively and regularly engage in listening to and reading religious materials, and to make other expressions of faith in real-world contexts.

The BIAS consists of a ten-item scale, consisting of one item where individuals select what is the most important thing to them from a set of ten items, and then nine items where the individual rates a statement on ten-point Likert scales. One question related to finances has choices of percentages of their pay which are given to religious charities ranging from 0 percent to 15 or more percent; other questions are related to reading religious literature and listening to religious broadcasts and music, and scoring options range from never to a few minutes a day to several hours a day. A question related to religious service attendance has answers ranging from never to several times per week.

For the first item, respondents were asked to select their highest priority in life now. There were 10 options, which included choices such as these: my health and independence; my family; relationship with God; and freedom to live as I choose. Relationship with God was determined by the survey's creators to be the "best" answer in terms of how one's beliefs translated into action, and so that answer contributed ten points towards the total and every other answer for that question contributed no points. In other words, the other answers were not pro-rated for one to nine points; it was "all or nothing." As such, a respondent could score anywhere from one to ten points on questions two through ten, and either zero or ten points on question one. The maximum total score was 100.

A potential flaw of a survey such as this, as noted by Borgonovi (2008) is that people may be reluctant to answer questions they feel are too personal, but the survey was completed in its entirety by 97 percent of individuals in the studies conducted by the creators (Koenig, et al,

2015) as they tested for validity and reliability, suggesting most participants are willing to answer the questions.

The internal reliability of the scale is high, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89, and a test-retest reliability of 0.92. Further, there is a strong convergent reliability as compared to five other similar measurement tools, with 94.4 percent of the total variance explained when determining that this scale measures a specific construct defined as "religious commitment" (Koenig, et al, 2015.)

5   RESULTS

5.1   Religiosity and participation in a civic organization

Our first hypothesis was that individuals with higher levels of religiosity would have higher levels of participation in the club's service projects. A Pearson's product-moment correlation with a one-tailed significance test revealed there was a significant positive relationship between the two variables, $r(306) = .16$, $p = .002$, meaning the higher a member's religiosity, the higher his or her level of participation in service projects.

5.2   Religiosity and perceived potential and actual benefits of participating in a civic organization

Our second hypothesis was that there would be a positive relationship between level of religiosity and both perceived and actual benefits of participating in a service organization. We focused on three key benefits: business networking opportunities, service opportunities, and social opportunities, and asked participants what their perceptions were about these opportunities both before (perceived) and after (actual) joining the organization.

First, we examined the relationship between members' religiosity and perceived potential benefits when they joined an organization using a series of Pearson's product-moment correlations. There was no relationship between members' religiosity and their perceived potential business networking opportunities when they joined the organization, $r(270) = .07$, $p = .118$. There was a weak positive relationship between religiosity and perceived potential service opportunities when joining the organization, $r(275) = .15$, $p = .008$, meaning the more religiosity a member had, the more potential service opportunities they perceived when they joined the organization. Finally, there was no relationship between religiosity and members' perceived potential social opportunities when they joined the organization, $r(275) = .02$, $p = .356$.

Next, we examined the relationship between members' religiosity and perceived actual business networking opportunities, service, and social benefits after they joined an organization using a series of Pearson's product-moment correlations and a one-tailed significance test. There was no relationship between religiosity and actual business networking opportunities, $r(268) = .08$, $p = .093$. There was, however, a significant positive relationship between religiosity and perceived actual service benefits, $r(275) = .18$, $p = .002$, meaning the more religiosity a member had, the more actual service opportunities they perceived since joining the organization. Finally, there was no relationship between religiosity and members' actual social opportunities since joining the organization, $r(275) = -.01$, $p = .415$.

6   DISCUSSION

The present study focused on the relationship between religiosity and 1) participation and 2) perceived benefits of participating in a civic organization. Based on prior literature suggesting a link between

religion and volunteering (Wilson & Janoski, 1995) and a social link between religion and being active in the community (Cnaan, et al, 1993), we hypothesized for the first question there would be a positive relationship and that participants with higher scores on religiosity would be more likely to be more active in the club. Our findings supported our hypothesis, revealing that members with higher levels of religiosity were more likely to participate in a higher percentage of service projects, consistent with the findings of several prior studies (Park & Smith, 2000; Becker & Dinghra, 2001; Sherr & Shields, 2005; Driskell, et al, 2008; and Wang & Handy, 2014).

For our second question, we asked, is there a positive relationship between religiosity and perceived benefits of participating in a local club, including business networking opportunities, service opportunities, and social benefits, both before and after joining the club? Although prior research has not to our knowledge focused on these perceived benefits specifically, we hypothesized that participants who had higher levels of religiosity would perceive that there would be more service opportunities available through the club, both before and after joining it. Our hypothesis was partially supported: there was a weak positive relationship between religiosity and perceived service opportunities, but no relationship was found between religiosity and social benefits or business networking opportunities. There were also positive relationships between religiosity and perceived actual service benefits, suggesting members with higher religiosity perceived more actual service opportunities.

There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, those with higher levels of religiosity are probably more likely to be involved in a religious organization, which may provide more social opportunity for service outside of the club (Cnaan, et al, 1993). If this is the case, there may be some overlap between involvement in religion-based service and club-based service. We did not measure level of involvement in a religious organization in this study, so we are unable to determine if this was the case. A second explanation is that members with higher levels of religiosity may feel a calling to do more service in the community (Wilson & Janoski, 1995), and they see Kiwanis as a way to conduct those service activities. One additional finding was that the perception of the potential for service that individuals had before joining actually went up after joining, meaning that individuals seem to think that there will be opportunities to serve others, and then join and find more opportunities than they had even anticipated.

7   LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations of this study. First, only Kiwanis clubs in Georgia with overall membership of 40 or more people were included. Since Kiwanis (like other civic organizations) generally tends to build membership through members inviting prospects, and since people are probably more likely to invite others who share similar interests, it could be presumed that there would be a degree of homogeneity to a particular club's membership. This can be seen in the analysis of respondents provided earlier, where 74.4% of respondents were male, 92.9% of respondents were Caucasian, and 96.2% were Christian. Additionally, a Kiwanis club in one locale might not resemble a Kiwanis club in another locale. For example, a small Kiwanis club might not look quite like a large club, or a Kiwanis club in Georgia might not look quite like a club in Alabama, and a Kiwanis club anywhere might not look quite like a Rotary, Lions, or Pilot club anywhere. As such, future studies should try to replicate this process with Kiwanis clubs in other states and countries, and with smaller Kiwanis

clubs, and with other service organizations to expand the research across a broader spectrum of organizations.

Second, while individual clubs were allowed to select the date that their members participated, and while members were told about the upcoming study for several weeks before it actually happened, the survey was only distributed at one club meeting, so anyone not present at that particular meeting would not be included. Thus, the specific makeup of participants could be skewed by who showed up that day. Response bias may be at play, which may have affected the results. Future research should develop a process where club members could have several weeks to complete the survey, so that members who missed that designated meeting would not be excluded from participation.

Third, the study was initially designed to utilize a paper survey, which carries many of the same limitations as the item above. Partway through the study, one club requested to be able to use an online version of the survey, which the researchers developed for use with that club and then two others. These online surveys typically were made available for two weeks to increase participation by giving more flexibility to respondents to complete when it was convenient. While this potentially increased the participation level from the two or three clubs which used the online version of the survey, other clubs which had the paper surveys only had participation limitations that other clubs did not have. Future studies should look at using almost entirely online surveys to keep data collection more consistent and to potentially expand the pool of respondents.

Fourth, all items on the survey were self-reported items, making it impossible to verify the answer selected. For example, there is no way of confirming that respondent seven, who selected "about 50%" as the percentage of the club's service projects in which he participated, actually participated in "about 50%" and that he

did not simply select this response to look good. Future studies could consider more in-depth research working in tandem with the record keepers of organizations to pull real data related to percent of projects participated in. These real data could then be attached to the respondent's survey responses on other items for analysis.

Finally, similar to limitation four above, the Belief Into Action Scale is completely self-reported with no means to verify, so it must be presumed that all respondents are being honest about such things as how much they give to religious organizations, and how much time they spend in prayer and reading and listening to religious television and radio. Respondents may have chosen to inflate their participation, in spite of assurances that their surveys were anonymous and confidential, in order to "look good" to researchers. These researchers do not have any suggestions as to how future studies could control for the accuracy of this data collection, but that is a potential area for future studies.

8   CONCLUSIONS

In the present study, we conducted a survey with 434 Kiwanis members across Georgia (USA) to understand whether there would be a positive relationship between members' levels of religiosity and 1) their participation in a local club affiliated with Kiwanis International and 2) perceived benefits of participation. The survey results revealed that members' higher religiosity scores were positively correlated with the percentage of service projects they completed and their perception of increased service opportunity. These findings were consistent with prior literature regarding a link between religion and volunteering (Wilson & Janoski, 1995) and between religion and community involvement (Cnaan, et al, 1993). In a time where it is increasingly difficult to recruit and engage new members, our findings suggest civic organization clubs might consider targeting

those members of the community who express higher levels of religiosity, such as through church attendance, prayer, and giving. Doing so may bolster the longevity of clubs through increased enrollment and thereby enrich the lives of their members and the communities which they serve.

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