

THE STEEPER THE RISE, THE MORE YOU GIVE? EMPLOYEES' STATUS CHANGE AND PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEERING

DANA HARARI

Georgia Institute of Technology
800 West Peachtree NW
Atlanta GA 30308

ABSTRACT

Professional volunteering enables employees to contribute unique professional knowledge and expertise to help other individuals or organizations. I examine when, why, and where employees will engage in professional volunteering. I propose status change as a mechanism that alters employees' mindsets and their subsequent inclination to engage in professional volunteering.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013 alone, Americans volunteered 7.7 billion hours, worth \$173 billion to the economy (Independent Sector, 2015). The value of a volunteer hour is estimated at \$23.07, whereas the hourly value of a professional volunteer is estimated at \$150 (Independent Sector, 2015; Taproot Foundation, 2013). Thus, an employee's contribution to the economy is likely to be greatest when he or she volunteers in ways that utilize his or her professional knowledge and expertise. Moreover, many non-profit organizations (NGOs) need volunteers with specific skills, knowledge, and expertise to help with professional matters in their daily operations (Rodell, 2013: 1290). Therefore, it is important to understand, both theoretically and empirically, when and why employees engage in professional volunteering.

Professional volunteering enables employees to help others by using their unique professional skills and domain-relevant knowledge. To date, the literature on volunteering at work (e.g., "corporate volunteering") has mainly examined volunteering in domains that are separate from individuals' professional knowledge and expertise (Rodell, Breitsohl, Schröder, & Keating, 2016). Although this research has been important in understanding volunteer behavior generally, professional volunteering may be a unique phenomenon, with different antecedents and outcomes than corporate volunteering. For example, a chief motivation for employees to participate in corporate volunteering is to gain knowledge or skills (Booth, Park, & Glomb, 2009; Rodell et al., 2016), and gaining expertise and knowledge is more likely to be a driver for employees' to engage in professional volunteering than corporate volunteering. Thus, it is important to examine professional volunteering as a separate volunteering behavior.

The volunteering literature has typically examined demographic differences between volunteers and non-volunteers (Wilson, 2000). However, between-person differences in motivation and goals of volunteers are also important (Rodell, 2013: 1290). The managerial literature suggests that meaningfulness is the main driver for employees' corporate volunteering (Grant, 2012; Rodell, 2013), however, other goals that employees may wish to fulfill through volunteering are learning, gaining new skills, and making a positive impact on others (Booth et al., 2009; Geroy, Wright, & Jacoby, 2000; Rodell, 2013). It has also been proposed that volunteering at work, rather than volunteering outside of work, is rooted in different motivational

mechanisms (Grant, 2012). Altogether, we lack systematic knowledge regarding employees' underlying goals when they decide to volunteer, how they decide whether to volunteer at work or outside of work, and how multiple goals may operate concurrently (Grant, 2012).

In this paper, I examine status change as a driver for employees' professional volunteering. Expanding and building on recent findings that demonstrate that status decreases an individual's inclination to engage in prosocial behavior (Côté, Piff, & Willer, 2013; Piff, 2014; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010), I suggest that change in status, rather than stable status characteristics, is an important mechanism that may alter employees' mindset and make them more inclined to engage in professional volunteering. In developing and testing the theoretical framework, this manuscript aims to make four valuable contributions to organizational behavior research. First, I develop our scholarly knowledge about a unique and valuable type of volunteering, namely professional volunteering. Second, I contribute to the literature on status and volunteering by examining how individuals' changes in status can provide a unique psychological driver for employees to give their time. Third, I build on the self-regulation literature (Bandura, 1991), and propose that employees dynamically self-regulate their career goals, and that these changes in goals serve as an important predictor for employees' volunteering engagement. Lastly, I expand our knowledge of volunteering by examining how and why employees will volunteer at work or outside of work. Since many employees volunteer their time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), it is important for scholars and practitioners alike to understand when and why employees volunteer at work or outside of work.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional Volunteering Conceptualization

Volunteering has been conceptualized as giving time during a planned activity for a volunteer group or organization (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Rodell, 2013; Wilson, 2000), and corporate volunteering is conceptualized as doing so through a company sponsored initiative (Grant, 2012; Rodell, 2013). I define professional volunteering as a specific form of volunteering, in which volunteers use their professional knowledge and skills to support and assist another organization, an individual, or a community.

Although professional volunteering and corporate volunteering share some commonalities, they are also conceptually distinct. Professional volunteering is similar to corporate volunteering because it is an active and planned behavior of giving time by employees, without additional compensation or reward (Clary et al., 1998; Grant, 2012; Rodell, 2013; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997). However, corporate volunteering considers only volunteering in company-sponsored programs whereas employees may participate in professional volunteering outside of the workplace (e.g. an accountant finds an opportunity on his or her own to assist a non-profit with its bookkeeping outside of work hours). As implied, professional volunteering necessitates that the volunteer will use unique professional knowledge in their volunteering efforts, but it does not necessitate that his or her employer will be involved.

How Does Status Changes Impact Employees' Professional Volunteering?

Status hierarchies are one of the most naturally occurring features of social life (Barkow, 1989). Prior research has shown that status decreases employees inclination to engage in

prosocial behavior (Côté et al., 2013; Piff, 2014; Piff et al., 2010; Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). Research suggests that high social class, both objective as well as induced (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015), decreases individuals' engagement in prosocial behavior. However, I propose that status change, rather than stable levels of status, may have a unique impact on employees' prosocial behavior engagement. I argue that changes in status will elicit more prosocial behavior, even when prosocial behavior is targeted towards beneficiaries outside of one's social group, as may be the case in professional volunteering.

Social status represents the prominence and influence individuals enjoy in the eyes of others (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972). People who have high social status have a greater influence on decisions, more autonomy, and a greater personal sense of power and control than those with low social status (Berger et al., 1980). Subsequently, status has a significant impact on individuals' self-perceptions and behaviors (Marr & Thau, 2014). Social status is a form of social capital that can be impactful for the way actors perceive and experience their status (Bothner, Kim, & Smith, 2011). Social status is a relational form of status: employees with high social status typically have more workplace relationships, and are often more engaged in various social activities (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012; Thibault & Kelley, 1959). Interactions with others have been proposed to be an important element of one's job design (Grant, 2007). According to theory of relational job design (Grant, 2007), social interactions enable employees to feel that they have a positive impact on others. It is through relationships at work that employees experience the positive impact they have on others (Grant, 2007). Feelings of having a positive impact on others have the capacity to alter the focus employees place on relational elements of their job, and may make employees want to further increase relational elements of the job. Social interactions at work operate in a complementary manner: the more relationally-designed the job, the more employees want to increase relational elements of their job (Grant, 2007). Thus, as employees' social status increases, it is more likely that they will look for opportunities to have a meaningful impact on others' lives, such as professional volunteering engagement (Grant, 2012).

Employees' social status is dynamic (Bendersky & Shah, 2010; Marr & Thau, 2014; Pettit, Sivanathan, Gladstone, & Marr, 2013; Podolny & Phillips, 1996). Employees' status increases as they are perceived to contribute greater value to the group, and they may lose status as their value in the group declines (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Pettit, Yong, & Spataro, 2010). Social exchanges comply with a moral norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which has been conceptualized as a universal belief, or as an individual's ought (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960; Wang, Tsui, Zhang, & Ma, 2003). According to the norm of reciprocity, receiving should be followed by giving. However, unlike an economic exchange, social exchanges create general feelings of obligation, not required reciprocal obligations (Blau, 1964: 93). When employees feel fortunate with regards to their social status, they will feel a greater desire to help others, and they often direct the need to reciprocate towards society in general. The felt obligation to reciprocate will operate as an individual's motivation to give back to society. Greater status changes will generate a greater obligation to reciprocate what they have been fortunate to receive. Consequently, individual's sense of obligation to reciprocate and to help others will increase the likelihood that individuals will engage in professional volunteering.

Hypothesis 1: Status change is positively related to professional volunteering (a) at work and (b) outside of work.

The Mediation of Changes in Employees' Goals

Social-cognitive theory of self-regulation suggests that people behave according to future expectations (Bandura, 1991). People choose to engage in behaviors that they believe will fulfill their goals. Individuals may also change the focus and content of their goals, and the importance they place on different goals may change over time (Bandura, 1991). I argue that changes in status will trigger a dynamic process of changes in goals that will partially mediate the relationship between status change and professional volunteering. The need for status has been suggested to be one of the most basic human motivations (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). As employee status changes, the focus they place on goals will change as well. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of an individuals' basic need for status will make them more or less attentive to other life-goals and alternate the focus they place on their goals.

Changes in Satisfying Career Goal as a Mediating Mechanism. People are more likely to determine how important a certain life domain is for them according to their success in that domain (Hill, Smith, & Lewicki, 1989; Lewicki, 1984; Marr & Thau, 2014; Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). Individuals place greater focus on domains in which they are successful and decrease the importance they place on domains in which they are less successful (Brockner, 1988; Marr & Thau, 2014). Increments in social status will increase the salience and appreciation of the benefits that are related to social status at work (Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010). Changes in social status will be reflected daily from the relationships people have in their professional environment. Positive and meaningful work relationships with colleagues and peers at work are likely to increase the focus individuals place on the work-related domain (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Thus, as employees' social status increases, they will place greater focus on success in work-related domains and consequently will have greater aspiration for a satisfying career.

Hypothesis 2: Social status changes are positively related to changes in satisfying career goal.

As the focus on having a satisfying career increases, there will be increased engagement in behaviors believed to increase career satisfaction. Individuals choose to engage in corporate volunteering because they want to have meaningful work experiences (Grant, 2012), either because they currently lack meaningfulness or because they want to increase their job meaningfulness (Rodell, 2013). Thus, when employees are increasingly interested in having a satisfying career, they are more likely to choose to volunteer at work. By participating in meaningful professional volunteering at the workplace, employees will believe that they will be able to fulfill their aspirations to have a satisfying career.

Hypothesis 3: Changes in satisfying career goal are positively related to professional volunteering at work.

Hypothesis 4: Social status changes are positively related to changes in satisfying career goal, which, in turn, partially mediate the relationship between social status change and professional volunteering at work.

Changes in Impact Goal as a Mediating Mechanism. Individuals adjust behaviors and attitudes as their standing in a social group changes (Burt, 2010; Walker & Smith, 2002). When social rankings decrease, feelings of deprivation will act as a motivator to perform, whereas high rankings may lead to feelings of advantage (Bendersky & Shah, 2010; Bothner et al., 2011). These feelings of relative advantage with regards to one's status, in comparison to prior status will generate a sense of obligation to give back. Through a process of social exchange and reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960), employee's feelings of gratitude will generate a moral obligation to give back to society. Consequently, greater sense of a moral obligation to make a positive impact on society will make employees more likely to choose to engage in professional volunteering.

Hypothesis 5: Social status changes are positively related to changes in impact goal.

Hypothesis 6: Changes in impact goal are positively related to professional volunteering (a) at work and (b) outside of work.

Hypothesis 7: Social status change is related to impact goal, which, in turn, partially mediate the relationship between social status change and professional volunteering (a) at work and (b) outside of work.

SAMPLE

I analyzed archival data from the After the JD (AJD) study (Dinovitzer & Garth, 2004). AJD is the first national longitudinal study of lawyers in the United States. The respondents were a nationally representative sample of lawyers who passed the bar exam in 2000 (Sterling & Reichman, 2013). Data were collected in three waves (see Sterling & Reichman, 2013).

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 suggests that social status change is positively related to professional volunteering. I tested change in phenomenon over time following the procedure described by Chen and colleagues (Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011). Due to the nature of the dependent variable as a count measure, I regressed social status change on professional volunteering using negative binomial regression. Hypothesis 1 was supported: social status change was positively related to professional volunteering (H1a) at work ($b = 4.63, se = 0.85, p < .01$), and (H1b) outside of work ($b = 6.15, se = 0.95, p < .01$).

I continued by testing the relationship between status change and employees' changes in satisfying career goal (hypothesis 2) and impact goal (hypothesis 5). I tested the direct effect of status change on goal change using OLS regression. In order to be able to predict changes in goals, rather than individual difference in goals, I controlled for time 1 career goal (for hypothesis 2) and time 1 impact goal (for hypothesis 5). Hypothesis 2 was supported: status change was significantly related to changes in satisfying career goal ($b = .07, p < .05$). Hypothesis 5 was also supported: status change was significantly related to changes in impact goal ($b = .48, p < .05$).

In order to test the direct effect of goal change on employees' professional volunteering engagement (hypothesis 3 and 6), I used negative binomial regression using GLM in SPSS.

Hypothesis 3 was supported: changes in satisfying career goal are positively related to professional volunteering at work ($b = 1.27$, $se = .57$, $\chi^2(1) = 4.89$, $p < .05$). As a supplementary analysis, I also tested the relationship between change in satisfying career goal and professional volunteering outside of work, and found that the relationship is not significant ($\chi^2(1) = 1.63$, n.s.).

Hypothesis 6 suggested that changes in impact goal are positively related to professional volunteering at work (6a) and outside of work (6b). Hypothesis 6a was not supported ($\chi^2(1) = 2.31$, n.s.), whereas hypothesis 6b was supported: changes in employee's impact goal are significantly related to professional volunteering outside of work ($b = .74$, $se = .30$, $\chi^2(1) = 6.01$, $p < .05$). Altogether, when employees want to increase their contribution to others, they are more likely to professionally volunteer outside of work, but not at work.

In order to test the indirect effect of status change on professional volunteering through goal change, as hypothesized in hypothesis 4 (satisfying career goal change) and hypothesis 7 (impact goal change), I used the Monte-Carlo simulation method for mediation (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006; Preacher & Selig, 2012) using Rweb (Selig & Preacher, 2008). The results provide partial support for hypothesis 4. Changes in satisfying career goal partially mediate the relationship between status change and professional volunteering at work (95% CI [-2.224, -.264]). However, the relationship between status change and professional volunteering outside of work is not mediated by changes in satisfying career goal (95% CI [-.507, .428]). Lastly, hypothesis 7 was supported: the relationship between social status change and professional volunteering outside of work is partially mediated by changes in impact goal (95% CI [-.690, -.019]).

CONCLUSION

This manuscript examined when and why employees may engage in professional volunteering at work or outside of work by integrating theoretical perspectives from the status and prosocial literatures. Altogether, I proposed and demonstrated that systematic changes in social status triggers a dynamic self-regulatory process that shapes employees professional volunteering engagement. As employee status changes over time, they are more likely to increasingly aspire to have a satisfying career and a positive impact on others. Changes in career satisfaction and impact goals, in turn, partially mediate the relationship between status change and professional volunteering.

The nature of employees underlying goal when they volunteer is related to *where* they volunteer. The results suggest a surprising pattern: employees do not volunteer at work in order to increase their positive impact on society. When employees are interested in making an impact, they are more likely to engage in professional volunteering outside of work, but they are *not* more likely to volunteer at work.

This manuscript highlighted that changes in employees' social status is an important predictor for employees' psychological experience of having status, and their subsequent attitude and behavior. I contribute to our theoretical understanding of professional volunteering and status dynamics and progress our scholarly understanding regarding the socially-constructed psychological experience of status change and employees' goals underlying professional volunteering engagement.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR