Add Volunteering to the Mix of Balancing Work and Family: The Findings and Implications for Volunteer Administrators

Janet Fox, Ph.D.

Daniel Wheeler, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Americans are generous with their time. The volunteer movement is strongly woven into the fabric of American society. As the involvement of the public sector in financing, administrating and delivering social services continues to be curtailed, the emphasis on the utilization of volunteers to complement and enrich service delivery is increasing dramatically. At the same time that resources are shrinking, community challenges are multiplying. The economic situations that result from declining resources are pushing decision making responsibilities back to local communities where empowered volunteers are getting things done (Andrews, 1995).

Despite a trend of increasing volunteer involvement since 1995, the Independent Sector (2001) reported a decrease in the number of volunteers in 2000. Studies have linked a lack of volunteer time to conflict with work and family issues. In the Prudential Spirit of Community Adult Survey (1995), volunteers reported a lack of time to volunteer because of competition with work and family. In their study of baby boomers and generation X'ers, Merrill and Safrit (1998) found that 42% of current volunteers and 52% of non-volunteers reported that vol-unteering took them away from friends and family.

At the same time, the world of work and family are increasingly colliding. Research indicates that work and family have a profound mutual impact on each other. When women work outside the home, major changes and adjustments are being made within families, at the workplace, and in the volunteer arena. As individuals try to keep their jobs, meet lifestyle expectations, raise healthy children and stay financially afloat, life becomes complex to the point of collapse.

While a large body of research on balancing work and family roles exists (Amatea, Cross, Clark & Bobby, 1986; Bolger, DeLongis & Wethington, 1998; Galinsky, 1987; Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1996; Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Guelzow, Bird & Koball, 1991; Hughes & Galinsky, 1994; Hughes, Galinsky & Morris, 1992; Kirchmeyer, 1994; Menaghan & Vicary, 1990; Repetti, 1989; Rook, Dooley & Catalano, 1991; Rousseau, 1978; Skinner & Mc Cubbin, 1991; Tate & Davis, 1987; Zedeck & Mosier, 1996), little research (Fox, 1996) can be found on what effect volunteer responsibilities add to the mix of juggling multiple roles within a family. By exploring strategies

Janet Fox is an Associate Professor - 4-H Youth Development Specialist at the University of Nebraska She has taught a graduate level Volunteer Leadership Course. Janet is a governor appointee to the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission. On state and local levels, Janet serves as a member of several volunteer and nonprofit boards. She is a member of AVA and the Association for Research in Non-Profit Organizations and Voluntary Action.
Daniel Wheeler is a Professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications at the University of Nebraska. For twelve years, he coordinated the Office of Professional and Organizational Development. He has provided leadership and professional development for numerous volunteer organizations.

used, situations encountered, and satisfaction experienced by volunteers, the present study provides baseline data on how volunteers manage the situations they face and the strategies they use to balance volunteer roles. Knowing more about how the roles interact is valuable to volunteer managers, employers, and families.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, a mixed-model design was used to determine if relationships exist among the situations encountered, strategies used, and perceived satisfaction reported by Nebraska 4-H volunteers in balancing family, volunteer and work roles. The study describes the situation as the immediate environment and circumstances that volunteers encounter while volunteering. In addition, the study examines the frequency with which volunteers utilize specific techniques and skills or strategies in managing their roles (Fox, 2000).

The population for this study consisted of randomly sampled Nebraska 4-H adult volunteers. The total population of Nebraska 4-H volunteers was 12,841 which resulted in the use of the larger recommended sample size of 378 to assure confidence in the findings. To ensure the sample size needed at a 95 percent confidence level, the survey was sent to 820 participants. After two mailings, 356 surveys were returned for a return rate of 44 percent.

Content validity of the survey instrument was determined by a panel of experts and a focus group of north-central 4-H volunteers. Balancing work and family research coupled with volunteer research were utilized as a base for item development. The Cronbach Alpha scores of .7273 to .8749 were within the desired range of acceptance for these items. When compared to the pilot study, the study findings were consistent.

Descriptive statistics were utilized for item responses on the survey. For the collapsed data, the number of responses for each frequency (never, occasionally, sometimes, often and always) stated in the survey was calculated. The mean, range and standard deviation for each category was determined. The Spearman Rho Correlation was calculated to determine the statistical significance (p<.05) and the degree of the relationship between two variables.

THE FINDINGS
Situations

What situations do volunteers encounter most often while volunteering? For the purpose of this study, situations were defined as the environment and circumstances that the respondents encounter while volunteering. The survey explored this question by linking situations with the frequency they occurred utilizing a five-point Likert scale (1-Never; 2-Seldom; 3-Sometimes; 4-Often; and 5-Always). Volunteers were given a list of

TABLE 1:
The Top Ten Situations Experienced by Volunteers

Situation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Work in a supportive environment	3.87	.7656	1
Juggle several roles at one time	3.75	.9398	2
Handle family responsibilities while volunteering	3.67	1.021	3
Recognized for good work	3.48	.8681	4
Handle work responsibilities while volunteering	3.31	1.204	5
Work extended hours	3.25	.9704	6
Things are constantly changing	3.11	.9637	7
Schedule is hectic	3.11	.9806	7
Feel stressed	3.03	.9215	9
Overworked	3.00	.8906	10

situations and asked to indicate the frequency with which they experienced them. The situations were divided into six topical areas garnered from existing work and family research. These areas included: change, harmony, role conflict, stress, support, and role overload. Table 1 outlines the top ten situations experienced by volunteers listed in rank order by mean scores.

Not surprisingly, volunteers were most likely to encounter positive situations at a higher frequency while volunteering. Working in a supportive environment was the situation most frequently experienced in the volunteer setting. They were likely to be recognized for good work while volunteering. Overall, volunteering was a source of satisfaction more often than a source of stress.

As volunteers carried out their duties, they reported having more time for themselves. This was probably a result of becoming more efficient at handling both family and work responsibilities while volunteering. Handling family responsibilities in volunteer settings emerged as the most frequent role spillover situation.

Volunteer Satisfaction and Situations

Did the situations volunteers encountered have an impact on their satisfaction? The study explored whether relationships exist between situational factors and elements of satisfaction. Elements of satisfaction examined in the survey were feeling in control, experiencing balance, having a sense of completeness, feeling comfortable, being confident, having enough time for oneself and others, and feeling satisfied. Indicators of satisfaction were correlated with situations that volunteers encountered while volunteering. According to the results, situational factors had more of an impact on satisfaction than strategies. Working in a supportive environment and being recognized for good work were positively correlated with satisfaction. Working in a supportive environment was positively linked to feeling comfortable, com-

pleteness, being in control, balanced and feeling confident in one's abilities. Recognition for good work had the most impact on being comfortable, confidence in one's abilities, completeness, feeling in control and feeling balance.

Handling multiple responsibilities in various settings, a potential indicator of role conflict, was both negatively and positively associated with many areas of satisfaction. While some of the situations could be thought to produce stress, many of the situations examined in the study provided sources of satisfaction. On the positive side, being able to manage several roles at one time was favorably linked to experiencing a feeling of completeness in a volunteer setting. Juggling multiple roles was positively attributed to self confidence. Handling work responsibilities while volunteering was linked to being confident. Working extended volunteer hours was attributed to a feeling of completeness, satisfaction and balance.

While burnout was not experienced frequently by volunteers, burnout was the most negative situation experienced and was associated with lack of being comfortable, a lack of balance, lack of control, dissatisfaction, and not feeling complete. Decreased energy levels negatively affected being comfortable, having time for oneself, satisfaction and having time for others. Having unresolved conflict negatively impacted satisfaction and feeling comfortable. Being under a lot of pressure, feeling stressed and having too much responsibility were all associated with not feeling comfortable.

Strategies

What strategies do volunteers utilize to balance volunteer roles? Even with the proliferation of research on balancing work and family, there is comparatively little information available on strategies, specific techniques and skills use to manage roles, used by volunteers.

In reviewing the existing research, balanc-

TABLE 2:
The Top Ten Balancing Strategies Utilized by Volunteers

Strategies	VOLUNTEER SETTING		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Keep lines of communications open.*	4.18	.6979	1
Work with others to get jobs done*	4.16	.7216	2
Am flexible**	4.14	.7711	3
Take care of important matters promptly*	4.06	.6977	4
Prioritize tasks*	4.06	.7484	4
Hang around positive people**	3.99	.6874	6
Break down jobs to get them accomplished*	3.92	.7817	7
Use resources to get jobs done*	3.91	.7911	8
Have realistic expectations**	3.80	.7929	9
Accept things I can't change**	3.69	.8181	10

Note: *- Management Strategies, **- Psychological Strategies

ing strategies found in key studies fell into two categories: psychological (Amateu & Fong-Beyette, 1987; Farhang, 1998; Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1996; McCubbin, Joy, Cauble, Comeau, Patterson & Needle, 1980; Skinner & McCubbin, 1991; Tate & Davis, 1987; Unger & Powell, 1980; Wiersma, 1994) and management (Amateu & Fong-Beyette, 1987; Farhang, 1998; Fox, 1996; Hall, 1972; Nieto & Clutter, 1999; Wiersma, 1994). In this research using a five-point Likert scale (1-Never; 2-Seldom; 3-Sometimes; 4-Often; and 5-Always), volunteers indicated the frequency they used a list of strategies related to balancing volunteer roles. In this study, psychological strategies included social support, adaptability and changing expectations. Management strategies included planning, priority setting and delegation. The top ten balancing strategies utilized by volunteers shared in table 2 below are arranged in order of rank determined by mean scores.

As illustrated in the table above, the top psychological strategy used to manage volunteer roles was keeping lines of communication open. Communication and working with others were frequently used strategies in this study. Volunteers were more likely to delegate or work with others to get things done. Associating with positive people was common in volunteer settings. The other psychological strategies of being flexible and

accepting things that one cannot change were used frequently.

The management strategies of taking care of important matters promptly and prioritizing tasks were commonly utilized by volunteers to balance roles. Breaking down jobs to get them accomplished was a management strategy that made the top ten balancing strategies list. Volunteers often use resources available to get tasks accomplished.

Volunteer Satisfaction and Strategies

To determine if relationships existed between strategies and satisfaction, Spearman Rho Correlations were calculated. While management strategies seem to be utilized at a slightly higher frequency, psychological strategies were more positively connected to satisfaction. Psychological strategies were present in all elements of satisfaction.

Building supportive networks was positively connected to satisfaction, completeness, feeling in control, having enough time for others, being comfortable, and being balanced in the volunteer setting. Hanging around supportive people was associated with feeling complete. Keeping lines of communication open was positively connected to having enough time for others, feeling balanced, being comfortable, being confident and completeness.

In a volunteer setting, having realistic expectations was positively associated with

feeling in control of life, feeling confident in one's abilities, being in balance, being comfortable, having time for others, satisfaction and completeness. Having realistic expectations was the strategy with the strongest link to having time for oneself. Accepting things one can not change was linked to feeling comfortable, satisfaction and completeness. Being flexible was associated with having enough time for others, feeling comfortable and satisfaction.

With the exception of having enough time for oneself, management strategies were linked to all measures of satisfaction. When looking at management strategies and satisfaction, taking care of important volunteer matters in a timely manner led to feeling in balance, being in control of life, completeness, satisfaction, feeling confident, having enough time for others and feeling comfortable. Prioritization of tasks was positively linked to being comfortable, feeling in control and feeling confident. Evaluating one's volunteer roles was linked to feeling comfortable, being confident, completeness, satisfaction, being balanced, having enough time for others and feeling in control. Setting long range goals was associated positively with being confident and completeness, feeling balanced, satisfaction, and having time for others. Breaking down jobs to get them accomplished was connected to being comfortable and being confident.

Using resources to get the volunteer job done was associated with feeling confident, being in control, completeness, being comfortable, feeling balanced, satisfaction and having enough time for others. Working with others while volunteering was related to having enough time for others, feeling confident and being in control of life. Delegating tasks, another strategy involving working with others, was linked to feeling confident.

IMPLICATIONS
Social Support
Social support has been connected to vol-

unteer commitment (Sargent, 1992) and to increases in psychological well-being that occurs when one volunteers (Van Willigen, 1997). Merrill and Safrit (1998) found that being around family and friends was a motivator to volunteering. Documented in earlier research, this study reinforces the importance of social support in the volunteer setting. Administrators of volunteer programs who wish to help volunteers balance multiple roles and support commitment to a volunteer role should evaluate and create service opportunities to promote social support. These opportunities should enhance family and friend participation. Staff should consider setting up social opportunities for volunteers and their families to meet others with similar interests. Social occasions for volunteers to become acquainted and build support networks can include working on teams, having meals together, arranging buddy assignments, and holding social events. Even connecting through technology to share ideas, successes and support is a great way to provide volunteers with social support. In forging new relationships and strengthening old relationships, volunteers can gain ideas and gather support.

Work Environment
This study reinforced earlier findings about the importance of the volunteer work environment (Culp & Schwartz, 1999; Larkin, 1996; Moen, Harris-Abbott, Lee & Roehling, 1999; Pettegrew, 1993). Situations should be continuously analyzed to determine if volunteers feel valued, recognized and supported. Staff should show appreciation for the impact that volunteers make on the organization. In evaluating the work environment, administrators should insure that the volunteer work setting environment and procedures are user- and family-friendly for those volunteers managing family roles. In an effort to make processes user-friendly, administrators should evaluate, streamline and/or eliminate meetings or paperwork to reduce time and stress.

In addition, administrators should focus on eliminating or modifying negative environments including physical, time and other barriers.

Communication

Volunteer administrators should enhance communication between staff and volunteers, including suggestion boxes and other avenues to open dialogue. Staff should practice active listening in which they paraphrase what the volunteer said to make sure they understand. Volunteers will have increased identification with the program when their opinions are heard and valued. As a result, an organization can expect a stronger commitment from the volunteer.

Recognition

This study reinforces earlier findings that support volunteers being recognized in multiple ways (Culp & Schwartz, 1999; Nelson, 1997; Sargent, 1992). Recognition should be customized to meet the volunteers' needs and delivered in a timely fashion. Highlighting a volunteer's specific skills and talents and positioning volunteers in roles which provide them personal satisfaction and enjoyment will be a source of reward. Reinforcing the volunteer's role in the organization and the importance of the service to the organization is important.

Priority Setting

Volunteer managers should communicate clearly the priorities for the organization and the philosophy behind these priorities. In order to help volunteers understand how priorities are established, administrators should communicate the philosophy behind these decisions. They can use evaluation questions linked to setting priorities such as: "Why is this important to do?" to increase a volunteer's understanding of organizational priorities. Staff should work with volunteers on setting priorities within their roles to keep them from being overwhelmed. The support for priority setting is consistent with earlier

findings (Duncan and Martoz-Baden, 1999; Moen, Harris-Abbott, Lee and Roehling, 1999; Nieto and Clutter, 1999).

Time Management

Master calendars are important management tools for volunteers. Administrators should provide volunteers with dates well in advance so they can implement long-range planning. Meetings should be scheduled based on their priority and purpose combining them whenever possible to wisely spend the volunteers' time. Events should be carefully distributed over a calendar period in order to have recovery time between projects. Awareness of other events happening in the lives of volunteers is another important part of balancing projects with downtime.

Resources

Consistent with early research (Hall, 1972; McCubbin, Joy, Cauble, Comeau, Patterson, and Needle, 1980; Unger and Powell, 1980), this study reinforces the need to provide volunteers with resources such as knowledge, tools, supplies, space, and equipment to do their job when they arrive. Creating an awareness of resources through modeling their use is an important step in helping volunteers utilize assets to make their job easier and more enjoyable. Resource libraries, trainings, scholarships and grants are all valuable resources which enhance the volunteers' ability to perform their tasks. Having resources available 24-hours-a-day via the web or telephone is another avenue to provide resources to support the volunteer.

Adaptability

Administrators should build flexibility into programs to provide volunteers with options to meet the current demands and expectations in their lives. Combining volunteering with family and job responsibilities is a creative way to be flexible. Focusing on the volunteers' potential to make a contribution to the community is paramount to their continuing volunteer involvement.

Conclusion

Using the information gained from this study, volunteer managers can design environments that better match the realities of life as we know it, thus increasing the individual volunteer's abilities to thrive. By purposefully designing a positive volunteer environment, the creation of a satisfied, committed group of volunteers is more likely to emerge. This study provides volunteer administrators assistance in building and developing resources and strategies to deal effectively with volunteers who balance multiple roles. Administrators should provide volunteers the tools to respond positively to the stress of the balancing act. Volunteers will benefit directly from the study results through increased knowledge about balancing multiple roles. As this information is applied to real-life situations, administrators and volunteers can apply strategies and situations that positively impact personal satisfaction.

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