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Chakorn Kraivichien[1], Kalayanee Senasu[2]

[1]Corresponding Author, Ph.D. Candidate, Human Resource and Organization Development, School of Human Resource Development, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand. Email: chakornkr@gmail.com

[2]Professor Emeritus, School of Human Resource Development, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand. Email: kalaya.s@nida.ac.th

Abstract

Social responsibility, referring to supporting others in society, became a crucial topic during the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly impacting people's mental and physical lives. Socially responsible activities can be conducted on two main levels-individual and organizational. An individual who participates in socially responsible activities acts as a volunteer while an organization performs social responsibility through related activities, contributing to society without any return. Limited research exists on the motivation of volunteers, especially involving multi-level studies. Therefore, this study intends to fill the gap by employing a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the volunteers' motivations by conducting interviews with 27 participants at the individual level and representatives from 14 companies at the organizational level. The results reveal six motivating factors at the individual level and four at the organizational level, under some common themes. Both individuals and organizations can support each other to design appropriate socially responsible activities and create an iterative positive cycle, positively contributing to society.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Covid-19 Pandemic, Motivational Factors, Volunteer

Introduction

COVID-19 has highly impacted human life around the world. This viral disease is in the same family as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and is classified as a common cold. COVID-19 rapidly spread, significantly impacting individuals, societies, and economies worldwide (Kazak, 2020). The research shows that people became distressed and experienced negative emotions (Pillay & Barnes, 2020). The outbreak also affected the economic system. From the macro perspective, overall GDP around the world has dropped. Thailand's GDP was -6% in 2020 (Bank of Thailand, 2021). The global economic effect led to concern about the stability of organizations. According to the research, Thai people experienced a loss of earnings, job opportunities and increased financial concerns (Osterrieder et al., 2021).

Despite all repercussions, there was also a positive side to the pandemic crisis (Kumar et al., 2023). Many volunteers, both individuals and organizations, showed great social spirit in supporting others suffering from the crisis. Volunteers' actions tended to be directed toward people who had limited access to treatment, lack of job opportunities, and the inability to gather fundamental living resources such as food.

Given the phenomena as mentioned above, it is crucial to learn from the situation and understand the motivation and key drivers encouraging people and organizations to volunteer and benefit society with little or no financial return, especially since they would be at risk of infection. There is limited research on volunteers' motivation (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009; Fjørtoft et al., 2020). This study aims to fill the academic gap in the motivation of volunteers, both at individual and organizational levels, by exploring the motivational factors encouraging individuals and organizations to undertake socially responsible actions. There is a key research question: "What are the factors that motivate individuals and organizations to participate in socially responsible activities?"

Literature Review

Social Responsibility

The social responsibility agenda has been widely discussed among scholars and practitioners over the past decades. Historically, economists have viewed shareholders as important, emphasizing the need for firms to maximize benefits for them while other stakeholders' benefits were protected by law (Bénabou & Tirole, 2010). However, the concept has changed. People consider social responsibility as being part of sustainable benefits for society (Nahar & Khurana, 2023). Bénabou and Tirole (2010) stated that social responsibility has emerged as a new trend for the following reasons: 1) social responsibility is a good concept; 2) the world has changed, and information is easier to assess; 3) the environment and social protection issues are international topics; and 4) the costs of solving long-run issues have risen. Bénabou and Tirole (2010) discussed social responsibility by separating it into individual and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Individual Social Responsibility

Many people do charity work by investing their funds, products, and time to help others. In this sense, such people can be classed as "volunteers." A volunteer is a person who freely dedicates time and effort to help an individual, organization, or a specific cause. A volunteer is a valuable human resource and plays an important role in creating benefits for society (Bang & Ross, 2009). Volunteering can be categorized as a form of social practice where people use their resources for the benefit of others without expecting monetary gain (Stukas et al., 2015).

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility was first introduced in 1953. Brønn and Vidaver-Cohen (2009) predicted that social values would change, and new demands would be created. Businesses must respond to new demands by enhancing their resilience. Firms must consider and respond to these social demands to be competitive in the future. They must prioritize the broader interests encompassing all stakeholders, including shareholders. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has received increasing attention from the state, government, private organizations, and scholars (Grimstad et al., 2020), and it refers to the actions taken by a firm for social benefit. According to Fjørtoft et al. (2020), CSR is a voluntary activity that concentrates on stakeholders' interests while maintaining the firm's profitability. Even though the CSR topic has been widely discussed, there remains a lack of consensus on its definition (Carroll, 1991; Fjørtoft et al., 2020; Fontana, 2017). The term CSR is commonly used to explain the activities of a firm that commits to delivering positive results while considering the impact on society and the environment. It goes beyond laws or regulations.

Motivational Factors of Social Responsibility

To effectively perform socially responsible activities, individuals and firms need to spend time and resources such as financial (Dusuki, 2005). Research on volunteers has widely discussed their motivation. It is crucial because 1) motivation is the core of a human's actualization and willingness to continue voluntary work; 2) the research results in this area can be used to define a policy to increase the participation and commitment of volunteers (Yeung, 2004). Several approaches have been used to discuss the motivation of volunteers. For instance, some scholars argue that several social and psychological factors drive volunteers. Many scholars divide volunteer motivation into two factors, namely altruistic and non-altruistic.

Clary and Snyder (1991) proposed a model to understand volunteers' motivation using the functional approach. The model was derived from the classic theories relating to psychology and attitude. The principle of this approach is that volunteers can perform the same actions, but they may result from different psychological functions. Individuals may have different targets. For instance, one person may volunteer to carry out an activity for self-satisfaction, whereas another can volunteer to enhance their skills and knowledge. Clary et al. (1998) defined six functions served by volunteerism and further developed the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI): values, understanding, enhancement, career, social, and protective. These six elements have been utilized to understand the motivation of volunteers in countries such as Australia, Spain, and Hong Kong (Butt et al., 2017). The outcomes of volunteers' activities tend to be influenced by the congruence of individual motives. Even though the six functions have been widely used, there are limited studies focusing on the special event context (Bang & Ross, 2009).

Additionally, various scholars have modified and extended the variables of volunteers' motivation. Allison et al. (2002) included religious, social, and governmental factors in the motivation variables, while Esmond and Dunlop (2004) modified the assessment using ten variables. In 2007, researchers argued that volunteer functions should include social and political responsibilities (Bierhoff et al., 2007). Some researchers found enjoyment an important part of volunteers' motivation (Rokach & Wanklyn, 2009).

According to Omoto and Snyder (1993), volunteerism is complex. They argued that researchers must consider the whole picture to understand the concept. Therefore, they proposed the volunteer process model which identified volunteerism as three stages: antecedents, experiences, and consequences. The level of analysis in this model can be classified into three levels: individual, organizational, and broader social. Other theoretical models have been developed using the volunteer process model as the foundation. For example, Piliavin and Callero (1991) contributed to the field by developing the Role Identity Model of Volunteerism. They argue that to explain volunteerism, the crucial element is role identity. In addition, Wilson (2012) summarized existing research. According to the antecedents that persuade people to act as volunteers, the factors comprise subjective disposition, role identity, human resources, lifecycle period, social context, and volunteer task trends. In terms of experiences, the existing research focuses on the satisfaction and autonomy levels in the volunteer role after performing the tasks. The existing research relating to consequences focuses on the results obtained by volunteers, such as positive mental health, physical health, and socioeconomic benefits.

Alias and Ismail (2015) presented that volunteerism relates to individual, social, and organizational factors. Individual factors influence the decision to act as a volunteer. The first factor is intrinsic and includes egoistic. Cialdini et al. (1990) argued that individuals were egoistic and involved in volunteering for their purposes. Kilpatrick et al. (2010) presented that confident in their skills, volunteers want to contribute to society through their competencies.

The second factor is social factor. The research by Bryant, Jeon-Slaughter et al. (2003) found that people donated money or property because other people in society asked them to do so. This situation arises from the social interaction among people. According to Meer (2011), people are more likely to give when asked by someone with whom they have a social connection. People also carry out volunteer work because they want to retain their image in society. The third factor is the organizational factor that motivates volunteers. These include organizational goals, structure, size, and justice among team members.

From the organizational perspective, Fjørtoft et al. (2020) summarized four reasons why people engage in CSR activities: 1) moral obligation, 2) sustainability, 3) license to operate, and 4) reputation. In addition, Brammer and Millington (2005) presented that firms tended to embrace CSR activities to build a positive reputation and ultimately improve profitability. In line with Arjoon (2000), they reported that companies engaging in CSR activities were more likely to generate higher profits than those who did not. Lynes and Andrachuk (2008) revealed that the factors leading to CSR activities were long-term strategy, competitiveness, stakeholder pressure, and a good image. Researchers have frequently cited these factors. Muwazir and Hadi (2017) synthesized broad motivations for firms volunteering for CSR programs, defining 11 variables as motivational factors: 1) corporate image; 2) customer loyalty; 3) government pressure; 4) global pressure; 5) cultural and ethical; 6) religion; 7) competitive advantage; 8) profit; 9) brand and reputation; 10) job attraction; and 11) pressure from special interest groups such as the local community.

Research Methodology

This study seeks to explores the motivational factors that persuaded individuals and organizations to undertake socially responsible actions during the COVID-19 pandemic to answer the research question: "What are the factors that motivate individuals and organizations to participate in socially responsible activities?" Applying the qualitative approach, data were collected from multiple case studies, semi-structured interviews, observation, and information on the participants from digital sources.

Research Participants and Selection Criteria

This research utilized a multi-level analytical approach, focusing on both the individual and organizational dimensions.

At the individual level of analysis, there were 27 participants. The participants chosen for this investigation were specifically those officially recognized as village health volunteers (VHV) or representatives of foundations that have made contributions to societal welfare. The rationale behind their selection lies in their pivotal role in providing social assistance, particularly during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. This cohort's engagement in community support activities, especially in periods of crisis, underscores their significance in understanding the dynamics of community-based health initiatives and societal support mechanisms.

At the organizational level, 14 companies participated in this study. Within the selection process from a diverse array of companies, priority was given to entities that demonstrated a robust commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), particularly those that had actively engaged in initiatives aimed at enhancing societal welfare amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The rationale for this focused selection stems from the desire to scrutinize the impact and scope of CSR activities during periods of global crisis. The companies included in this

study spanned a range of sizes—from small to medium and large—and operated across various business sectors, thereby ensuring a comprehensive analysis of CSR practices across different organizational contexts and scales.

Data Collection and Research Instrument

The data were collected through onsite and online interviews, depending on the participants' preferences, observation, and document analysis.

At the individual level, there were 27 participants, 14 of whom allowed the researcher to interview them individually, while 13 permitted the researcher to conduct focus group interviews. Focus groups were separated into three groups.

At the organizational level, 14 companies participated in this study.

Content Analysis

According to Sharan (2009), data analysis is a crucial process .The researchers need to classify and interpret data into a statement to create meaning for the data gathered from the field .The interview passages contain various stories drawn informants 'experiences which can only be described and thematically developed based on the inter-coding contents analysis. Sharan (2009) recommends writing the code to the right of the script line .This is the first stage to identifying the construct categories .The second stage involves sorting the categories and data .At this stage, researchers rewrite the categories and re-assign them if necessary .Later, the researcher names the categories .It is recommended that the names of categories be congruent with the study .The names of the categories can be chosen by the researcher from the participants 'words or literature on the study topic .The final process involves rechecking whether the categories correspond with the research questions or not .The process suggested by Sharan (2009) is employed in this study.

In the process of developing the open coding framework, a total of 161 codes were identified and subsequently categorized into 18 distinct sub-themes. These sub-themes were further consolidated by the researchers into 11 principal themes. Upon the delineation of these key themes, the researchers formulated a conceptual framework depicting multi-level motivational factors. This framework is conceptualized as an iteration loop, symbolizing the continuous and reciprocal interplay between individual and organizational levels of motivation. To ascertain the validity of the proposed model, the researchers engaged in a validation process, wherein participants were requested to verify the congruence of the model with their personal experiences, as articulated during the interview sessions.

Results

Motivational Factors of Social Responsibility at the Individual Level

At the individual level, six major themes from a total of 99 occurrences represented participants' motivation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of themes and sub-themes of motivational factors at the individual level

Theme	Sub-theme	Occurrence	Percentage
Spiritual enhancement	Happiness	27	27.28%
	Gaining merit (Dai-boon)	11	11.11%
	Self-value	9	9.09%
Total		**47**	**47.48%**
Self-development	Upskilling	8	8.08%
	Emotional Quotient (EQ)	7	7.07%
Total		**15**	**15.15%**
Duty	Giving back to society	10	10.10%
	As a human	3	3.03%
Total		**13**	**13.13%**
Role model	King Rama IX	11	11.11%
Total		**11**	**11.11%**
Virtuous cycle	Virtuous cycle	9	9.09%
Total		**9**	**9.09%**
Networking	Networking	4	4.04%
Total		**4**	**4.04%**
Grand Total		**99**	**100.00%**

The following themes motivate participants to undertake volunteer activities, and sample quotes are presented in the following section.

Theme 1: Spiritual Enhancement

Spiritual enhancement refers to the experience of a positive shift in an individual's beliefs regarding their existence and place within the universe. "I am a person who has done many wrong things. Some people blamed me because I had no educational background. I could not live in a moral way. When I carried out volunteer tasks, I acknowledged that I was useful. I felt proud of myself. I had a friend who was in jail, and when he was released, I persuaded him to perform volunteer tasks. He started by helping me to deliver patients to the hospital. Right now, he has bought a van from his own funds to carry out volunteer work. He said he feels valued when he can help others survive. I think many volunteers feel the same." (Interviewee IA)

Theme 2: Self-development

Self-development refers to the process or state of improving or developing oneself. "Volunteer work provides me with the opportunity to develop myself. I need to have multiple skills. For example, when I take care of a disabled person who is unable to walk, I seek more knowledge on how they move from one place to another. I can then support them when I understand, which is how I can upskill myself." (Interviewee #IM)

Theme 3: Duty

Duty refers to an act of volunteering based on the belief that it is a duty. "I have a better opportunity compared to others. I am lucky to have the opportunity to learn, work, and do something I want. So, I should not ignore when others are in pain. It is my duty to give back something to society." (Interviewee #IJ)

Theme 4: Role model

King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the ninth king of the Chakri dynasty (1950–2016), who reigned over Thailand, was a role model in motivating people to perform volunteer tasks. "King Rama IX was my role model. I had seen him work hard since I was young. He could do many types of work. So, I should be able to do something to make a better Thai society." (Interviewee #IG)

Theme 5: Virtuous Cycle

The virtuous cycle refers to a chain of events in which one desirable occurrence leads to another, further promoting the first occurrence. This results in a continuous process of occurrence and improvement. "When I worked on volunteer activities, I was very impressed and wanted to do it again. It is the same as when I do good things. I see the results, feel good, and want to carry out more volunteer activities. It is the cycle of doing well for society." (Interviewee #IE)

Theme 6: Networking

Networking refers to the action of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts. "I enjoyed participating in volunteer activities. The people who participate in volunteer activities have something in common. So we can work together to build a good team. When I moved to Rayong Province, I also participated in a volunteer group there. I made new connections, and it was a good social group. It is one factor, even though not directly, that motivated me to continue working as a volunteer." (Interviewee #IC)

Motivational Factors of Social Responsibility at the Organization Level

After reviewing and analyzing all the transcripts from organizational representatives, 62 occurrences emerged under five major themes, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of themes and sub-themes of motivational factors at the organizational level

Theme	Sub-theme	Occurrence	Percentage
Sustainable Development	Social	9	14.52%
	Environment	8	12.90%
	Economy	8	12.90%
Total		**25**	**40.32%**
Stakeholder Engagement	Employees	11	17.74%
	Community	9	14.52%

Theme	Sub-theme	Occurrence	Percentage
Total		**20**	**32.26%**
Compliance	Compliance	9	14.52%
Total		**9**	**14.52%**
Company Branding	Company Branding	6	9.68%
Total		**6**	**9.68%**
Employee Development	Employee Development	2	3.22%
Total		**2**	**3.22%**
Grand Total		**62**	**100.00%**

The five motivational themes lead organizations to spend their resources on corporate social responsibility, as detailed in the following and sample quotes from interviewees.

Theme 1: Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is considered by a company that aims to develop a sustainable society. "Our company wants to support the community as part of sustainable development. We might start from small communities around our area of production and expand the policy into society. In the past, we have given money to communities, allowing them to spend according to their needs, but we now focus more on sustainability. We engage with communities by providing knowledge to local people. For example, we have a special English class for children in school. The teachers are our employees with good English and love teaching children." (Interviewee H)

Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement refers to the actions taken on behalf of an organization to engage stakeholders. "The company undertakes CSR activities for various reasons. Employees have more engagement with the company when they perform CSR activities. Employees value an organization that supports CSR activities more than one that does not. I think CSR tasks make employees understand that the company not only focuses on work, but also the value and contribution to society. It is the value that occurs in their hearts. They can feel it and are proud of it." (Interviewee J)

Theme 3: Compliance

Compliance refers to the actions companies take to comply with the law and regulations. "CSR is part of the regulations. Our company is manufacturing based. Under the regulations, we need to assess the environmental impact. This leads us to take overall responsibility for communities." (Interviewee G)

Theme 4: Company Branding

Company branding refers to the image of the company that both internal and external stakeholders perceive. "I think the company performs CSR activities to project a good image. The company also wants to develop a sustainable society." (Interviewee D)

Theme 5: Employee Development

Employee development refers to the activities or programs designed to develop the skills, mindset, and attitude of employees in an organization. "CSR activities support employees' development. People can develop their skills through activities. For example, we implemented a program to allow employees to submit ideas for CSR activities. Interestingly, the employees generated ideas beyond our expectations, such as an open house for the community to learn more about production." (Interviewee A)

A Multi-Level Framework of Motivation for Successful Social Responsibility as an Iteration Loop

According to the findings, people become involved and continue with volunteer activities because of the individual motivations that drive them, such as spiritual enhancement, duty, role models, virtuous cycle, and networking. The continuous phase gradually starts (as shown by the yellow curve in Fig. 1) when these people work in an organization and find that it also supports employee volunteers, making them feel more engaged.

The level analysis indicates that organizations support people to participate in CSR activities. The factors leading organizations to pay attention to CSR are sustainable development, stakeholder engagement, compliance, and company branding. When people engage in volunteer activities according to the organizational value and acknowledge the benefits, they also continue to participate in socially responsible actions (as shown by the green curve in Figure 1).

There exist shared motivations and values at both the individual and organizational strata, specifically, self-development at the individual level and employee development at the organizational level. Once both individual and organizational values are interconnected and communicated, the iteration of volunteerism automatically occurs and continues.

Figure 1

Framework of multi-level motivation for successful social responsibility as an Iteration Loop which was validated by participants
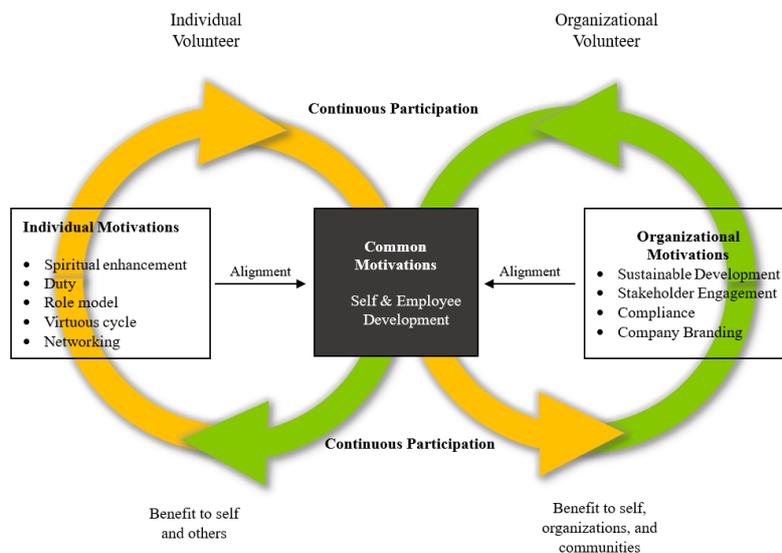
Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this study are supported by the theory of Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit). Muchinsky and Monahan (1987) described the P-O Fit as the compatibility between an individual and an organization. The P-O Fit comprises two important aspects: supplementary fit and complementary fit. Supplementary fit occurs when a person supplements, embellishes, or possesses similar characteristics to others in an environment. When a person has values that

align with those of the organization, the supplementary fit automatically occurs, whereas the complementary fit occurs when a person's characteristics "make whole" the environment or add something to it that is missing. Based on this study, when an individual has a strong motivation to perform socially responsible actions and the organization supports them, the resulting fit and satisfaction create an iteration loop.

According to the theory of altruism explained by Van Vugt and Van Lange (2006), altruistic behaviour is driven by intentionality. It is not haphazard or coerced in nature. Rather, individuals purposefully undertake altruistic acts with the conscious aim of advancing the welfare of others. Altruistic behaviours are predominantly directed toward an improvement in the well-being or flourishing of others, independent of any personal advantage. Lastly, the essence of altruistic behaviour incorporates an inherent cost to the actor, surpassing the realm of self-interest. Altruistically inclined individuals willingly embrace personal sacrifices, be it in terms of time, exertion, resources, or even exposure to personal risks, in order to extend aid to others. In this respect, the evidence from this study draws numerous implications concerning the correlation linking altruism and voluntary motivations, particularly when considering the three fundamental dimensions of altruism propounded by Van Vugt and Van Lange (2006). These include one's intention, the benefit provided to others, and the personal sacrifice or cost incurred. The practices of people in society align with the theoretical explanation. There are volunteers who decide to help others without the expectation of a return. Even though some people do not have tangible resources such as funds, they select an alternative way to help others, such as spending personal time.

In terms of practitioners, the findings of this study can be used as a guideline for management to understand volunteers' motivations and design appropriate programs to persuade employees toward socially responsible actions. In addition, this study provides suggestions for national policymakers to help them understand the motivations of people who engage in socially responsible actions. It is recommended that an altruism playbook be developed to cultivate a socially responsible culture. Essentially, incorporating the interested private and public organizations would also help to promote CSR activities to a broader group of people. In terms of the theory of organizational citizen behavior (OCB), policymakers can widen the national strategy to build societal citizenship behavior (SCB). According to Lewin et al. (2020), the model of citizenship behavior can be extended from organization to society. This situation can occur when employees learn by identifying with the organization.

Conclusion and Future Research

The results of this research contribute to the knowledge of volunteer motivations by providing insightful information to both scholars and practitioners. This study employs a qualitative approach to gain rich information through direct interviews with the participants. The findings provide a broad model of volunteer motivations. Future research should focus on adopting a quantitative research approach to confirm the findings through statistical data. In addition, this study involves the collection of data from Thai volunteers. Future research should extend to other countries in order to generalize the results. Lastly, the key participants of this

study consist of health volunteers. It would be beneficial if future research involves the collection of data from volunteers in other sectors to broaden the perspective.

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