Utilizing the Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development to Interpret the Volunteer Activities of Retirees

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Introduction

- This study examines connections between retirees’ previous paid work and their volunteer activities at non-profit organizations.
- These insights are valuable for the recruitment, placement and retention of retirees who volunteer in non-profit organizations.

Some Background Statistics:
- Thirty-two percent of people age 65 and older volunteer.
- Canadian volunteers of all ages contributed almost 2 billion volunteer hours to non-profit organizations.
- Twenty-five percent of volunteers contribute the most volunteer hours, accounting for 77% of all volunteer hours.
- Volunteers contributed an average 168 hours to non-profit organizations over the course of the year in 2004, and older volunteers tend to contribute the most average volunteer hours.

Statistics Source: (Hall, Lasby, Gumulka, & Tyron, 2006)
Rationale

- Our population is aging:
  - In Canada, there are more than 4 million people over age 65 (Statistics Canada, 2007)
  - Between 2001 and 2006, individuals aged 55 to 64 were the fastest growing age group; they number 3.7 million individuals (Statistics Canada, 2007)
  - Today, an older individual can expect to spend as much as 25 to 30 years in retirement (Stone, 2006) because of longer life expectancies

- As our population ages, there will be more older people with time to volunteer and retirees’ opportunities for development and their ability to pursue fulfilling activities will become increasingly important

- Gaining a better understanding of the experiences of retirees who volunteer with non-profit organizations is critical because retirees are a growing demographic (Statistics Canada, 2007) and older volunteers are an important resource for non-profits (Canada Volunteerism Initiative, 2005; Foster-Bey, Grimm, & Dietz, 2007)
Research Questions

1. To what extent do retirees use the skills and abilities that they developed through their paid work experiences in their volunteer activities and to what extent do they develop new ones?

2. To what extent do retirees use the knowledge that they developed through their paid work experiences in their volunteer activities and to what extent do they seek to learn new things?

3. To what extent do retirees transfer contextual factors from their paid work and work experiences to their volunteer activities?

4. To what extent do retirees’ career self-concepts change from those they developed during their paid-work careers, as they are engaged in later-life volunteer roles?

The theoretical perspectives used in this study are the life-span, life-space theory of career development (Super, Savickas & Super, 1996) and the life course approach (Giele, J. Z. & Elder, G. H., Jr. 1998).
Mixed Method Paradigm

Phase 1: Exploratory Developmental
- Semi-structured interviews with 10 retired volunteers

Phase 2: Broad Survey
- Quantitative Survey Instrument Developed
- Quantitative Survey Conducted

Phase 3: Explanatory
- Interpretation and Selection of Case Study Participants
- Qualitative Case Analysis of Small Sample of Typical Participants

Phase 4: Integrative
- Integration and Interpretation of Findings

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003)
Phase 1 Participants

- Snowball sampling used
- Ten interviews with individuals 55 to 72 years of age
- Retired within the last 6 years
- Five men, five women
- Middle class, Caucasian and living in Southern Ontario
- Retired from blue collar jobs (2) and from professional jobs (8) - health and safety technician (1), maintenance and inventory technician (1), auto sales person (1), teacher (4), principal (1), lawyer (1), computer analyst (1), and nurse (1)
- Volunteer organization types: social service; arts and cultural; educational; religious; political and environmental
Preliminary Findings

- The majority of participants felt their skills, abilities and knowledge had been transferred to their volunteer activities. For some this was planned; for others, it just happened. Participants indicated that their skills were not completely transferred to their volunteer activities: 30% to 100% of skills and abilities were transferred.
- Some participants felt contextual factors had been transferred to their volunteer activities.
- All of the participants wanted to continue learning new things, developing new skills and gaining knowledge.
Work in Progress

- The changes in career self-concept
  - The role of worker is replaced with new roles, leading to a transformation of career self-concept

- Life themes are visible across each participant’s life course
  - How does this connect to and inform their self-concept during this transition?

- Continuing work with Phase 1 qualitative data
  - Phase 1 is developmental and will help inform the survey to be conducted in Phase 2


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