

Regulatory Focus and Volunteer Motive Matching

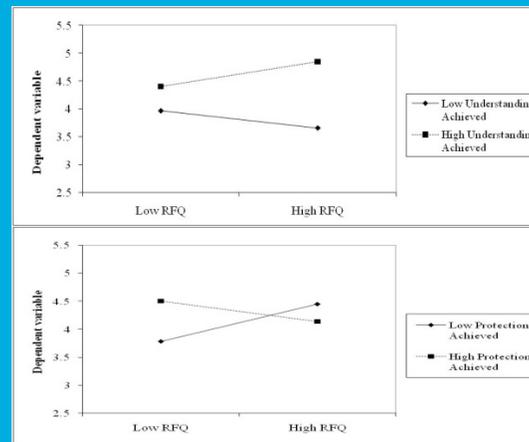
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Introduction

- The notion that the same pro-social action can be enacted for different reasons is a central tenet of the functional approach to pro-social motivation (Clary & Snyder, 1991).
- Research examining the motives of those who engage in volunteerism has shown that “matching” of motives to experiences promotes future engagement in voluntary service (e.g., Clary et al., 1998).
- Whereas most of the research investigating the effect of motive matching on volunteerism has examined specific reasons for volunteering, we take a broader perspective that considers an individual’s more general orientation toward goal pursuit.
- Regulatory focus theory suggests that people can approach the same activity in different ways (Higgins et al., 1997):
 - **PROMOTION:** A promotion focus is concerned with growth, achievement, and aspirations and the presence and absence of positive outcomes. (“High RFQ” in figures)
 - **PREVENTION:** A prevention focus is concerned with maintenance and security and the presence and absence of negative outcomes. (“Low RFQ” in figures)
- Volunteer experiences may differ in the extent to which they fulfill promotion- or prevention-focused concerns. This notion has yet to be explored and tested empirically.

Hypotheses

- Because opportunities to learn and gain greater understanding through volunteering are consistent with a promotion focus, we hypothesized that the extent to which volunteering offers greater understanding will influence interest in volunteering for promotion rather than prevention focused people.
- Additionally, because opportunities to protect against negative states (e.g., guilt) through volunteering are consistent with a prevention focus, we hypothesized that the extent to which volunteering provides self-protection will influence interest in volunteering for prevention rather than promotion focused people.



Method

- A survey of volunteers (N=110) from the U.S.-based service program AmeriCorps approximately 6 months into their service. Participants completed the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ), and indicated the extent to which their AmeriCorps service satisfied motives concerning understanding and self-protection, along with future interest in volunteering.

Results / Discussion

- As hypothesized, regression analyses revealed a significant interaction between regulatory focus and satisfaction of the understanding motive ($p < .05$), such that greater motive satisfaction predicted greater interest in volunteering for more promotion focused people (see top figure).
- Also, as hypothesized, a significant interaction between regulatory focus and satisfaction of the self-protection motive was observed ($p < .05$), such that greater motive satisfaction predicted greater interest in volunteering for more prevention focused people (see bottom figure).
- Whereas past theory and research on volunteerism has emphasized the importance of matching domain-specific motives with volunteer experiences, the present research suggests the utility of a complementary matching approach based on a person’s broader motivational orientation. From a practical standpoint, organizations that rely on the assistance of volunteers could benefit from taking regulatory focus into consideration when designing appeals aimed at recruiting and retaining volunteers.

References

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