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The Subjective Index of Benefits in Volunteering (SIBiV): An instrument to manage satisfaction and permanence in non-profit organizations

Abstract

Volunteering is a helping behavior with more benefits for those who receive it than for those who offer it. After more than two decades of intense research focused on isolated variables, this paper focuses on the subjective balance between costs and benefits that make volunteers remain in non-profit organizations. A short instrument of 22 items is validated using a sample of 205 volunteers engaged in 10 non-profit organizations working in the social sector. Confirmatory Factor Analysis provided a 3-factor model of benefits (Benefits from the activities, Benefits of giving and Benefits of sharing) and a 3-factor model of costs (Costs of impotence, Costs from the organizational context and Costs from lack of competence) with a good fit to the data. The General Index of Benefits presented a positive pattern of significant relationships with psychological and subjective well-being, satisfaction with volunteering, organizational commitment, volunteer engagement, role identity as a volunteer and intention to stay as a volunteer in the same organization. The General Index of Costs presented negative relationships with the same mentioned variables. The numerical difference between both General Indexes was called the Subjective Index of Benefits in Volunteering (SIBiV) and can be interpreted as the positive balance of benefits at any time for any volunteer when it is greater than 0. This instrument can help to manage this positive social phenomenon that benefits those who receive the help, volunteers themselves and society as a whole in many different ways.

Key Words: Volunteering, Motivations, Well-being, Permanence, Cost, Benefits.

Volunteering is a freely chosen, planned, sustained helping behavior towards strangers (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner, 2002) and as such it is included on the more general topic of altruism (Batson, 1991; Clary & Snyder, 1991; Smith, 1981). When we talk about altruistic behaviors, we compute costs and benefits and conclude that at least on a material level the costs are higher than the benefits for the helper. That make volunteering altruistic by definition although it can be motivated by all kind of reasons among them those more egoistic or self-centered.

The mentioned characteristics allow researchers to objectively distinguish volunteering from other types of altruistic behaviors, for example, the help given to family members, which is at many points an obligation (Al-Janabi, Carmichael, & Oyebode, 2018); the help given in emergency situations, which is not planned; the small and informal acts of help, which are not sustained (Smith, 1981). But volunteering has been considered the most organized and formal manner of altruism (Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Penner, 2004) because it occurs within organizational settings. This definitively tilts the balance towards observable costs in volunteering. Volunteers are therefore those people who choose to help strangers, without any obligation, without any economic remuneration, over time and experiencing many costs, some derived from their own personal investments (time, efforts, resignations, etc.) and other many derived from the organizational context in which takes place (norms, hierarchies, disagreements, conflicts, bad organizational management practices, etc.).

In this paper we validate an instrument to evaluate the subjective balance of benefits and costs that would make people remain as volunteers in non-profit organizations. The resulting balance would be a snapshot of a cocktail of subjective experiences that evolves and changes over time in each person. It would indicate how

subjectively rewarding this costly helping behavior is for a particular volunteer at a particular moment.

A new question for an old interest

Because more and more people took part in volunteering during the nineties and the first decade of this century (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003, 2016), it is not surprising that researchers were fascinated about the reasons why people work under such expensive circumstances. Two related questions grabbed their attention (Vecina, Chacón & Sueiro, 2010): What characterizes people who decide to work for other's wellbeing, continuously and despite the costs and difficulties involved? and what factors explain why some individuals remain consistent in their decision to help others over the long-term?

Since then, many studies have been published and many variables have been studied to answer these questions (Penner, 2002; Wilson, 2012). Most of these variables have been analyzed in isolation and most of the studies have very similar and sometimes understandable limitations (Smith, 1994; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2015; Wilson, 2005). As a result, we have a very complex and at some points disintegrated panorama in which sustained volunteerism has been related with a little of everything: Empathy, altruistic personality, prosocial attitudes, secure attachment, egocentric and heterocentric motivations, positive emotions, satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, social identity, organizational support, burnout, etc. (for a revision (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2015). This approach prevents understanding deeply dynamic processes such as the one involved in volunteering, in which the importance of the variables may change over time, new variables may develop throughout the process in different ways for different people, and causes and consequences may be reciprocally

related (Chacon, Vecina, & Davila, 2007; Marta, Manzi, Pozzi, Vignoles, 2014; Marzana, Marta, Pozzi 2012). At this point, the problem may not be the many and sometimes static and obvious answers we have, but the questions we make. To articulate and make sense of this complexity, in this paper it is proposed to summarize the two questions in just one with a new practical focus: What kind of subjective balance between costs and benefits makes people remain as volunteers in non-profit organizations?

Although the first question about the decision is important, specifically for organizations that want to attract volunteers for their projects, permanence is a defining aspect of the concept of volunteerism and it already includes the decision to volunteer. By definition, volunteers are not the individuals who decide to volunteer, but those who continue to carry out this behavior over time. Although permanence is the desired goal, it must be accepted that volunteers can rightfully drop out at any time for many understandable reasons such as unforeseen circumstances, family and work responsibilities, and many other personal reasons. The voluntary nature of the action is another defining characteristic of volunteering. Within this limited frame, in which permanence is a necessary condition for volunteering but the freedom to leave also, the final balance would be a measurement of the particular subjective experiences that keep people more or less satisfied and consistent with their decision of being volunteers. At any time, the many and different positive experiences of being a volunteer can become causes of permanence, if their subjective magnitude exceeds that of the negative ones.

Subjective benefits

Discussions about benefits in volunteering seem to contradict its own definition as altruistic behavior, and force researchers to make desperate distinctions between pure

and impure altruism, private and public benefits, other-focused motivations and self-focused motivations, by-products of volunteering (those obtained, but not expected) (Andreoni, 1989; Clary et al., 1998; Handy & Mook, 2011; Kiviniemi, Snyder, & Omoto, 2002; Smith, 1981). However, we can move forward also thanks to the definition of the concept: Volunteers are those who plan to help others in an expensive organizational context with their time, skills, implication, efforts, etc., without economic remuneration and steadily (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner, 2002; Wilson, 2012). That should be enough to qualify their behavior as altruistic from a direct and observable point of view. Expecting that, in addition to this, the volunteers suffer, accumulate dissatisfactions of all kinds, do not learn anything, do not expand their world of relationships or do not find meaning in their actions, it is humanly difficult and unnecessary. We can also find ourselves without a trace of altruism.

From this perspective, nothing prevents volunteers from obtaining a huge array of subjective benefits, such as satisfaction by expressing their values, learning new skills, receiving gratitude, being productive and creative, performing worthwhile activities, experience pride, enthusiasm and happiness doing whatever task available, feel self-efficacy, engagement and commitment, enrich their personal identity and their social network, hope to make a better world or improve their CV. Most of these benefits are rarely material, although they may have a material value. They are eminently subjective and therefore psychological. They can be anticipated or discovered during the process, conscious or intuited, subjectively important or not according to each person.

Seeking to reduce the great variety of particular benefits that literature has associated with volunteering, we identified three sources of satisfaction related to: 1)

what is done (task or activity), 2) with whom it is done (people involved) and 3) what it is done for (ultimate purpose). The latter is the most cited set of benefit and derives from some kind of altruistic interest in doing something positive for others. From different perspectives it is well known that giving is a way of getting (Ferguson, Zhao, O'Carroll & Smillie, 2019; Piliavin, 2003; Piliavin & Siegl, 2007; Piliavin & Siegl, 2015; Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000). What is given and what is received may be different, and of a different nature, but the key is that the result of the computation provides a subjective satisfactory balance for the helper. Doing what is right and feels satisfying would be a kind of intangible and subjective benefit that may compensate many observable and unobservable costs. Having a more important goal than one's self, which is usually the case for most volunteers motivated by altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others (Clary et al., 1998; Vecina, & Marzana, 2019), and working every day using as many human strengths as possible, has been proposed as the formula of happiness (Diener, Seligman, Choi, & Oishi, 2018; Seligman, 2002). In this respect, it has been shown that volunteering provides benefits for the personal identity (Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Thoits, 2012) and gives meaning to life (Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Klein, 2017; Son & Wilson, 2011). Volunteering has also been related to well-being, subjective and psychological (Okun, Stock, Haring, & Witter, 1984; Stukas, Hoye, Nicholson, Brown, & Aisbett, 2014; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Vecina, Chacón, Marzana, & Marta, 2013). These connections are quite logical if, as some authors indicate, people are socialized to obtain satisfaction by helping others (Berkowitz, 1972; Cialdini, Kenrick, & Baumann, 1982; Son & Wilson, 2011), and that has many adaptive advantages for human beings (Trivers, 1971).

Another set of benefits may come from sharing values and experiences with similar and significant people. That is a kind of benefit because sharing intentions and goals with others reinforces a common understanding of the world and ultimately makes possible social structures of duties and rights that allow cooperative work (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005). It is well known that volunteering enhances volunteers' social capital with a bigger network of contacts and relationships (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991). In fact, volunteering is a way to satisfy the need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) and good relationships with other volunteers have been linked to satisfaction and intentions to remain (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001). It also happens that having social ties to people already volunteering is a stronger inducement to volunteer (Rotolo & Berg, 2010). It seems that sharing connections with significant people can be both, cause and consequence of volunteering (Omoto & Packard, 2016; Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

A third set of benefits may refer to the activities themselves and reflect an intrinsic and genuine interest in what is done. Such experience can be described as flow or a complete absorption in what one is doing (Csikszentmihalyi, 2016). It is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, especially when it comes from psychologically meaningful places for the development or enhancement of one's own identity (Bonaiuto et al., 2016). Empirical evidence suggests that matching personal motivations with consistent tasks results in positive volunteer outcomes of satisfaction (Clary et al., 1998; Finkelstein, 2008; Hustinx, 2008; Tschirhart, Mesch, Perry, Miller, & Lee, 2001). Engagement with the volunteer activities which include experiences of vigor or high levels of energy and mental resilience performing activities, has also been associated to satisfaction and intention to remain in non-profit organizations (Vecina et

al., 2013; Vecina, et al., 2012). Also the experience of positive emotions during activities has been associated with intentions to stay (Vecina & Chacón, 2005; Worth, 2006).

Potential costs

Regarding the costs, there are those which are obviously and perfectly observable in terms of time, effort, energy, and money expended by volunteers, as well as the opportunity costs of other activities foregone to make time for volunteering activities (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999; Chinman, Wandersman, & Goodman, 2005). There are also many other avoidable costs that can be prevented with good management practices. In this respect, we have a first set of costs referred to the organizational management of the volunteers. These kinds of costs occur when volunteers are unsatisfied or in disagreement with organizational aspects or when they work without the optimal degree of supervision, formation, support or recognition (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008; Cnaan & Cascio, 1999; Hidalgo & Moreno, 2009; Stirling, Kilpatrick, & Orpin, 2011; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013). More specifically, it has shown the perverse effects of working under emotional pressure (Chacón & Vecina, 1999), excessive bureaucracy (Stirling et al., 2011), or organizational conflicts (Haski-Leventhal, Hustinx, & Handy, 2011). Based on systematic research of the literature about organizational factors affecting volunteers, Studer and von Schnurbein (2013) conclude that the successful volunteer coordination depends on careful implementation of some key factors such as the definition of roles, monitoring of the social processes and communication of the organizational identity. All of this gives organizations a starring role to avoid the avoidable costs and enhance potential benefits.

Another kind of cost may occur because volunteers do not perceive effectiveness to improve things, either because the objectives or activities commissioned by the organization are not useful or because they lack the necessary physical or psychological skills to face it well. The perception that what is being done has some impact in the desired direction is a widely recognized predictor for maintaining engagement and participation over time (Born, Marzana, Alfieri, Garavay, 2015; Primavera, 1999; Wymer, Riecken, Yavas, 1997; Yeich, Levine, 1994). The lack of confidence about the utility of the activities performed could be real or perceived, but in any case it would mean the frustration of the most important reported reason for volunteering. According to Stukas et al. (2015), volunteers may decide where to maintain their efforts based on their perceptions of the appropriateness and usefulness of their contributions. When volunteers feel that their work is not worthwhile and they do not perceive the utility for others that they expected, it is very likely they stop making such efforts. Research shows that burnout was more likely among volunteers who felt they were wasting their time (Kulik, 2007) and participation efficacy was related to satisfaction and predicted intention to remain (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001). Bekkers (2010) presented a series of scenarios involving both costs and perceptions of the efficiency of help, finding that intentions to volunteer were greater for more efficient activities.

Equally, the lack of confidence about their own competence can be conceptualized as an important cost that can lead to abandonment (Clary & Orenstein, 1991) and has negative consequences for the identity. Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that behaviors that satisfy the human needs to feel autonomous, related to others and competent will enhance well-being and vitality and lead to increased intrinsic motivation. Gagné (2003) has demonstrated that satisfaction of these needs in a voluntary activity is associated with greater psychological engagement and more

volunteer hours contributed. Weinstein and Ryan (2010) have also related prosocial behavior with the human needs to feel competent. In any case, what is theoretically clear is that a sense of powerlessness collides with the most reported cause for volunteering.

Working under all these costly and sometimes overlapping conditions has negative impacts at all levels. Not only can they lead to dissatisfied and frustrated volunteers prone to abandonment at any time, it also implies doing low quality work for the recipients and giving a bad image of the organization.

Objective and hypothesis

This study aims to develop a short instrument to assess the subjective balance of costs and benefits perceived by volunteers at any moment during their active process of volunteering. Based on the existing literature on what makes volunteers continue or leave, we developed a theoretical structure of three main benefits and three main costs that will be validated in this paper using Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA). The three benefit factors to be confirmed are the following: 1) “I get from giving”, understood as the attainment of some kind of transcendent satisfaction driven from an altruistic interest; 2) “I get from the activity itself” or a genuine interest in doing the volunteer tasks assigned; and 3) “I get from sharing with similar people”, refers to the need to be connected with significant people with similar values and common interests. The three cost factors to confirm are the following: 1) “The organization does not solve my problems as a volunteer”, 2) “I feel that it is not worth what I do”, and 3) “I do not have what it takes”.

The external validity of the instrument is analyzed by exploring the pattern of relationships with relevant constructs in the volunteering field. In this respect, we relate the benefits and cost factors to the following variables: satisfaction of the motivations,

satisfaction with the tasks, satisfaction with the organization, organizational commitment, volunteer engagement, subjective and psychological well-being, role identity as a volunteer and intention to continue. We expect positive relationships between all these variables and the benefits scales, and negative relationships between them and the costs scales.

Finally and as heuristic to manage volunteer programs, it is proposed the Subjective Index of Benefits in Volunteering (SIBiV) as the subtraction between all the benefits and all the costs present at any time for any volunteer. Positive scores would indicate a positive balance of beneficial experiences in volunteering, while negative scores would indicate a negative balance of experiences and therefore the need to make changes.

Method

Participants

The Table 1 illustrates some relevant descriptive statistics of the sample under scrutiny. The participants were 205 Spanish speakers volunteers engaged in ten non-profit organizations working in the social sector. Some of the organizations had an international scope while others were national or local. Different inspiration values were represented (religious - non religious and conservative - liberal). Three organizations contributed with 50% of the participants (Red Cross, Intermon Oxfam, Afro aid).

Most of the volunteers were female (66%) and their level of education was high (67% of the participants had a university degree). Participants were, on average, quite young: 35% of participants is less than 24 years old, 44% is in the age class 25-39. Regarding the total time spent in the organization, 43% had been part of the same organization for less than 1 year, 33% for 1 to 2 years, and lastly 24% for 3 years or more. The majority of participants (44%) spent between 11 and 30 hours per month in

the organization, 30% spent more than 30 hours per month, and 26% spent less than 10 hours per month.

INSERT TABLE 1

Procedure and instruments

A pool of thirty items was written in such a way that each one is simple, easy to understand, and address of only single issue. Three experts' opinions were gathered to determine whether the item covers the aimed characteristics for testing the content validity of each scale (Brod, Tesler, & Christensen, 2009). Eight items were eliminated based on lack of clarity, redundancy and undesirable similarity to other items. Finally, twenty two items evaluated the degree of agreement with different statements related to potential subjective costs and benefits in volunteering. It was used a 7-point scale (1: absolutely disagree; 7: absolutely agree). The content of the items can be seen in Table 2.

Volunteers completed the twenty two items through an anonymous online questionnaire hosted on a Spanish web page. Each organization used their internal procedures to contact their active volunteers, guaranteeing anonymity and personal data protection. Participation was voluntary. Volunteers completed also the following measures:

Volunteer Satisfaction. The Volunteer Satisfaction Index (Vecina, Chacón, & Sueiro, 2009) was used which includes three subscales: Satisfaction of motivations, satisfaction with the tasks and satisfaction with management of the organization (7-point scale). The first subscale contains six items that measure the extent to which the activities carried out serve to fulfill the six motivations identified in the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Claryet al., 1998). Examples include: values "my volunteering allows me to express my personal values; "knowledge "…it allows me to learn new and interesting things;

”social relationships “. . . it enables me to meet new people; ”career “. . . it gives me the necessary training and experience in order to be a better professional”. The second subscale includes four items to investigate positive characteristics of the tasks. It includes such items as: “I can find out easily whether I am doing my tasks well as I do my volunteer work” or “I am satisfied with the efficiency with which I perform the tasks bestowed upon me.” The third subscale includes seven items that refer to different aspects of the management of the organization, beginning in each case with, “I am satisfied with the way in which the volunteers are managed by the organization”, “. . . with the training provided to improve the volunteers’ work”, and so on. The internal consistency of each of the subscales, measured using Cronbach’s alpha, was .74, .75, and .92 respectively.

Satisfaction with life. The Satisfaction With Life Scale was used (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). It assesses satisfaction with people’s lives as a whole and is made up of five items that evaluate, on a 7-point scale, the overall judgment made by people about their life satisfaction. It included items such as “In most ways my life is close to my ideal; I am satisfied with my life”. Cronbach’s alpha was .87.

Psychological well-being. The Psychological Well-Being Scales were used (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). They constituted eudemonic measures of psychological well-being, defined in terms of fulfillment and a sense of purpose or meaning. The six scales were as follows: Self-Acceptance (four items; $\alpha = .89$; Eg. “When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out”), Positive Relations (five items; $\alpha = .77$; Eg. “People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others”), Autonomy (six items; $\alpha = .75$; Eg. “I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus”), Environmental Mastery (five items; $\alpha = .74$; Eg “In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live”), Purpose in

Life (five items; α = .84; Eg. “Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them”), and Personal Growth (four items; α = .68; Eg. “I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world”). Responses ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree).

Volunteer Engagement. The Volunteer Work Engagement Scale was used (Vecina, Chacón, Sueiro, et al., 2012). Responses to the nine items range from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). It included items such as “I am enthusiastic about my volunteer work” (Dedication), “I always feel like going to do my volunteering” (Vigor), and “Time flies when I am doing my volunteer work” (Absorption). Cronbach’s alpha was .82 for Dedication, .84 for Vigor, .82 for Absorption.

Organizational commitment. The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire was used (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) in its brief and positive version of nine items. Its 7-point scale ranging from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 7 (absolutely agree) evaluated the degree of the volunteers’ emotional attachment to their organization. It included items such as: “I find that the organization’s values are similar to my own”, “I am proud to say that I am a part of this organization.” Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Volunteer role identity. The five-item measure of Role Identity was used (Callero Howard, & Piliavin, 1987) as adapted by Dávila, Chacón y Vecina (2005). Sample items, on a 10-point scale (1: absolutely disagree, 10: absolutely agree), included: “For me, being a volunteer is the most important of the concrete tasks that I perform”, “Volunteering is an important part of who I am”. Cronbach's α was .70.

Intention to remain. The intention to stay with the same organization was measured by three items asking about the likelihood that the volunteer would continue in the organization 6 months later, 1 year later and 2 years later. The measurement was on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (absolutely unlikely) to 7 (totally likely).

Statistical Analyses

Two Confirmatory Factor Analyses were run using the software STATA 14, one for the benefits factors and a second one for the costs factors (Bentler 1995; Hurley et al. 1997). The three latent factors of benefits and the three latent factors of costs were allowed to covary separately. The ratio of participants to parameter estimated was about 8. This sample size was in line with guidelines and recommendations (Kyriazos, 2018). Missing data were 22 in total and they were imputed using the modal value. Because the distribution of data was highly not-normal, we accounted for the violation of this assumption by using in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis robust standard errors through the Satorra–Bentler (1994) adjustment.

Results

Results from the CFA for the 3-factor model of benefits and for the 3-factor model of costs can be seen in Table 2. All the coefficients, both standardized and unstandardized, displayed high and significant relationships with their corresponding constructs.

The three factors of benefits that emerged were named: Benefits from the activities: "I get from the activity itself" (α = .78); Benefits of giving: "I get from giving" (α = .70); and Benefits of sharing: "I get from sharing with similar people" (α = .62). The three factors of Costs were named: Costs of impotence: "I feel that it is not worth what I do" (α = .77); Costs from the organizational context: "The organization does not solve my problems as a volunteer" (α = .82); and Costs from lack of competence: "I do not have what it takes" (α = .60). Cronbach's α for each subscale was high enough considering the small number of items (four or three for each factor). In any case and from our point of view, it is better to have dissimilar items that are moderately correlated but that each capture a different facet of the concept than it is to

have similar items that are highly correlated and capture only a small amount of the scale's scope.

INSERT TABLE 2

Both the 3-factor model of benefits and the 3-factor model of costs provided a good fit to the data. Table 3 shows a selection of goodness-of-fit test associated to CFA. It can be observed that the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation *(*RMSEA) was lower than .06 and the Standardized Root Mean square Residual (SRMR) was lower than .08 in both models, whereas the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) fit statistics were higher than .90. The Coefficient of Determination (CD) was about or higher than .95, meaning that the fraction of variance explained by the models is high. Several studies have produced guidelines in analysing cut-off indicating good fit of estimated CFA (see Schreiber et al., 2006). Goodness-of-fit tests associated to our CFAs are in line with these standards.

INSERT TABLE 3

To obtain a numerical measure for the three latent factors of benefits and the three latent factors of costs of volunteering, we first calculated a score that is the arithmetical mean of the different items that load to each of the latent factors. The values of these six indexes, given the values for the scale used, goes from 1 (minimum) to 7 (maximum). Then, we calculated the arithmetical mean of the three factors linked to benefits of volunteering and the arithmetical mean of the three factors of costs that were called "General Index of Benefits" and "General Index of Costs" respectively.

All the calculated indexes were correlated to a pool of variables widely used in the literature on volunteerism. Table 4 shows partial correlation coefficients between benefits and costs of volunteering and these variables, controlling for a fixed set of

covariates (the ones already illustrated in Table 1) to avoid for possible composite effects due to the characteristics of the analyzed sample.

As expected, the General Index of Benefits, and in addition each one of its three factors, correlated positively with all the variables under consideration. In other words, the more the volunteers of the sample perceive the subjective benefits proposed in this paper, the more they feel: 1) subjective and psychological well-being, including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth; 2) satisfaction with their volunteering experience that includes satisfaction of their motivations, satisfaction with the tasks and satisfaction with the organization; 3) engagement with their volunteer activity which includes dedication, vigor and absorption; 4) commitment to the organization in which they volunteer; 5) strong personal identity as volunteers; and 6) greater intention to continue as volunteers in the short, medium and long term.

Also as expected, the General Index of Costs, and most of their three scales, correlated negatively with all the variables related to volunteering, meaning that the more volunteers of the sample perceive the subjective costs, the less satisfied they are, the less engagement, commitment and identity as volunteers they feel, and the less intention to continue as volunteers they have. All these correlations did not vary even taking into account the particular characteristics of the participants.

INSERT TABLE 4

Finally, the Subjective Index of Benefits in Volunteering (SIBiV) can be calculated by subtracting to the General Index of Benefits, the General Index of Costs. Because both indexes range from 1 (minimum) to 7 (maximum), the hypothetical extreme solutions would be: General Index of Benefits = 1 & General Index of Costs = 7 or General Index of Benefits = 7 & General Index of Costs = 1. Consequently, the

difference would oscillate between -6 and +6 where 0 occurs when the benefits are equal to the costs. Positive scores would indicate beneficial experiences in volunteering while negative scores would indicate an expensive volunteer experience that is not compensated by the benefits obtained.

Discussion

In recent years there are more and more studies that explore and find that people who help without obligation and without receiving money for it, benefit from their help in many ways (Ferguson, Zhao, O'Carroll & Smillie, 2019; Meier & Stutzer, 2008; Piliavin, 2003; Plagnol & Huppert, 2010; Stephen, 2005). The multiple benefits obtained are not usually adduced as the main reason or as an explicit motivation to volunteer. This may be simply because they are not, even if they are present. The motivation to do something or to stay in it, is something different from the set of circumstances and experiences that inevitably accompany and also sustain any action. In this paper, we propose to change the focus from the motivations to the positive balance of subjective benefits in the volunteer experience. This balance of benefits may not be the reason for volunteering, but it is present in costly processes with multiple interrelated variables. It is also necessary, whatever the motivation is, so that the motivation can be rightfully fulfilled. Otherwise, we would be assuming that the motivation would be sufficient to volunteer even if the volunteers are punished, do not feel competent or their experience is heavily unsatisfactory. This kind of positive balance may be, in addition, relevant for organizations to manage volunteers' permanence through positive and satisfactory experiences for volunteers. Managers can measure the state of each of their volunteers at any time and take appropriate measures in each case.

We add to this theoretical perspective an empirical study that validates a 3-factor structure of benefits in volunteering (Benefits from the activities, Benefits of giving and Benefits of sharing with similar people) and a 3-factor structure of costs (Costs of impotence to effectively help, Costs from the organizational management and Costs from lack of competence). Both models fit to the data well and their factors seem reliable enough and consistently related to seven different variables currently used in the field of volunteerism. The General Index of Benefits presents a positive pattern of significant relationships with psychological and subjective well-being, satisfaction with volunteering, organizational commitment, volunteer engagement, role identity as a volunteer and intention to stay as a volunteer in the same organization. On the other hand, the General Index of Costs presents negative relationships with the same mentioned variables. The numerical difference between the General Index of Benefits and the General Index of Costs was called the Subjective Index of Benefits in Volunteering (SIBiV) and can be interpreted as the positive balance of benefits at any time for any volunteer when it is greater than 0.

These results suggest that the new index, based on a few number of items (22 in total) are able to capture most of the relevant features that literature has underlined to be essential in analyzing the reasons why people volunteer despite the obvious and observable material costs from an individual perspective. This practical approach may help to manage the complex process of volunteering diagnosing how each volunteer or group of volunteers feel at each moment. Focusing on positive balances of benefits would contribute to sustaining the permanence of the volunteers because they freely want to, which is the proper definition of the concept of volunteerism, and with this

making possible the many social benefits of sustained volunteerism for particular recipients as well as society as a whole.

For good reasons, we may care for positive balances of benefits for volunteers, but we have to remember that the final objective of volunteering is with the needs of recipients, and not with the benefits for the volunteers. Nevertheless, it seems an ethical and manageable formula to aspire to have volunteers in positive balances of subjective benefits to improve programs and solve recipients' needs. This approach may contribute to managing permanence within an optimal margin in which volunteers, organizations, recipients and society benefit.

Study Limitations

Our incidental sample is at least large and diverse enough for the factor analyzes performed. Its main characteristics reflect the prototypical profile of volunteering in countries as different as Spain (Plataforma del Voluntariado en España, 2018) and the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). However, the results obtained require confirmation with other samples of volunteers outside the classical social scope of intervention (for example, environmental, sport or civic volunteer samples) and using more fluid definitions of volunteering that encompass broader limits (one-time volunteering, on-line volunteering or informal volunteering). The generalization of the results, which is the weakest point of this study, will depend on these new and necessary studies.

Finally, it is worthwhile noting that the balance between costs and benefit may be affected by uncontrolled factors such as illnesses, changes of address, unexpected family obligations, and particular circumstances of the organization. We assume this as

part of the process where volunteers can freely chose to continue or leave. However, we expect that the Subjective Index of Benefits in Volunteering (SIBiV) will globally reflect the six factors proposed in this paper that are manageable.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Participation in the study was voluntary and all data collected was anonymous.

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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