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## TRANSMITTAL

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**to:** Adam Gamoran  
**fax #:** (608) 265-5389  
**re:** Research on Leadership  
**date:** November 21, 1996  
**pages:** 9, including cover sheet.

Here's a draft of the research on leadership document for your review.

Bill



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LEADERSHIP:  
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE?

Bill Robinson

The crisis of leadership today is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power, but leadership rarely rises to the full need for it. The fundamental crisis of underlying mediocrity is intellectual. If we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about *leadership*. We fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age and hence we cannot agree even on the standards by which to measure, recruit, and reject it. Is leadership simply innovation -- cultural or political? Is it essentially inspiration? Mobilization of followers? Goal setting? Goal fulfillment? Is a leader the definer of values? Satisfier of needs? If leaders require followers, who leads whom from where to where and why? How do leaders lead followers without being wholly led by followers? *Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.* (Burns 1978:1-2, *emphasis his except last sentence*)

This quote above from the author of the most highly read (modern) book on leadership, *Leadership* (1978), expresses a sentiment shared by many scholars in the field. After spending decades researching leadership, we know perhaps no more than the medieval and ancient writers on the subject. After examining numerous cases of leadership, interviewing hundreds of leaders, and subjecting this data to a wide range of theoretical analyses, scholars have little that they can offer practitioners that is of use to them. This predicament in which the field finds itself has become the focus of discussion in academic conferences, and commenting on this situation has become almost a required rite in books and articles on the subject. Thus, in a review of the research literature, House (1988:260) ends his review by asserting his belief in the potential of the field.

In conclusion I would like to stress my belief that the study of leadership has yielded a number of empirically supported generalizations and a number of promising theories. I am optimistic about the future. I see promise and progress in leadership research and theory.

It is true that research has yielded some empirical findings, which House points out. Yet, these studies have focused on

the peripheral elements surrounding leadership [such as traits, group facilitation techniques, situational characteristics, and styles] and its content [the knowledge a leader needs to know about a particular organization or issue] instead of on the nature of leadership as a process, on leadership viewed as a dynamic relationship. Almost none [of the research] has been aimed at understanding the essential nature of what leadership is, the process whereby leaders and followers relate to one another to achieve a purpose. (Rost 1991:4).

Leadership research has yielded very few policy-oriented and practical insights that could be helpful to those concerned with cultivating leadership in pursuit of certain organizational or societal goals. Yet, if one pays less attention to the findings of particular studies and instead examines the critical reviews of the field by its (research) practitioners, then there are significant things we (as an organization aiming to cultivate leadership) can learn.



The following summary analysis of leadership studies is divided into six sections. The first section addresses the question: What are leadership studies trying to explain? Conversely, what are they not explaining? This section addresses certain definitional problems underlying the field of leadership research, which make research findings of limited utility to those (like CIJE) who aim to find leaders for their cause. Second, the various theoretical approaches to explaining leadership will be delineated and critiqued. Third, a set of "findings" that may be useful to practitioners of leadership will be discussed. These are predominantly conceptual and may be useful in reconceptualizing how we think about leadership and, thus, how we plan to cultivate it. Fourth, the "how-to" literature of (reflective) practitioners is examined to glean the common sense wisdom of leaders. Fifth, two different (though complementary) political-anthropological approaches to leadership are described, following upon Rost's suggestion (quoted above) that studies of leadership should focus on the processes through which relationships between leaders and followers are developed. Lastly, a few practical suggestions are offered in regard to developing plans for the cultivation of leadership.

#### WHAT ARE LEADERSHIP STUDIES TRYING TO EXPLAIN?

Leadership research focuses almost exclusively on the question: What constitutes good leadership? As a subsidiary (practical) concern, scholars may attempt to answer the question: How does one select for and/or train good leaders? The literature tends to avoid addressing another important question: What motivates people to become leaders? The reasons for this are as follows.

First, most of the literature does not distinguish between being a leader and being a "good" leader. By this, I do not mean the leaders's goals, such as one may focus upon in comparing Martin Luther King and Hitler. Rather, I am referring to the practice of leadership, in that some people may be better than others at leading. Yet, they all may be considered leaders depending on one's definition. In essence, scholars in the field have difficulty separating the practice of leadership from its effects; leaders are those who are successful at leading. However, defining leadership by its effects is problematic. Primarily, how do you know that the designated "leader" produced the stated effects? Attribution theory argues that leadership is a result of a psychological and/or cultural need in people to find a meaningful cause other than themselves for observed changes. Leaders are attributed power that may in actuality be the result of the populace or historical-structural factors.<sup>1</sup>

Second, when the literature does distinguish between good leaders and (ineffective) leaders, it relies upon a structural-functional (role) definition of leaders. Leaders are those who inhabit leadership positions (from the Presidency of the United States to a board member of a local nonprofit agency). These studies tend to be of two kinds. Some assume the existence of leaders (as those who fill the board positions). In this case, the primary research question is: How do we improve the skills of these board members? The practical result of this research is board training programs. The second type of study asks: How do we select for those who have the potential to be good leaders? The practical result of this research is candidate examinations, which select people into training programs. In either case, scholars assume the existence of people who either are or want to be leaders. They do not see a lack of candidates for leadership positions or leadership training. Thus, the literature tends not to ask the question: What makes

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<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur (1986) has developed a theory of authority (leadership) that parallels this idea. Ricoeur asserts that a person becomes a leader by convincing the populace that s/he is responsible for changes that are in actuality due to the power of the populace. The process by which this is achieved and its implications for our understanding of leadership are discussed below.



*people willing to be leaders or take a leadership role?*

Because the Jewish educational system -- unlike government or businesses -- does not have clearly defined structures and positions of authority (beyond the boards of day schools), we cannot easily distinguish between those who are (in positions of) leadership and those who are not. Thus, prior to addressing the problem of motivating people to be leaders, we must tackle an underlying definitional problem: What constitutes leadership, leaders, or leading?

This is not an easy task. Researchers in the field of leadership have not managed to agree upon definitions. For some scholars, leadership involves controlling the decisions of a group. Lowry (1962:8) states that "(l)eadership is the ability (and potential) to influence the decisions and actions of others (followers) and therefore to exercise power over the decision-making processes of community life." For others, leadership involves supporting group processes in ways that enhance their effectiveness. Fiedler (1967:36) wrote that "(b)y leadership behavior we generally mean the particular acts in which a leader engages in the course of directing and coordinating the work of group members." Scholars disagree over whether leaders act to fulfill their own goals or the shared goals of the group. Scholars also disagree over whether leadership should be restricted to influencing others through rational (or emotional) appeals or can involve the exercise of raw power.

Without a clear (and operationalizable) definition, researchers cannot with any substantial degree of validity or reliability determine if a specific instance is an example of leadership or if a specific person is being a leader. A definition proffered by Carter (1958:24) -- "Leadership behaviors are any behaviors the experimenter wishes to designate, or more generally, any behaviors which experts in this area wish to consider as leader behaviors." -- may be an accurate description of the field, but it not useful for building cumulative, scientific knowledge. This is not solely a theoretical problem. It has practical implications. If we are to develop programs to either identify, encourage, and/or train leaders, we need to know what we mean by leadership. *The key question we need to ask ourselves is: How do we know when someone is leading?* If we cannot clearly answer this question, our diagnosis of the "problem" may be wrong, and our remedy may yield unexpected and undesired results.

#### THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO EXPLAINING LEADERSHIP

Five types of theoretical approaches have dominated the research on leadership. While each one continues to have its adherents, the following list is chronological in regard to the particular theory's period of dominance over the field of leadership. (1) Group theory (1930's - 1940's) examines leadership within small group (face-to-face) interactions. (2) Trait theories (1940's - 1950's) focus on those personality characteristics that are common among good leaders. Leadership is a product of unique personalities. (3) In contrast, behavior theories (1950's - 1960's) view leadership as the performance of discrete behavioral patterns. They attempt to generalize from the specific, observed behaviors of good leaders. (4) Situational (or contingency) theories (1960's - 1970's) suggest that practicing successful leadership is dependent upon certain situational characteristics. Thus, certain traits or behaviors may only produce leadership if certain environmental conditions exist. Moreover, certain environmental conditions may preclude the development of any leadership. (5) More recent research attempts to examine all three aspects in relation to each other. One example of this is excellence theory (1980's). The focus is on understanding the traits, behaviors, and decisions (situational paths) of specific leaders (usually in business) who have been designated as "excellent leaders."

*The current result of all these endeavors is bits and pieces of data with little or no relevance to*



*the actual practice of leadership and for those who are in the business of encouraging and developing leaders.* For the most part, findings on leadership in small groups cannot be applied to understanding the more common occurrences of leadership that take place on a larger scale. While excellence theories attempt to combine trait, behavior, and situational factors in their analysis of leadership, the complexities block any attempts at generalization. Given that leaders have different traits, act differently in different situations, and that the possible situations in which they must lead are innumerable, researchers have not been able to develop meaningful and practical generalizations. Thus, the most current crop of research either provides trite findings -- such as leaders create visions that motivate others and leaders know how to pick the right battles to fight -- or mystify leadership further by viewing it as the product of charisma.

In addition, excellence studies fail to take into account the reciprocal relationship of person and environment. Excellence studies aim to develop a description of good leadership by observing and interviewing leaders who have been defined as already excellent (in regard to the organization they have improved). They tend to disregard the possibility that the current attributes of these leaders are a product of their efforts to improve their organizations. These leaders did not start out with the qualities they now possess and employ; they learned them through practice. Thus, the research would be used incorrectly, if one decided to select for leaders with these observed qualities or to train people in these qualities. What may be necessary is developing the ability of would-be good leaders to learn from and in their practice as leaders (ala TEI) and developing conditions conducive to that learning.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE RESEARCH?

### Learning and Leading

As mentioned above, the first thing we can learn is that learning may be a central component of leadership. Perhaps the most obvious finding from the recent group of studies, which attempt to examine simultaneously personality traits, behaviors, and situational attributes of leaders and leading, is that no one set of traits, no easily trainable repertoire of behaviors, and no handbook of directions for situational-based decision-making can produce leaders. Instead of simplifying reality into scientifically manageable bits, applying path analyses to leadership (for example) has illustrated the innumerable types of situations that confront leaders and the consequent complexity of leadership decisions. *Leaders need to be capable of analyzing situations, choosing appropriate responses, and critically reflecting on the effects of their choices.*

### Leaders and Followers

Some scholars in the field (e.g., Ford 1990; Foster 1989; Gardner 1986, 1990; Rost 1991) have suggested that we need to revise our understanding of leaders and followers. First, leaders do not create change by themselves, nor are followers the empty vehicles by which leaders create change. Leadership is dependent on people choosing to follow (whether or not they see this as a choice). *Thus, leadership must be understood as a relationship between leaders and followers, the primary function of which is to cultivate the motivation of followers.* Second, leaders and followers are not easily distinguished categories with clear boundaries. As especially noted in studies of small group dynamics, sometimes people will lead and at other

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, the research on educational leadership may be very appropriate to our understanding of lay leadership. Given CIJE's expertise in this area, this document does not examine the literature on educational leadership.



times those same people may follow. People move in and out of these roles as their interests and conditions change. Moreover, it is often difficult to determine if persons are leading, following, or collaborating. For instance, in democratic, self-empowered groups without explicitly-defined roles, are the participants leaders or followers? *Thus, instead of searching for or training people to be leaders, we should be thinking about how to motivate people to participate as leaders and followers in those endeavors we deem important.* While certain observers of American leadership have lamented the lack of leaders, others have suggested that there are more active leaders now than at any other point in American history. It is just that these days there are more opportunities for people to be leaders outside of the traditional arena of government - business - schools, churches, civic associations, etc. The issue is how to motivate these leaders to lead in your area of concern.

### Leadership and Management

Many past studies of leadership did not distinguish between leadership and management. Some simply defined leadership as good organizational management. More recent work has begun to address the relationship between the two. Of particular note, Rost sees management as the coordination of "human and material resources so as to achieve organizational goals" (1991:77). Good management makes bureaucracies work. Leadership, on the other hand, is "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (1991:102). Rost contrasts "real change" to those changes that preserve the bureaucratic (industrial) conditions of our lives. "Real change" involves transforming people and contexts toward a "post-industrial" way of life.

Many scholars of modernity have struggled with the question: What is the alternative to the alienating, instrumental, bureaucratic conditions of modern, industrial life? In attempting to distinguish between leadership and management, leadership scholars face the same question. One element that is common in many of the answers given by leadership scholars and others is the centrality of "vision" and "values." Leadership moves beyond management by raising the question -- What are our core values? -- and committing people to answering it in word and deed. *While management attempts to meet the given needs of organizations (and people), leadership transforms people and their social environment toward the realization of a shared ethical vision.*

Management and leadership represent two common ideal types; they reiterate Tönnies' distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*. Buber (1958, 1965) presents a similar distinction in developing his ideal types of I-It and I-Thou. The instrumental nature of I-It relationships is to be found in those *collectivities* that humans create for the pursuit of external goals, such as businesses, political parties, and military units. The value-based I-Thou relationships are the hallmark of *communities*, where people congregate for the purpose of enhancing their relations among one another within the group. Defining leadership in contrast to management, and thus aligning leadership with the development of *community*, leads to three defining aspects of leadership. (1) Leadership works by motivating people on the bases of shared values, not interests. (2) Leadership is future-oriented. It aims to transform social reality (including "human nature") toward a shared, value-based vision. (3) While leaders must be concerned with the limitations of the social environment (including human interests), leadership involves overcoming those limitations. By questioning in word and deed the "given-ness" of any situation, leaders make the seemingly impossible seem probable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> One consequence of this view of leadership is the inability of mainstream social science to "understand" leadership. Social scientific analysis assumes that certain features of the social environment and human nature are (relatively) immutable. Science aims to make predictions (after the fact) based upon its knowledge of these immutable conditions and the subsequent likelihood of certain events occurring. If



## COMMON SENSE WHAT DO REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS SAY?

Another source of knowledge about leadership is from those who practice leadership. What do the (reflective) leaders have to say about their practice? To answer this question, I went to a local bookstore and selected from the "management" section ten books whose titles referred to leadership. Then, I examined their Tables of Contents for commonalities. [The Tables of Contents follow in Appendix C.] Five concepts seemed central to the authors' understanding of their leadership practices. These concepts address the question: How does leadership work?

- 1) **VISION:** Judging by the frequency of which these authors mention vision (or mission), it must be the most important single attribute of leadership. Vision implies that leadership is future-oriented, and leaders are responsible for creating change.
- 2) **RELATIONSHIP:** Leadership, as mentioned above, is a relationship between leaders and followers. As leaders require cultivation, so do followers. Some have called this "followership."
- 3) **MOTIVATION:** Followers (and leaders) need to be motivated. While a person may be in a position of leadership and may have developed a vision (alone or in cooperation with others), this person will still need to work on motivating others to participate in realizing this vision.
- 4) **LEARNING:** To accomplish all this, leaders need to be learners. They need to learn about their environment and about themselves.
- 5) **HOPE:** Lastly the process of change needs to be sustained. Thus, leaders need to offer signs of hope to their followers that, though the road is long, we are making good progress.

## POLITICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

Political-anthropological approaches have remained on the margins of leadership research. Yet, they tend to address those ideas that have been found wanting in mainstream research on leadership (as described above) -- namely, viewing leadership as a relationship between leaders and followers and emphasizing the pursuit of shared, ethical visions over the fulfillment of given needs. The following two theories from political anthropology (a narrative model and a structural model) are offered with the aim of enriching our thinking about leadership -- as grist for the mill.

### A Narrative Model of Leadership

Ricoeur (1986) asserts that while a leader's claim of authority must be seen (according to Weber) as self-evident and obligatory upon the populace (followers) -- denying any need for voluntary acceptance -- its actualization (the ability to lead) depends precisely on gaining the populace's acceptance of that claim. Yet, the populace can never be led to accept a leader's claim on purely rational grounds. Thus, the problem of leadership, according to Ricoeur, is how to overcome the gap between claim and belief in a way that does not reveal the authority of the leader as dependent upon the belief of the followers.

The process by which this gap can be overcome and the populace motivated to act is a primary

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what seems given is no longer such, then social science cannot develop theoretical generalizations with postdictive power. Thus if a central feature of leadership is its capacity to overcome what at first seems to be immutable aspects of society and human nature (or, as Marx stated, to emancipate humans from "the dead weight of history") then social scientific analysis (as it is commonly understood) is incapable of explaining or accounting for leadership.



focus of my own dissertation. Research on Reform rabbis in Israel has led to developing a narrative model of authority, in which the "gap" between claim and belief is overcome through the followers recognizing and accepting their obligations as articulated verbally and symbolically in a socially constructed narrative enacted by the would-be leader.<sup>4</sup>

In their sermons, one-to-one interactions, and ritual performances, rabbis act out a constructed story with both plot and characters. These stories have a specific narrative structure, consisting of three related components: (1) a description of what is; (2) a description of what ought to be (that is different from what is and is obligatory upon the intended followers); and (3) a "sign" by which the leader reveals that the space between what is and what ought to be has been or is being closed (and, thus, their obligations are being fulfilled) and by which the followers recognize the extra-ordinary or exemplary abilities of the leader to close the space (and help them fulfill their obligations).

Deshen (1976) provides an apt illustration of this process (examining a different area of social interaction). During one of Israel's elections, he observed an Israeli attempting to convince another to vote for the National Religious Party (NRP). In Israel, each political party is represented by a Hebrew letter or letters. Through this letter the party attempts to metaphorically link itself with those values held by their intended followers. The letter of the NRP is a "B" (Bet in Hebrew), which could stand for Bereshit (Blessing). The following monologue was recorded by Deshen:

When I go to vote, I take the "B" slip in my hand. I kiss it! I say lesheim yihud kudsha! and I drop it into the ballot box. (Deshen 1976:91)

Deshen (1976:91) points out that this statement is a play upon "routine behavior in the performance of acts of ritual devotion in Judeo-Moroccan tradition." The speaker is arguing that the individual's ritual obligation (what ought to be) should be fulfilled through a political practice that is obligated by the State. Moreover, it is only through the extra-ordinary power of a particular political party that the secular act of voting could be transformed into the fulfillment of a sacred, religious obligation. Thus, fulfillment on the person's obligation (and the closing of the space between what is and what ought to be) is predicated upon the individual's recognition of the unique authority of the State and party. The vote becomes both a sign of the realization of what ought to be (fulfillment of one's obligations) and a proof of the leader's (party's and State's) unique claim to authority.

*In this model of leadership, the most essential skill of the would-be leader is the ability to provide narrative meaning to one's interactions with others in such a way that these actions will be viewed as "signs" of the group's growing accomplishments in realizing what ought to be and the unique or exemplary qualities of oneself to lead the group.*

#### A Structural Model of Leadership

In contrast to this (voluntaristic) approach, Wildavsky offers an understanding of leadership that views the type of leadership that a society experiences as determined by certain political and cultural conditions. A society based on slavery yields leaders with unlimited powers and uninterrupted succession. In an anarchic society, the powers of leaders are limited and the rise of leaders is sporadic. In a society based on equity, the rise of leadership is still sporadic, but their powers are unlimited. Finally, in a hierarchical society, leadership is limited but succession is uninterrupted.

If one applies Wildavsky's analysis to Jewish education in North America, one may conclude that

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<sup>4</sup> The following is a substantially abbreviated description of the theoretical model.



the sporadic rise of leaders with limited powers to change current conditions is to be expected given the anarchic relations among Jewish educating institutions. *In order to cultivate leaders who have greater influence and continue the same agenda as each succeeds the other, it may be necessary to transform the structural relations between the different Jewish educating institutions.* The hope that Wildavsky offers is that leaders are often capable of changing those social structures that initially determined the extent and nature of their authority.

#### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Based on the above review of the literature, I offer three suggestions for CIJE's continued work in the field of lay leadership.

1. Cultivating leadership goes hand-in-hand with cultivating followership. The key may not be training or selecting leaders; rather, it may be motivating people to participate as leaders and as followers. Central to motivating others is the idea that they have (Jewish) obligations that need to be fulfilled and which can be fulfilled (ideally) through participation in the offered endeavor.
2. Since the above is easier said than done, leaders (professional and lay) need to learn how to motivate others. Given the nature of the process and the complexities of the environment, this learning needs to happen within practice. The social scientific research does not offer useful guidelines for this process beyond what is considered "common sense." Findings must be discovered through a shared inquiry into the practice of leadership, similar to the approach of TEI. To accomplish this we need to develop and institutionalize the means by which professional and lay leaders, along with researchers on leadership, can become "critical colleagues" for each other.
3. If Wildavsky is correct, we also need to engage in structural change. The anarchic structure of Jewish education may be a primary influence leading to the existence of sporadic leadership with limited capacities for creating change. [The limited tenure (and power) of professional leaders in their jobs and in the field may also be seen in this light.] If we want to develop a succession of leaders that will maintain focus on those issues that we deem important to transforming Jewish education, we may need to change the political relations among Jewish educating institutions.

#### APPENDIX A

Selected scholarly works

To be completed

#### APPENDIX B

Notable researchers and (reflective) practitioners of leadership who may be useful consultants to CIJE

#### APPENDIX C

Tables of Contents from the "how-to" literature of leaders



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## TRANSMITTAL

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**to:** Adam Gamoran  
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## VOLUNTEERING: WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM ACADEMIC RESEARCH?

Bill Robinson

Social science research into volunteering has been preoccupied with ascertaining the personal and environmental correlates of volunteer participation. This has resulted in a dearth of research into those processes that motivate potential volunteers to actually participate. Moreover, the research that has been done on volunteer motivations provides only a "thin description," lacking an sufficient understanding of the social and cultural ways organizations compel volunteer participation. Consequently, mainstream social science research is of limited utility to practitioners of volunteering.

This basic argument is detailed in the following four sections. First, the five basic avenues of social science research into the determinants of volunteer participation are outlined. Most of this research focuses on one type of determinant; very few studies have been conducted that examine simultaneously the multitude of variables potentially affecting volunteer participation. Second, two theoretical models that attempt to provide a semblance of order to the disparate research findings are described. This leads into a discussion of two theoretical concerns with the general course of empirical research into volunteer participation. Third, survey research into the reported motivations of volunteers is described, and the need for a "thick(er) description" of the processes by which volunteers are motivated to participate is detailed. Lastly, the limited usefulness of empirical research to practitioners of volunteering is addressed. Instead, practitioners may learn more from careful analysis of interviews with and observed interactions of actual (and potential) volunteers in their organization.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE DETERMINANTS OF VOLUNTEERING

Research into the determinants of volunteering tend to focus on one of five variable types:

- Contextual variables, such as region, community size, and attributes of organizations;
- Social background variables, such as education, household size, income, race, and age;
- Personality variables, such as empathy, morality, and ego strength;
- Attitudinal variables, such as perceived benefits and costs, ideological agreement with aims of voluntary organization, and sense of civic responsibility;
- Situational variables, such as previous organizational involvement, having friends in the organization, and being asked to join.

[While researchers explicitly refer to these categorical types in their studies, their boundaries are not exclusive, as some specific variables may be viewed as one or another type by different researchers.]

Concerning contextual variables, Curtis, Grabb, and Baer (1992), using data from fifteen industrialized countries, demonstrated that rates of volunteer participation is higher in smaller, more rural communities. Sundeen (1992) had similar findings from a U.S. national sample. Several different researchers (Berger 1991; Vaillancourt and Payette 1986; Stump 1986; Williams and Ortega 1986) have found state and regional differences in volunteer participation in the United States. In addition, the characteristics of organizations in which respondents work or attend school have been shown to have an impact on volunteer participation. Hougland and Shepard (1985) found that managers in larger corporations are more likely to volunteer. Foss (1983) found that students attending universities with positive attitudes toward volunteer



participation, perhaps not surprisingly, tended to volunteer more often. Furthermore, religious practices and identity have been considered to be important determinants of volunteer participation. Hodgkinson, Weitzman, and Kirsh (1990) found that church attendance correlates with volunteering and charitable giving.

Concerning social background variables, Edwards and White (1980), using a multi-county sample in the United States, found volunteer participation to be associated significantly with education, occupational prestige, income, and (low) family size. In a study of urban blacks, Florin, Jones, and Wandersman (1986) found volunteer participation to be higher among respondents who were home owners, longer residents, married and older. Focusing in a slightly different direction, Smith and Baldwin (1974) found that parental attitudes was a significant predictor of adult volunteer participation. Social background variables have received the most attention in the literature and are typically included as control variables in studies focusing on other variable types. Among the social background variables, the relationship of education to volunteer participation has been well documented, while the relationship of others to volunteer participation remains debatable. For example, the relationship of gender to volunteer participation has received mixed results. When controlling for other variables, some studies (Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Cutler 1980; Palissi and Korn 1989; Williams and Ortega 1986) have found participation rates to be higher for men, while other studies (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1992) have shown women to have higher participation rates. The latter is especially true when volunteer work is examined separately from membership-at-large in volunteer associations. This point will be elaborated upon below.

Concerning personality variables, Allen and Rushton (1983), in reviewing studies on community mental health volunteers, found that participation was higher for those with more empathy, morality, efficacy, emotional strength, and ego strength. Rimor and Tobin (1988), found that increased religious identity among Jews in the United States increases volunteer giving of time and money. However, Chnaan, Kastemakis, and Wineburg (1993), using a sample of volunteers and non-volunteers from three eastern United States cities, found that measures of religious motivation did not correlate with volunteer participation. As Smith (1994) notes, there is a paucity of research in this area and different studies often yield conflicting results depending on the group studied and the instrument employed.

Concerning attitudinal variables, several researchers (Condre, Warner, and Gillman 1976; Klandermans 1984; and Schafer 1979) found that participation was higher among those who perceived the benefits of volunteering to be greater and/or the costs of volunteering to be lower. Some researchers (Cook 1984; Jenner 1982) have shown the importance of ideological agreement between the volunteer and the organization's aims. In contrast, Widener (1985) illustrates the importance of self-development incentives, and others (Florin, Jones, and Wandersman 1986; Friedman, Florin, Wandersman, and Meier 1988) have found that a sense of civic obligation and a perception of organizational efficacy are important determinants of volunteer participation.

Concerning situational variables, some researchers (Adams 1980; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1992) have found that having received services from the organization is a significant predictor of volunteer participation, while others (Hougland and Wood 1980; Perkins 1989; Rohs 1986) have found that having friends in the organization to be a significant determinant. Greeley (1997), testing James Coleman's model of social capital, found that 34% of volunteers in the nation-wide study either learned about their current volunteer activity through participation in church or synagogue activities or from someone at the church or



synagogue. This accounted for 95% of volunteering in religious organizations, but also for 50% to 16% of other types of volunteering. Perhaps most poignant for its obviousness, Berger (1991) found that being asked to join was one of the two most important predictors (along with education) of volunteer participation. Smith (1994) reports that situational variables, along with personality variables, needs to receive greater attention.

Most research in the field tends to focus on a single type of variable, though some studies employ social background variables as control variables. Very few studies attempt to assess the relative weight of the different variable types on volunteer participation. One such study was done by Rohs (1986), in which he attempted to account for varying lengths of volunteer service among adult 4-H leaders. Employing a range of social background variables (i.e., age, income, education, length of residence, number and age distribution of children, occupational status, gender, previous organizational involvement, marital status), a personality variable (instrumentalism), and attitudinal/situational variables (i.e., attractiveness of organization, influence of neighbors and influence of various organizational members), he found that a volunteer's length of service increased if the volunteer was older, had participated more years in the organization, had children in the organization, was not a laborer, and was attracted to the goals of the organization. These variables accounted for 65% of the variation in leaders' tenure.

#### THEORETICAL MODELS AND THEORETICAL CONCERNS

The research on volunteer participation, as outlined above, has yielded many "findings." At best, the studies point toward important variables that must be taken into account in any general explanation of volunteering. At worst, the studies yield a jumble of disparate and sometimes conflicting results. A theoretical structure is needed to make sense of the "findings." Yet, the attempt to provide theoretical coherence and clarity to the data illuminates certain fundamental problems with the field's understanding of volunteer participation.

One such theoretical model is the Dominant Status Model. This model, first articulated by Lemon, Palisi, and Jacobson (1972), asserts that certain types of people are more likely to end up participating in volunteer activities than others. These people are characterized by having certain socially approved or "dominant" statuses, such as higher education, greater income, middle age, married, longer length of community residence, and more children under eighteen (Smith 1983). For those with previous involvement in volunteer organizations that focus on fund-raising, this model seems intuitively accurate. Federation staff members, for example, tend to want on their committees those persons who have the potential to donate a substantial amount and/or have a certain social status in the community (perhaps by dint of age or long-term, multi-generation residence in the community). Thus, the organizational staff may be pre-selecting for certain types of participants. Berger (1991), as mentioned above, has pointed to the importance of being asked to join in determining volunteer participation. Yet, the research has not delved into distinctions between organizations with varying degrees and types of selectivity in the people they allow or encourage to participate. To understand the determinants of volunteering, research must understand what makes certain people more attractive to particular volunteer organizations.

Another theoretical model which has been offered is the General Activity Model (Smith, Macaulay, and Associates 1980). This model views volunteer participation as simply another socially approved way of using one's discretionary time. The model asserts that people who engage more in socially approved discretionary activities, such as socializing with the neighbors, interacting with friends, informal helping, charitable giving, political activity, church participation,



and mass media activity (with the exception of television watching), will also engage more in volunteer activities. The common wisdom correlate of this model is "If you want something done, ask someone who is always busy." The explicit assumption of this model is that volunteering is no different than other socially approved forms of using discretionary time and, thus, it is hypothesized that predictors of one usage will predict another usage. There is some evidence for this (Smith 1994) -- however, there is also evidence disputing this hypothesis and also suggesting that those activities that have been grouped under the category of "volunteering" may be better understood as separate (dependent) variables.

Heidrich (1990), in a study of volunteers in a midwestern town, found different volunteer roles -- leadership, direct service, general support, and member-at-large -- to be associated with different volunteer characteristics. People in leadership roles tended to have a longer history of volunteering. Those in direct service and general support roles tended to spend more hours both volunteering and in leisure activities. Lastly, members-at-large tended to be the most goal-oriented and the least likely to be working part-time (that is, they worked full-time or were retired).

Williams and Ortega (1986), using a sample of adults from across the United States, found that different organizational types were associated with different volunteer characteristics. The five organizational types studied were: church-related; job-related; recreational; fraternal/service; and civic/political. Education and race were found to be significantly associated with volunteering in all five organizational types. However, community size was associated only with volunteering in recreational, church-related, and civic/political organizations. Region of residence was associated with volunteering in recreational, job-related, and fraternal/service organizations.

Both of these studies suggest that in the attempt to understand the nature of volunteering (especially, who volunteers) it may be more productive to focus one's efforts on the specific type of volunteering and the particular type of volunteer organization in which one is interested.

## THE PRACTICE OF MOTIVATING VOLUNTEERS

The research on volunteering, for the most part, has been concerned with finding those relatively immutable characteristics of the person and his/her environment that are associated statistically with the act of volunteering. Yet, not everyone who lives in a small town, has a college degree, scores high on an empathy test, and has friends in the organization volunteers. Conversely, some people who live in big cities, dropped out of high school, score at the bottom of an empathy test, and have no friends in the organization do give of their time or money to volunteer organizations. The research tends to overlook the decision to volunteer.

Central to comprehending people's decisions to volunteer is understanding their motives. Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996), using a national survey conducted by the Independent Sector (1992), tested a functional approach to volunteering, which sees the volunteer experience as a way of fulfilling individual goals. The range of potential goals examined in the study include: expressing or acting upon one's values; increasing one's knowledge or skills; enhancing one's self-esteem; gaining experiences that will benefit their career; fitting into social groups; and coping with inner anxieties. Individuals may seek to fulfill one or more of these goals through volunteering. The study found that all six areas are associated with volunteering. Yet, different areas tend to have higher associations when length of volunteer experience, the type of volunteer activity, and certain demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, education, and income) are taken into account. For instance, career motivations are less important among those who are more



established in their careers or earning a higher salary.

The findings from motivational research suggest that individuals choose to volunteer if they view the volunteer experience as meeting their specific goals. However, whether the volunteer experience will achieve this is a matter of interpretation and, thus, individuals may be influenced by messages crafted and marketed by volunteer organizations. In an earlier study by some of the same authors (Clary, Snyder, Copeland, and French 1994), they found that messages which provided abstract arguments countering reasons for not volunteering and concrete reasons to volunteer were the most effective in enticing college students to volunteer. They also found that the effectiveness of a particular style of message depended upon the target audience (i.e., recruiting new or retaining current volunteers).

While an important step in the right direction, this research only provides a "thin description" of ways organizations can and do motivate volunteers. As Geertz suggested to researchers of ideology, we must comprehend how "metaphor, analogy, irony, ambiguity, pun, paradox, hyperbole, rhythm, and all other elements of what we lamely call 'style' operate" (1973:209) to motivate volunteering. The following example (from the literature on political culture) offers an illustration of the intricacies and non-rational nature of motivation, which equally applies to encouraging someone to volunteer for a particular organization as it does to convincing someone to vote for a political party.

During one of Israel's elections, Deshen (1976) observed an Israeli attempting to convince another to vote for the National Religious Party (NRP). In Israel, each political party is represented by a Hebrew letter or letters. Through this letter the party attempts to metaphorically link itself with those values held by their intended followers. The letter of the NRP is a "B" (Bet in Hebrew), which could stand for Bereshit (Blessing). The following monologue was recorded by Deshen (1976:91): "When I go to vote, I take the 'B' slip in my hand. I kiss it! I say *lesheim yihud kudshal* and I drop it into the ballot box." He points out that this statement is a play upon "routine behavior in the performance of acts of ritual devotion in Judeo-Moroccan tradition" (1976:91). The speaker is arguing that the individual's ritual obligation should be fulfilled through a political practice that is obligated by the State. Moreover, it is only through the extra-ordinary power of a particular political party that the secular act of voting could be transformed into the fulfillment of a sacred, religious obligation.

In this example, as in the research described above, people volunteer (vote) for a particular organization (political party) because they believe that it will fulfill certain personal goals. However, volunteering as goal fulfillment is not an objective entity that can easily be measured quantitatively; it is subjective, non-rational, and influenced by the interpretations of others.

The resonance of Deshen's research on political leadership with volunteering suggests that political-anthropological approaches may have much to offer. In particular, the work of Ricoeur (1986) on ideology and leadership provides an unique way of viewing the practice of volunteering. Ricoeur asserts that (1) an organizations' (leader's) claim to participation (authority) must be seen as self-evident to and obligatory upon the "volunteer" (populace) -- denying any need for voluntary acceptance. However, (2) the successful motivating of volunteers to participate (the actualization of the claim) depends precisely on gaining the volunteers' (populace's) acceptance of that claim. Moreover, (3) the volunteers (populace) can never accept an organizations' (leader's) claim on purely rational grounds. Thus, (4) the problem of motivating volunteers (leadership) is how to overcome in a non-rational manner the gap between claim and belief in a way that does not reveal the participation of the volunteers in that



organization (the authority of the leader) as dependent upon the beliefs of the volunteers (populace).

What does this mean for those interested in motivating volunteers? First, motivating volunteers is not a rational-choice process. Volunteers do not choose to volunteer based on carefully constructed, explicit reasons. Instead, they participate because they recognize the legitimacy and compelling nature of the organization's claim to their time and/or money. Second, getting potential volunteers to recognize the legitimacy of the organizations' claim upon them involves social performances (i.e., community events, board meetings, publications, informal conversations, etc.) that are filled with the non-rational tools of cultural discourse -- metaphor, irony, symbol, myth and ritual, among others. Third, others may be playing at the same game. Other organizations dependent upon the same pool of potential volunteers may be offering their own "reasons" for volunteers to participate, and their messages may contain implicit (or explicit) "reasons" why people should not volunteer for your organization. Lastly, between the production of a social performance and its understanding by the potential volunteers, there is a large space for interpretation, reinterpretation, and misinterpretation.

#### SOME CONCLUDING NOTES ON RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Brudnet and Kluesner (1992) studied the relevance of published research for practitioners of volunteer motivation. They compared the frequency of research topics covered in the preeminent journal of volunteer research (Journal of Voluntary Action Research / Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly) with the results of a survey of practitioners in volunteer administration on their perceived research needs. They reported mixed findings. While published research has dealt with the top twenty reported needs of practitioners, the frequency of published topics did not coincide with the rank ordering of needs given by the practitioners. Moreover, more than half (51.5%) of published research articles did not deal with a reported need.

Based on their results, it would seem that the fit between research and practice in volunteer motivation may need improvement, but there is already much that practitioners can learn from the research. However, Brudnet and Kluesner's study only reveals part of the story. It is not only the research subject that must be compared; the ways in which social scientists understand the research problem may determine the usefulness of research to practice.

Social science tends to ask the question: What relatively immutable characteristics of persons or the environment can be shown to be correlated with and/or determinative of a specific type of event? While not a predictive science, it aspires to be postdictive (predictive after the fact). The goal of mainstream social science is to be able to state that (all else being equal) the existence of such and such factors will yield such and such an effect. Thus, volunteer research aims to determine those relatively immutable aspects of persons and their environment, which when in existence, will lead to volunteering. From a practical point of view, this is problematic. It suggests that the best (and perhaps only) way to increase an organization's pool of volunteers or motivate current volunteers to give more is to select volunteers with certain characteristics or tailor your organization's goals to the goals of people most likely to give of their time or money. Social science research, not surprisingly, is most compatible with a market orientation to doing "business."

We need to ask a different question: How can we meaningfully understand the social, psychological, and cultural processes through which humans become committed to giving of their



time and/or money? To answer this question (and in accordance with the two theoretical concerns about the empirical research articulated above), volunteering cannot be considered as a distinct analytic category. Volunteering is viewed as part of a larger social process involving fulfillment of the organization's goals (such as revitalizing Jewish life in the diaspora) or as a particular type of social mobilization not unlike joining unions, political parties, or revolutionary cells. To understand volunteer participation, we need to become more concise and clear in regard to the specific actions we desire of others and the purposeful meaning of those actions. As a professor of mine (Peter Vayda) once taught me, if you want to understand why deforestation is occurring in a particular area, don't try to understand "deforestation" as a distinct and unified phenomenon. Instead, begin by finding those people who are cutting down trees and ask them why they are doing it. Research into volunteering for a Jewish organization should begin by asking those who volunteer why they are doing so. From a careful analysis of their answers informed by an understanding of social mobilization processes in general and Jewish history and practice in particular, we can begin to understand how to encourage others to volunteer.

As a final note, the existing research literature focusing specifically on Jewish giving tends to replicate the findings of and problems associated with the general literature on the determinants of volunteer participation, as detailed in the first two sections. Horowitz (1991) reached a similar conclusion. For instance, Rimor and Tobin (1991) and Ritterband (1991) have found that particular religious practices and religious identity correlate with increased giving. Yet, as Ritterband (1991:59) states, "Identification is not enough. One must have a sense of moral obligation toward those with whom one identifies [in order to encourage giving]." Unfortunately, his research does not explore the social and cultural ways that moral obligations to give are cultivated among Jews.

As Horowitz (1991:187) states in the prelude to her own study of giving among havurah Jews, "to understand 'who gives where and why' we must take stock of the socio-psychological climate within which a person enacts choices about giving money to one cause but not to another." However, to follow this suggestion offered by Horowitz and explicated above requires researchers to focus their studies on the particular social, cultural, and psychological worlds of actual groups of interacting people. In this way, knowledge that will be useful to practitioners of volunteer participation will be built up slowly -- one group or sub-group at a time.

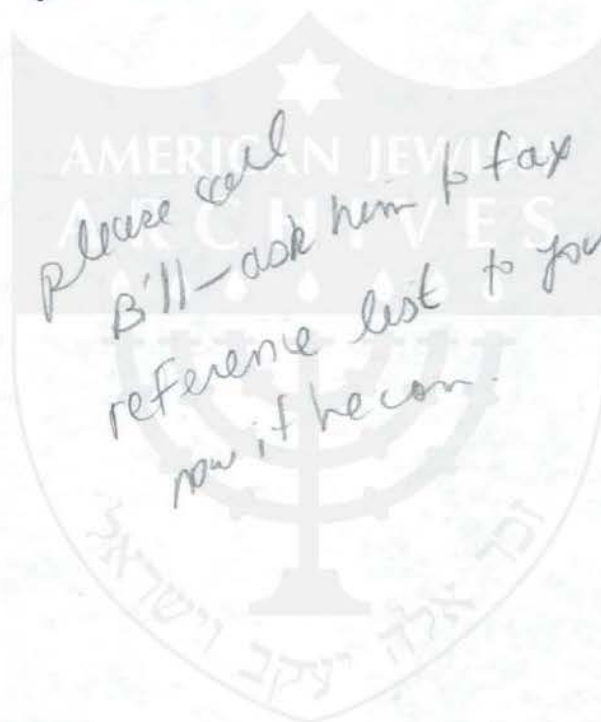


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## TRANSMITTAL

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**to:** Adam Gamoran  
**fax #:** (608) 265-5389  
**re:** Revised Report on Volunteering  
**date:** December 23, 1996  
**pages:** 7, including cover sheet.



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## VOLUNTEERING: WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM ACADEMIC RESEARCH?

Bill Robinson

In reviewing the research on volunteering, two basic questions were asked:

- Who volunteers?
- How are people motivated to volunteer?

Most of the research on volunteering seeks to answer the first question by finding those relatively immutable characteristics of people and their environment that are associated statistically with the act of volunteering. For example, studies have found that people who live in small towns, have college degree, score high on an empathy test, and/or have friends in the organization tend to volunteer more than others. Yet, in practice, not all people with these characteristics actually volunteer. Thus, it is also important to understand the processes by which people are motivated to actually volunteer.

The findings presented in this report are derived from a search of social science journals and published books over the last two decades. This yielded a multitude of (primarily) quantitative studies on volunteering (in general). In addition, a search was done on the more focused topics of nonprofit, business, government, and congregational lay leadership. This additional search did not yield any information directly pertinent to the two questions. Case studies of particular non-profit organizations, churches, or social movements were not examined. While these could provide useful insights into the motivation of volunteers in that particular group, the usefulness of the research would be dependent upon the similarity of that group to those people who CIJE is interested in motivating to volunteer. This point is explicated further in the final section of the report.

### WHO VOLUNTEERS?

Over the last couple of decades, researchers have discovered many answers to the question -- Who volunteers? These answers can be grouped into five areas:

- Context, dealing with issues such as region, community size, and attributes of organizations
- Social Background, dealing with issues such as education, household size, income, race, and age;
- Personality, dealing with issues such as empathy, morality, and ego strength;
- Attitudes, dealing with issues such as perceived benefits and costs, ideological agreement with aims of voluntary organization, and sense of civic responsibility;
- Situation, dealing with issues such as previous organizational involvement, having friends in the organization, and being asked to join.

The following lists the qualities of those people (and their environments) who have been found to be likely to volunteer. As you may note, findings from different studies may contradict one another.

### CONTEXT

- People who live in smaller, rural communities  
(Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Sundeen 1992)
- People who work in larger corporations  
(Hougland and Shepard 1985)



- People who attend colleges with positive attitudes toward volunteering (Foss 1983)
- People who attend church regularly (Hodgkinson, Weitzman, and Kirsh 1990)

#### **SOCIAL BACKGROUND**

- People who have a higher education (Edwards and White 1980, among many other studies)
- People who have a prestigious occupation (Edwards and White 1980; Palisi and Korn 1989; Vaillancourt and Payette 1986)
- People who work full-time (Auslander and Litwin 1988; Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Edwards, Edwards, and Watts 1984; Reddy and Smith 1972)
- People who work part-time (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1986; Vaillancourt and Payette 1986)
- People who have higher incomes (Auslander and Litwin 1988; Cutler 1990; Edwards and White 1980; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1986; Menchik and Weisbrod 1987; Palisi and Korn 1989; Sundeen 1992)
- People who are home owners (Florin, Jones, and Wandersman 1986)
- People who are long time residents (Auslander and Litlin 1988; Berger 1991; Florin, Jones, and Wandersman 1986; Schiff 1990)
- People who are married (Florin, Jones, and Wandersman 1986; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1986; Palisi and Korn 1989; Vaillancourt and Payette 1986)
- People who are separated or divorced (Williams and Ortega 1986)
- People who have small families (Edwards and White 1980)
- People who are older (Florin, Jones, and Wandersman 1986)
- People who are middle age (Auslander and Litwin 1988; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1986; Palisi and Korn 1989; Roof and Hoge 1980; Vaillancourt and Payette 1986)
- People who are males (Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Cutler 1980; Palisi and Korn 1989; Williams and Ortega 1986)
- People who are females (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1992)
- People who are white (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1986; Palisi and Korn 1989; Sundeen 1992)
- People who are non-white (Auslander and Litwin 1988; Bob and Gilliam 1990; Palisi and Korn 1989; Williams



and Ortega 1986)

#### PERSONALITY

- People who have more empathy, morality, emotional strength, and ego strength (Allen and Rushton 1983)
- People with a high religious identity (Rimor and Tobin 1988)

#### ATTITUDES

- People who perceive the benefits of volunteering to be greater and/or the costs to be lower (Condre Warner, and Gillman 1976; Klandermans 1984; Schafer 1979)
- People who share the aims of the volunteer organization (Cook 1984; Jenner 1982)
- People who view the volunteer organization as effective (Chacko 1985; Florin, Jones, and Wandersman 1986; Friedman, Florin, Wandersman, and Meier 1988)
- People with a sense of civic obligation (Florin, Jones, and Wandersman 1986; Friedman, Florin, Wandersman, and Meier 1988)
- People who view the activity as interesting (Gordon 1983; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1992; Opp 1986)

#### SITUATION

- People who have received services from the volunteer organization (Adams 1980; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, and Gorski 1992)
- People who have friends in the organization (Hougland and Wood 1980; Perkins 1989; Rohs 1986)
- People who learn about the volunteer opportunities through participation in church or synagogue activities or from someone at the church or synagogue (Greeley 1997)
- People who were asked to join (Berger 1991)

#### THEORETICAL MODELS AND THEORETICAL CONCERNS

The research on volunteer participation, as outlined above, has yielded many "findings." At best, the studies point toward important variables that must be taken into account in any general explanation of volunteering. At worst, the studies yield a jumble of disparate and sometimes conflicting results. A theoretical structure is needed to make sense of the "findings." The following discusses two such theoretical models:

- Dominant Status Model
- General Activity Model

The Dominant Status Model asserts that certain types of people are more likely to end up participating in volunteer activities than others (Lemon, Palisi, and Jacobson (1972). These people are characterized by having certain socially approved or "dominant" statuses, such as



higher education, greater income, middle age, married, longer length of community residence, and more children under eighteen (Smith 1983). For those with previous involvement in volunteer organizations that focus on fund-raising, this model seems intuitively accurate. Federation staff members, for example, tend to want on their committees those persons who have the potential to donate a substantial amount and/or have a certain social status in the community (perhaps by dint of age or long-term, multi-generation residence in the community). Thus, the organizational staff may be pre-selecting for certain types of participants. Yet, for the most part, research has not delved into distinctions between organizations with varying degrees and types of selectivity in the people they allow or encourage to participate. To understand who volunteers, research must acquire a better comprehension of what makes certain people more attractive to particular volunteer organizations.

The General Activity Model (Smith, Macaulay, and Associates 1980) views volunteer participation as simply another socially approved way of using one's discretionary time. The model asserts that people who engage more in socially approved discretionary activities, such as socializing with the neighbors, interacting with friends, informal helping, charitable giving, political activity, church participation, and mass media activity (with the exception of television watching), will also engage more in volunteer activities. The common wisdom correlate of this model is "If you want something done, ask someone who is always busy." The explicit assumption of this model is that volunteering is no different than other socially approved forms of using discretionary time and, thus, it is hypothesized that predictors of one usage will predict another usage. There is some evidence for this (Smith 1994).

However, there is also evidence disputing this hypothesis and also suggesting that in trying to understand who volunteers it may be more beneficial to look more specifically at the type of volunteer activities being performed. For instance, Heidrich (1990) found different volunteer roles -- leadership, direct service, general support, and member-at-large -- to be associated with different volunteer characteristics. People in leadership roles tended to have a longer history of volunteering. Those in direct service and general support roles tended to spend more hours both volunteering and in leisure activities. Lastly, members-at-large tended to be the most goal-oriented and the least likely to be working part-time (that is, they worked full-time or were retired).

In addition, Williams and Ortega (1986) found that different organizational types were associated with different volunteer characteristics. The five organizational types studied were: church-related; job-related; recreational; fraternal/service; and civic/political. Education and race were found to be significantly associated with volunteering in all five organizational types. However, community size was associated only with volunteering in recreational, church-related, and civic/political organizations. Region of residence was associated with volunteering in recreational, job-related, and fraternal/service organizations.

Both of these studies suggest that in the attempt to understand the nature of volunteering (especially, who volunteers) it may be more productive to focus one's efforts on the specific type of volunteering and the particular type of volunteer organization in which one is interested.

#### HOW ARE PEOPLE MOTIVATED TO VOLUNTEER?

While there have been many studies on the question of who volunteers, there has been little research done on the question of how people are motivated to actually volunteer. Moreover, as will be discussed, this research is not very insightful.



As an example of this research, Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) found that people are motivated to volunteer by being provided with an opportunity to fulfill a personal goal. They list six possible goals: (1) expressing or acting upon one's values; (2) increasing one's knowledge or skills; (3) enhancing one's self-esteem; (4) gaining experiences that will benefit their career; (5) fitting into social groups; and (6) coping with inner anxieties. Individuals may seek to fulfill one or more of these goals through volunteering. Moreover, the researchers found that different goals tend to be more important to different types of people. For instance, career motivations are less important among those who are more established in their careers or earning a higher salary.

This research suggests that individuals choose to volunteer if they view the volunteer experience as meeting their specific goals. However, whether the volunteer experience will achieve this is a matter of interpretation and, thus, individuals may be influenced by messages crafted and marketed by volunteer organizations. In an earlier study by some of the same authors (Clary, Snyder, Copeland, and French 1994), they found that messages which provided abstract arguments countering reasons for not volunteering and concrete reasons to volunteer were the most effective in enticing college students to volunteer. They also found that the effectiveness of a particular style of message depended upon the target audience (i.e., recruiting new or retaining current volunteers).

While an important step in the right direction, this research only provides a "thin description" of ways organizations can and do motivate volunteers. As Geertz suggested to researchers of ideology, we must comprehend how "metaphor, analogy, irony, ambiguity, pun, paradox, hyperbole, rhythm, and all other elements of what we lamely call 'style' operate" (1973:209) to motivate volunteering. The following example (from the anthropology literature) offers an illustration of the intricacies and non-rational nature of motivation, which equally applies to encouraging someone to volunteer for a particular organization as it does to convincing someone to vote for a political party.

During one of Israel's elections, Deshen (1976) observed an Israeli attempting to convince another to vote for the National Religious Party (NRP). In Israel, each political party is represented by a Hebrew letter or letters. Through this letter the party attempts to metaphorically link itself with those values held by their intended followers. The letter of the NRP is a "B" (Bet in Hebrew), which could stand for Bereshit (Blessing). The following monologue was recorded by Deshen (1976:91): "When I go to vote, I take the 'B' slip in my hand. I kiss it! I say lesheim yihud kudshal and I drop it into the ballot box." He points out that this statement is a play upon "routine behavior in the performance of acts of ritual devotion in Judeo-Moroccan tradition" (1976:91). The speaker is arguing that the individual's ritual obligation should be fulfilled through a political practice that is obligated by the State. Moreover, it is only through the extra-ordinary power of a particular political party that the secular act of voting could be transformed into the fulfillment of a sacred, religious obligation.

In this example, as in the research described above, people volunteer (vote) for a particular organization (political party) because they believe that it will fulfill certain personal obligations. Their religious obligations are transformed into political obligations through the use of metaphor. The resonance of Deshen's research on political leadership with volunteering suggests that anthropological approaches may have much to offer. They can show volunteer organizations how to motivate people through the use of metaphor, symbol, myth, and ritual (among other tools of communication) in the context of community events, board meetings, publications, and informal conversations.



## SOME CONCLUDING NOTES ON RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In conclusion, the research on the question -- Who volunteers? -- has limited utility for practitioners. This research can tell you which types of people are more likely to volunteer than others. Employing these research findings, you can increase your organization's volunteers by focusing your outreach on those types of people most likely to volunteer, such as those with higher education, larger incomes, and smaller families. Yet, this research does not tell you how to motivate these people to actually volunteer for your particular organization, as opposed to another volunteer organization.

We need to ask an additional question: How are people motivated to volunteer (for a particular organization)? Unfortunately, much less research has been done in this area. Moreover, the researchers' understandings of the motivation process are very "thin." One reason for this is that most research groups together within the same category different volunteer activities for different types of organizations. Yet, how a person is motivated to sit on the board of a national, non-profit agency may be vastly different from how another person is motivated to work on Sundays in a church kitchen providing meals to AIDS patients. To understand how to motivate volunteering, researchers need to distinguish between different types of volunteering and different volunteer organizations. As a professor of mine (Peter Vayda) once taught me, if you want to understand why deforestation is occurring in a particular area, don't try to understand "deforestation" as a distinct and unified phenomena. Instead, begin by finding those people who are cutting down trees and ask them why they are doing it. Research into volunteering for a Jewish organization should begin by asking those who volunteer why they are doing so. From a careful analysis of their answers informed by an understanding of social mobilization processes in general and Jewish history and practice in particular, we can begin to understand how to encourage other Jews to volunteer for the particular organization in question.

As a final note, the existing research literature focusing specifically on Jewish financial giving tends to replicate the findings of and problems associated with the general literature on the determinants of volunteer participation, as detailed in the first two sections. Horowitz (1991) reached a similar conclusion. For instance, Rimor and Tobin (1991) and Ritterband (1991) have found that particular religious practices and religious identity correlate with increased giving. Yet, as Ritterband (1991: 59) states, "Identification is not enough. One must have a sense of moral obligation toward those with whom one identifies [in order to encourage giving]." Unfortunately, his research does not explore the social and cultural ways that moral obligations to give are cultivated among Jews.

As Horowitz (1991:187) states in the prelude to her own exemplary study of giving among havurah Jews, "to understand 'who gives where and why' we must take stock of the socio-psychological climate within which a person enacts choices about giving money to one cause but not to another." However, to follow this suggestion offered by Horowitz (and mentioned above in regard to the work of Geertz) requires researchers to focus their studies on the particular social, cultural, and psychological worlds of actual groups of interacting people. In this way, knowledge that will be useful to practitioners of volunteer participation will be built up slowly -- one group or sub-group at a time.