

# NOT JUST FOR KICKS

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON VOLUNTEER MOTIVATION IN SWEDISH  
FOOTBALL CLUBS

**Matilda Nilsson** (24041)

**Elin Ruland** (23852)

Bachelor Thesis

Stockholm School of Economics

Defended May 2020



# Not Just for Kicks

## Abstract:

According to recent population studies, the Swedish sports movement is experiencing a decline in the voluntary engagement upon which it relies. This raises the need for further research on what motivates volunteers, and by extension how to attract and retain volunteers. Consequently, the aim of this study is to answer what motivates people to engage voluntarily as coaches in Swedish football clubs. Through qualitative in-depth interviews with 13 coaches from 8 different clubs, empirical patterns which could be categorized according to the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) emerged. These were then analyzed through the lens of the Self-Determination Theory and theories on altruism, in order to provide a more theoretically grounded explanation to a previously objectivistically described phenomenon. The findings demonstrate that the motives driving people to engage voluntarily as coaches are primarily constituted by: *altruistic concern* as a result of both empathic and egoistic incentives; the opportunity for *autonomy* and self-direction; the ability to express *competence*; and the feeling of *relatedness*. However, these appear to be of a more dynamic nature than what has been assumed by many researchers to date. As a result of the shifting between different motives throughout the course of the engagement, the authors raise the idea that volunteers move on a continuum between what is defined as collective and reflexive volunteering respectively. The practical implication of this is that football clubs have to provide a flexible environment in which these different motives are constantly encouraged and supported, in order to keep the coaches motivated.

## Keywords:

Volunteer Motivation, Sports, Volunteer Functions Inventory, Self-Determination Theory, Altruism

## Supervisor:

Stefan Einarsson, Affiliated Researcher, Department of Management and Organization

## Examiner:

Laurence Romani, Associate Professor, Department of Management and Organization

Bachelor Thesis

Bachelor Program in Management

Stockholm School of Economics

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our greatest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the work on this thesis. A special thanks to:

*Stefan Einarsson* – for your engagement, support and invaluable feedback

*Ellen Persson, Emma Supponen Isacson, Leo Rystam & Marina Vernholmen* – for the rewarding discussions and the constructive feedback

*Laurence Romani* – for guiding us through the process

We would also like to take the opportunity to extend our gratitude to the clubs and coaches who have participated in the study for your time, interest and engagement. Without you this study would not have been possible.

**Thank you!**

Matilda Nilsson and Elin Ruland

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Nordics belong to the countries in Europe where volunteer engagement is the most extensive (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2018). According to a population study conducted by von Essen et al. (2015), about half of the Swedish adult population was engaged voluntarily in 2015, which is a large proportion compared to other countries. Out of these volunteers, approximately 30 percent were involved in a sports association, making them the single largest group of volunteers. In 2018, it was estimated that 890 000 people were coaches, team leaders or the like, in different sports associations, and the vast majority was engaged voluntarily (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2018). If these coaches instead got paid for the hours they allocate to their sports engagement, it would cost the society 20 billion SEK (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2019b). This suggests that the sports movement in Sweden is highly dependent on voluntary forces.

In Sweden, every third citizen is a member in a sports association and football is the sport that by far attracts the most members (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2018). This can be compared to the rest of Europe, where approximately every fifth citizen is a member (European Commission, 2018). The members are mainly children and adolescents, and the sports sector thus serves an important function in our society in multiple areas such as health economics, self-esteem and integration (Faskunger & Sjöblom, 2017).

Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College has conducted five population studies of the volunteer engagement in Sweden between 1992-2014. Although the studies show that the overall engagement has remained relatively stable over the period, the share involved in sports has decreased slightly from year to year, and in 2014 it was the lowest in 22 years (von Essen & Wallman Lundåsen, 2016). This implies that the sports movement's resources in terms of voluntary workforce are decreasing. The reasons for this decline could be many, but the authors find it interesting to study the motives underlying the voluntary engagement. What drives the volunteers to spend several hours a week, rain or shine, on the sidelines? Are they involved *just for kicks*?

## 1.2 Purpose and Research Question

In light of what has been presented above, the need for a comprehensive study on volunteering in the Swedish sports sector in a managerial context is evident. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the motives underlying volunteer engagement for coaches in Swedish football<sup>1</sup> clubs. The research question is as follows:

*What motivates people to engage voluntarily as coaches in Swedish football clubs?*

## 1.3 Delimitations

This study focuses on coaches who during the time of the conducted research worked voluntarily for football clubs in the Stockholm area. The specific selection of sport was made on the fact that football is by far the sport with the highest number of individual associations, as well as active members, in Sweden (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2018). Whereas there are almost one million active members in various football associations in Sweden, the same figure is close to halved for the second most popular sport, track and field. Furthermore, coaches and team leaders are crucial components for the survival of these many associations, and without them, there would simply be no operations (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2019a). Consequently, delimiting the study to the specific role of coaches are of great significance. However, it cannot be ruled out that a similar study on another sport and/or geographical area would have generated a different result. Similarly, it should be taken into consideration that the sport studied is a team sport, and that uncertainty regarding the applicability of the results on an individual sport prevails (von Essen & Wallman Lundåsen, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> American: *soccer*. Will hereon be referred to as *football*.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition of Voluntary Work

In the process of determining what motivates people to engage voluntarily, it is necessary to start by defining what voluntary work is. Handy et al. (2000) state that the systematic work of defining the term *volunteer* more rigorously is scanty, and as such, no definite definition that captures the many dimensions of volunteering exists. Nonetheless, several attempts have been made to formulate a clear-cut definition.

Taking a more general and comprehensive approach, Wilson (2000, p.215) argues that volunteering can be defined as “[...] any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization”. He however concludes that his own definition is too broad, and that it includes far too many and disparate activities to fall within one theory alone. Hustinx (2003) however, rejects Wilson’s conclusion and claims that broad and theoretically un-elaborate definitions like his is what generate diverse and nuanced theories. The authors of this study agree with Hustinx in this matter and argue that in order to discover what motivates people to engage voluntarily, the definition of the subject studied cannot itself contain presumptions of the underlying motivational functions. A too narrow definition of the studied phenomenon would prevent the researchers from finding initially unexpected themes, which counteracts the purpose of the qualitative and interpretive study that this is. Rather, the authors take the stance that a broad definition is required for this study, and have chosen to proceed from the following definition of volunteering: “Unremunerated contributions of time in an organizational context” (Smith, 1994, p.244; Yeung, 2004, p.53).

### 2.2 Volunteer Motivation

Over time, several empirical studies have been conducted with the purpose of identifying the motives for volunteering (Wilson, 2000). Despite being a well-researched topic, there seems to be little consensus among researchers regarding what motivates people to engage voluntarily, and there is no agreement on a single conceptual model. Based on a thorough review of the existing research, a conclusion that volunteer motivation is a complex phenomenon with many dimensions can be drawn (Winniford et al., 1997).



Pioneering the earlier research on the topic, Smith (1981) argued that motives for volunteering center around altruism and egoism. Knoke and Prensky (1984) later divided volunteer motivation into three different incentives: utilitarian (material benefits), affective (building personal relationships) and normative (altruistic values and civic obligations). Caldwell and Andereck (1994) built on this incentives approach, and in their study on volunteer motivation in a recreation-related association proposed three categories of volunteer incentives, much similar to the ones proposed by Knoke and Prensky: purposive, solidary and material. Among these three, they concluded that purposive incentives (community concern) were the most important for becoming and remaining a member in the association, followed by solidary incentives (socializing and networking) and material incentives (tangible benefits) respectively.

Taking a more functional approach, Clary et al. (1998) as a result of several quantitative studies presented one of the most frequently adopted concepts within the field of volunteer motivation: the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). Believing that people can engage in the same activity with different sets of psychological functions, Clary et al. (1992; 1996; 1998) identified six motives for volunteering: 1) Values (expressing humanistic and altruistic concerns for others), 2) Understanding (gaining knowledge and new learning experiences), 3) Social (strengthening social relationships), 4) Career (obtaining skills and benefits for future advancements), 5) Protective (protecting the ego and reducing guilt), and lastly 6) Enhancement (increasing self-esteem). These motivational functions were later on developed into 30 sub-items, which together constitute the VFI, used by many researchers to describe volunteer motivation in different organizational environments (Allison et al., 2002; Greenslade & White, 2005; Okun et al., 1998). Based on findings from prior research on the VFI, Silverberg et al. (2000) concluded that volunteer functions vary across different job settings, meaning that the motives for volunteering differ depending on the volunteer activity. As a result of this, researchers have made an effort to adapt the different measures of volunteer motivation to reflect the organizational context, sports settings included (Farrell et al., 1998; Kim et al., 2010).

Hustinx and Lammertyn (2004) on the other hand believe that the model presented by Clary et. al is a far too static and objectivistic description of reality. They also refer to earlier studies as being monolithic, attempting to reduce the many dimensions of volunteering to a catchall term. Instead, they, drawing on sociological modernization theories, aim to conceptualize the changing nature of volunteering. Hustinx and Lammertyn claim that volunteers can be divided into two separate groups, based on their distinct social roots: collective

and reflexive. For collective volunteers, volunteering is a natural and by society predetermined action. By engaging voluntarily, volunteers can express their group belonging and coherence with the collective code of conduct. According to the reflexive doctrine, on the other hand, these social boundaries and expectations are slowly eroding. Consequently, volunteering becomes a conditional and self-induced activity, used as a tool for persona construction and development. Reflexive volunteers adhere to the task itself, rather than the organization as a whole, and see flexibility as a requirement for their engagement. With these two styles of volunteering as a point of departure, Hustinx and Lammertyn (2004) could furthermore identify four distinct clusters of volunteers based on their motivational and attitudinal features: 1) Unconditional (strong devotion to and identification with the organization), 2) Critical (critical attitude towards the organizational environment), 3) Reliable (moderate devotion to and identification with the organization, but not at the expense of individual preferences), and 4) Distant (weak devotion to and identification with the organization).

### 2.3 Volunteer Motivation in Sports

As stated, volunteering in a sports setting has by a number of researchers been identified as different from that in other organizational settings, which has raised concerns regarding the application of general frameworks of volunteer motivation in sports (Chelladurai, 2006; Kim et al., 2010). Kim et al. (2010) state that volunteering in youth sports organizations differ from that in the general organizational context on several areas including, but not limited to, the fact that most volunteers are parents, and the relatively high attrition rate of volunteers that is a result of parents leaving the association when their child does. Through their study on a youth football organization, they modified the VFI to capture these unique dimensions, resulting in the Modified Volunteer Functions Inventory for Sports (MVFIS) with 18 sub-items specifically applicable to the context of youth sports. Worth noting, however, is that the main categories of the MVFIS are identical with the six factors of the VFI.

## 2.4 Volunteer Motivation in Swedish Literature

As previously stated, Sweden differs from comparable countries in terms of the scope and scale of the population's voluntary engagement, which raises the need for further research on volunteering in Sweden as a separate field of study. In Sweden, the research on volunteering has been dominated primarily by its influence on the society as a whole. As a consequence, less attention has been directed towards its meaning to the individual, and the Swedish research on volunteer motivation is hence fairly limited, not least in sports (von Essen, 2008).

One of the most extensive studies on volunteer engagement in the sports sector in Sweden is conducted by von Essen and Wallman Lundåsen. In their report from 2016, they, in line with Kim et al. (2010), state that a considerable proportion of all people who work voluntarily for a sports association have children who is active in the same association. In this regard, sports associations differ from other non-profit organizations (von Essen & Wallman Lundåsen, 2016). Although von Essen and Wallman Lundåsen acknowledge that many of these parents begin their voluntary engagement to support their child(ren), they state that, unlike what has been assumed in previous research (Olsson, 2007), no direct coercion was involved in the decision. Furthermore, they found that most parents gradually started to see their voluntary engagement as an opportunity to be active and express their own sports interest. Since the motives behind commencing a voluntary engagement seem to differ from the motives to continuing it, von Essen and Wallman Lundåsen emphasize that an analytical difference between the two needs to be made.

Other motives for parents to continue to engage voluntarily in sports that were found in their study were a strong sense of community, to feel needed, and to feel that what you do makes a difference to others (von Essen & Wallman Lundåsen, 2016).

## 2.5 Expected Contribution

Coaches constitute the backbone of sports associations, and without their voluntary engagement, the sports movement would pose a great burden on the Swedish economy and welfare. Despite this, an extensive review of the existing literature within the field shows that the Swedish research on motivation in a sports context is fairly limited. The aim of this study is hence to help broaden the existing stock of knowledge and contribute to the accumulated empirical evidence.

The authors hope to provide the sports community and voluntary sector, in primarily but not limited to Sweden, with knowledge on what drives people to engage voluntarily as coaches. By extension, the study will also give guidance on appropriate measures for obtaining and retaining voluntary workforce.

Furthermore, by applying a theoretical framework not specific to the context of volunteer motivation (see section 3.1), the authors hope to, to some extent, bridge the gap between different theoretical frameworks.

### **3 Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Application of Theory**

After reviewing previous studies on volunteer motivation, the authors found that the results are mainly dominated by empirically generated categorizations of motives. Although being thoroughly tested and validated, the existing theories within the field give little explanation of the underlying psychological functions that give rise to the respective categories. To deepen the understanding of volunteer motivation, the theoretical framework of this study is constituted by more general psychological theories not specific to the domain. As such, the authors hope to provide a more profound explanation to the themes found in the empirical material, rather than just regarding them as given. A final discussion between the results generated by the study and previous research will then yield a better interconnection between empirical patterns and grounded psychological theories.

In light of the research question and what has been discussed above, the authors early on found the use of motivational theory as valuable for explaining the empirical material. As a result of the main topics emphasized by the respondents, and due to its demonstrated practical implications for the field of management (Blomberg, 2017), the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) will be used. Although many earlier, more dualistic theories, such as the ones presented by Maslow (1943) and Herzberg (1964), have in large shaped the entire domain of motivation research, contemporary research with individual- and development psychology as its basis, including the SDT, has furthermore proven to provide a deeper and more nuanced picture of motivation (Blomberg, 2017). Another recurring theme that was discovered through the interview process, consistent with what is suggested by Smith (1981), was altruistic concerns and a strive to contribute to the society. Consequently, theories on altruism and related sub-theories was regarded as relevant for answering the research question.

Altogether, the authors found the above-mentioned theoretical fields as complementary and effective in capturing the many dimensions of volunteer motivation. The remaining parts of this section will explain the theories and their implications for this study more thoroughly.

### 3.2 Self-Determination Theory

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is an empirically based framework of human motivation and personality, presented by Deci and Ryan (2000b). The theory makes a distinction between intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation, the former defined as “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence” (Deci & Ryan, 2000a, p.56). Deci and Ryan (2000b) identified three psychological needs – autonomy, competence and relatedness – which when fulfilled generate increased self-motivation and well-being. In order to attain intrinsic motivation, the psychological needs have to be satisfied, and external regulations have to be integrated and internalized with one's own goals and values. In social contexts where satisfaction of the needs is hampered, individuals experience poorer motivation, performance, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000c).

The SDT has been used in various domains, such as education, work and sports (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). However, it is important to notice that it has been criticized for reducing the complexity of human conduct into only three basic psychological needs (Pyszczynski et al., 2000). Consequently, the authors would like to stress that this study excludes other psychological needs that, according to other research, might have an impact on the intrinsic motivation.

#### 3.2.1 Autonomy

The need for autonomy refers to individuals' desire to self-organize their actions with regard to their integrated sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2000c). An individual is autonomous when he or she performs an activity based on volition and choice. It is important to note that Deci and Ryan (2000b) do not equate autonomy with independence or individualism, but rather the feeling of volition when performing an activity. Furthermore, research has shown that intrinsic motivation is undermined by extrinsic rewards, such as monetary and other tangible rewards, but also deadlines, directives and imposed goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). Acknowledging feelings, providing choice and opportunities for self-direction, on the other hand, instill a sense of autonomy and thus enhance intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

#### 3.2.2 Competence

The concept of competence revolves around an effectance-focused motivation, meaning that people engage in activities to experience themselves as competent or effective (White, 1959). White further specifies that people want to have an impact on their environment and achieve

desired outcomes within it. To satisfy the need for competence, individuals have to feel like they are mastering their environment and acquiring new skills (Deci & Ryan, 2000c). Studies have shown that positive performance-related feedback tend to enhance intrinsic motivation by increasing perceived competence, whereas the opposite holds for negative feedback (Deci, 1975). Studies have also shown that a sense of competence will enhance intrinsic motivation only when a feeling of autonomy prevails (Fisher, 1978; Ryan, 1982).

### **3.2.3 Relatedness**

The need for relatedness refers to the desire to form and maintain interpersonal relationships, with people one feels connected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It revolves around a sense of belonging, caring for others as well as feeling cared for (Deci & Ryan, 2000c). To satisfy the need for belongingness, the interactions and relationships have to be perceived as meaningful to the individual (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Intrinsic motivation is more likely to be fostered in contexts with a secure relational base (Deci & Ryan, 2000b), in which supportive and encouraging behavior is essential (Feeney & Thrush, 2010). In relation to the other two psychological needs in the SDT, Deci and Ryan (2000b) emphasize that relatedness does not seem to be as strongly linked to the intrinsic motivation.

## **3.3 Altruism**

In the 19th century, the French philosopher and founder of positivism, Auguste Comte coined the term *altruism*, derived from the Latin word for *other* (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013). According to Comte, the word was to be used as an antonym for egoism, but whether the two are in fact mutually exclusive has since then been debated among researchers (Batson & Shaw, 1991). In respect to that, the authors have chosen to present a multi-sided description of altruism, with the hope of generating a more nuanced discussion.

Advocates of the doctrine of psychological egoism argue that all humans act in the pursuit of the own self-interest, and that altruistic and benevolent behavior is nothing but a mean for the own happiness (Shafer-Landau, 2012; Slote, 1964). Challenging this view, and speaking more in favor of Comte's original definition of altruism, Batson and Shaw (1991) presented the, within the field of psychology and sociology, frequently adopted empathy-altruism hypothesis.

### 3.3.1 Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis

Batson and Shaw (1991, p.108) define altruism as “a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare”. In this definition, they emphasize that the end of a prosocial action should be to benefit others, not the self, in order to be truly altruistic. They argue that empathic emotions, defined as feelings of compassion, tenderness, sympathy, and the like, for a person in need can evoke the motivation to help that person (Batson et al., 1981). The ultimate goal of helping is thus to reduce a person’s suffering, in a literal or figurative sense, and any benefits gained by the self are considered as unintended consequences. However, Batson and Shaw (1991) do not disregard the fact that we as humans can have more than one ultimate goal, and thus can act under the influence of both altruistic and egoistic motives simultaneously. They also acknowledge that the altruistic motives are greater when there is a strong attachment to the person in need, as they evoke stronger feelings of empathy – something that can be further explained by the theory of kin selection. Madsen et al. (2007) state that biological kinship, defined as genetic relatedness or family ties, does play an important role in explaining altruistic behavior.

### 3.3.2 Negative-State Relief Model

Reinterpreting the evidence for a causal link between empathy and altruism presented by Batson and Shaw (1991), Cialdini and his colleagues (1987) offered the theory of Negative-State Relief. They, in conformity with Batson and Shaw, recognize empathy as the source for altruistic behavior, but claim that it is the increased feeling of sadness that it entails that motivates action, rather than a genuine desire to help. Cialdini et al. state that with an increased empathic concern comes also an increased *personal* sadness, and any altruistic deed is thus associated with the egoistic motive to relieve that sadness, rather than to reduce the suffering of whom the empathy is concerned. Ultimately, the motives for altruistic actions, according to the Negative-State Relief model, are to relieve feelings of sadness and personal mood management.



### 3.4 From Theory to Practice

In order to answer the research question of what motivates people to engage voluntarily as coaches in Swedish football clubs, the authors have identified two theoretical frameworks that together provide a, in comparison to previous theories within the field, more theoretically grounded explanation. In light of the research question, Deci and Ryan's SDT is regarded as a close description of the reality experienced by the volunteers in the sample. Due to its contextual breadth, however, the model alone seems to lack the deeper understanding of the specific nature of the phenomenon studied. In respect to the empirical material, a theory more oriented towards the study's contextual singularity was thus required to complement the SDT, which is why altruism was added. In line with the interpretive epistemological position on which the study is founded, these two theories will not be reduced into a monolithic and fixed model used to categorize the empirics. Rather, the authors will henceforth combine the theories in an iterative framework which will guide the analysis.

## **4 Method**

### **4.1 Research Strategy and Design**

#### **4.1.1 Epistemological Orientation**

The purpose of this study is to determine the underlying motives of voluntary coaches, and on a deeper level to understand the volunteers' perspective on the matter. To the authors, the subjectivity of the empirical material is central to the research question, as is the social context in which it was collected and analyzed. Consequently, this study is grounded in a hermeneutic approach, described by Bryman and Bell (2015, p.38) as "concerned with the empathic understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it". This theory and method of interpretation is furthermore what shaped the epistemological position upon which the study is predicated: interpretivism (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The research paradigm centers around the notion that a separate strategy to that of natural science is required when trying to understand the subjective implication of social action – something that was taken into greatest consideration when designing the research procedure of this study.

#### **4.1.2 Research Strategy**

After acknowledging an empirical phenomenon, the authors used previous research and theories within the field to structure the collection of data. As more empirics were gathered, the theoretical framework was then revised accordingly, to capture the central themes observed. Consequently, this study has an abductive approach as its point of departure (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 1994). As typically associated with this type of reasoning, and as a result of the epistemological position assumed by the authors, the research conducted is furthermore of qualitative nature (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Contrary to the quantitative method, the qualitative research emphasizes the individual and collective interpretation- and sense-making processes that, according to Blumer (1956), are at the very core of human action, and which is central to the hermeneutics (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Nevertheless, it allows for the authors to look beyond the static and objectivistic picture of volunteerism provided by several previous studies, and in line with the aim of the study contribute with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

To capture the variations and patterns among these individual and collective processes, the authors found a cross-sectional design preferable to a case study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). By

studying volunteers from more than one organization, the transferability of the research, and the overall contribution to the field of study, is also believed to be greater.

Lastly, since the genuine understanding of the volunteers' motives and world views forms the basis of the research question, the authors made the judgement that semi-structured interviews were suitable for the study, as they leave room for the respondents to pursue topics and themes that are important to them (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A more extensive review on how these were conducted can be found under section 4.3.

## 4.2 Sample Selection

This study focuses on voluntary coaches in football clubs in the Stockholm area, due to the geographical proximity to the authors. Clubs were selected from the club directory on the website of the Stockholm Football Association (Stockholms Fotbollförbund), which manages lower tier football in Stockholm County. Out of the clubs in the directory, 23 clubs with a relatively wide range of teams in terms of age, gender and size were contacted by email. This resulted in 13 interviews with coaches from 8 different clubs, the majority of whom are parental coaches. A table of the participants of the study can be found below, with parameters that can be of explanatory value for the coaches' motivation and/or provide a more graphic description of the respondents. All names and clubs are replaced with pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity.

A greater variation in the sample in terms of age, gender, or the like was not regarded as important for the study, as it does not seek to find correlation between demographic factors and motivation.

Name	Club	Coaching Team	Child(ren) in Team	Duration of Engagement (years)*	Hours Spent per Week**
Adam	A	Boys 14yr.	Yes	8	10+
August	A	Women's 1st team	No	24	15
Bengt	B	Boys 10yr.	Yes	5	3-4
Benjamin	B	Boys 9yr.	Yes	6	12
Carl	C	Women's 1st team	No	12	5+
Daniel	D	Boys 10yr.	Yes	3	5+
David	D	Boys 10yr.	Yes	2	3-4
Dennis	D	Boys 10yr.	Yes	3	3-4
Erik	E	Women's jnr. team	No	9	15
Fay	F	Boys 12yr.	Yes	0.5	2+
Fiona	F	Boys 11yr.	Yes	2	3+
Gustaf	G	Women's 1st team	Yes	16	10
Hanna	H	Girls 10yr.	Yes	2.5	3-4

\*Duration of volunteer engagement as football coach

\*\*Hours spent per week on volunteer engagement as football coach

**Table 1:** List of Respondents

## 4.3 Interview Process

### 4.3.1 Data Collection

Due to the framework's frequent usage within the field, the six functions of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) served as a tool for structuring the interview guide (see appendix 10.1). As stated under section 2.3, these correspond to the main categories of the VFI modified specifically for a sports setting (MVFI<sub>S</sub>), which makes the two interchangeable in this context. In line with the abductive approach assumed by the authors, the questions were initially fairly open-ended in order to let the empirics steer the theory. A pilot interview was conducted with a person matching the selected sample, after which a few adjustments were made to the interview guide. Out of the 13 interviews, the first 7 were carried out in person (see appendix 10.3). When in public places, the interviews were conducted in a quiet area early in the morning, to allow for the respondents to speak freely without feeling overheard. Due to the prevailing COVID-19

pandemic, the remaining six interviews were conducted by telephone. The authors perceived an increased difficulty to get in contact with potential respondents given the circumstances, and thus decided to lower the barrier to participation by not including video in the interviews. Whether this affected the overall quality of the study is impossible to say, but to the authors' experience it had a positive effect on the accessibility of the participants. Rapport was furthermore reassured by initiating the telephone interviews with conversations not related to the study, by which a relaxed and safe atmosphere was established.

Recurring themes were identified early in the process, and after ten interviews the authors experienced that the interviews became repetitive and did not provide the authors with new insights. After that, three more interviews were held in order to ensure that no new patterns emerged and that empirical saturation was reached.

Both authors were present at all interviews to reduce subjectivity in individual interpretations. All interviews ended with room for the respondents to make any additions, in order to ensure that the coaches were given the opportunity to convey a fair picture of their reality. By the end of the interviews, the respondents also filled out a form, where they ranked the six functions of the VFI from 1-6, where 1 represented the most contributing function served by their volunteer engagement, and 6 the least (see appendix 10.2). The authors used the summarized version of the VFI, the sample VFI items, proposed by Clary and Snyder (1999), translated into Swedish. The full version of the VFI was not considered as necessary for the purpose of the study, as it is here used as a tool to bring about empirical themes, rather than as a framework for empirical analysis. The ranking was used to have the respondents reflect on the mutual order of the different motives, and thus worked as a more quantitative complement to the qualitative empirics. Furthermore, it allowed the respondents to confirm that the authors' interpretation of the interview was in accordance with their views. Important to emphasize, however, is that the interpretation of the qualitative material is paramount the results of the VFI ranking in this study.

#### **4.3.2 Analysis of Empirical Material**

The interviews were transcribed continuously during the collection of empirical material, which enabled the authors to identify themes that could be brought up in later interviews (Bell et al., 2019). A thematic analysis was conducted (Bell et al., 2019), and both authors studied the transcriptions and identified common concepts individually in order to increase the margin for

interpretation, and avoid groupthink. The authors made comparisons between the transcripts and the respondents' rankings of the VFI, to ensure that the answers were consistent. Bearing the theoretical framework in mind, the concepts were then discussed and grouped into broader themes, which were later sorted into the six functions of the VFI for the presentation of the empirics. Since the interviews were conducted in Swedish, the quotations have been translated. Consequently, some discrepancy in relation to the original empirics may prevail. Furthermore, the authors have made minor adjustments to some quotations, in order to increase the readability.

## 4.4 Discussion of Method

### 4.4.1 Quality of Study

In order to maintain a high quality of the study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985; 1994) four criteria for trustworthiness, as described by Bryman and Bell (2011), were assessed throughout the process. As stated above, both authors were present during all interviews in order to decrease the subjective skewness and consequently increase the overall credibility of the study. However, the authors acknowledge that subjective bias and personal values, as a result of own experiences with and interest in the specific setting studied, might have affected what was observed and how it was interpreted. To avoid the untrammelled incursion of personal values, and to further strengthen the credibility of the study, direct quotations validated by the respondents (see 4.4.2), were frequently used in the empirics section. Moreover, triangulation, in which the qualitative interviews were complemented with the quantitative VFI form, was exercised to cross-check the empirics.

Some degree of transferability was obtained by the cross-sectional design, with coaches from various clubs, that was employed in the study. The authors furthermore strived for providing a thick description of the phenomenon studied and the context in which it takes place. Moreover, an auditing approach toward the material collected and processed throughout the study was adopted by the authors, in order to strengthen the overall dependability. Without compromising the ethical considerations described below, the authors along the same lines aimed for greatest possible transparency throughout the research process, which permeates the

entire method section. As stated under section 4.3.1, however, the dependability might have been negatively affected despite these precautionary measures.

Lastly, the authors believe that they, in regard to what has been discussed above and throughout the methods section, have shown that they have acted in good faith and hence established high confirmability.

#### **4.4.2 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations have been assessed throughout the study in accordance with the four ethical principles proposed by Diener and Crandall (1978), referred to in Bell et al. (2019, pp.114-124): harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. In the initial email and prior to every interview the authors informed the participants about the nature and purpose of the study, and emphasized the anonymity of the participants. To ensure that the participants are not identifiable, the authors carefully considered what data to present in the table. Furthermore, the authors asked for permission to audio-record the interviews, which all participants gave their consent to, and assured that the records and transcripts would only be available to the authors and used within the scope of this study.

The participants were informed that they had the opportunity to refrain from answering questions or terminate the interview at any time without further explanation. Before publication, the respondents were given the opportunity to read and comment on their quotations and thus validate that the authors had understood them correctly, and mitigate discrepancies in the translations.

## 5 Empirics

In line with the hermeneutics approach central to the study, the authors have chosen to let the respondents' experiences shape the empirics section. The aim is to provide a rich and authentic picture of their perspectives.

By means of the data collection, the authors found empirical evidence of a discrepancy in the motives for starting a voluntary engagement, and for continuing it. In line with what is suggested by von Essen and Wallman Lundåsen (2016), the empirical material will thus be divided into two different sections accordingly. The presentation of the empirics on the latter, regarding the motives for continuing a voluntary engagement, will follow the categorization of the VFI. This, in order to further emphasize the unanimity between different theoretical frameworks.

### 5.1 Commencing the Voluntary Engagement

#### 5.1.1 Pressure and Responsibility

As stated, the empirical material provides a description of why people become voluntarily engaged as coaches that differs from that of why they remain as volunteers. When asked the question of how their engagement as coaches started, all of the respondents stated that they initially got a direct or indirect request from the club. Three of the respondents acknowledge that they, upon receiving the request, felt some sort of pressure to take on the mission:

*I felt a bit of pressure – when you're sitting there in a meeting you can't simply say no, you just can't. It's expected from you, I mean, why should someone else do it if you can't come forward? [...] And [the club] also expects that someone will step up and take over, or else the teams will fall. (Bengt)*

The remaining respondents, although not using the terms pressure or coercion, describe feelings of responsibility, obligation or duty as reasons for accepting the request from the club. As described by Hanna: *This is my time to pay it forward, it's my duty and responsibility.* In the majority of the cases, these feelings originate from a fear of the survival of the teams, in line with Bengt's statement above.



*[The members of the team] are a group of boys, many of whom attend the same school. And then [the club] told us that if we couldn't find more people that were willing to engage, they would have to divide the team into different groups. So it was important for me to engage, so that they could remain the same group, where they know each other and feel that it is fun to play. (Fay)*

*Back then the secretariat called a meeting, and said 'we have no leaders, and in the worst-case scenario the team is facing shutdown'. Many parents backed away, and many others were like me and said 'we can't just let these 20 girls lose their team'. The worst there is is when you have to shut down a team, and as long as there is engagement it shouldn't be necessary. [...] I understand that everyone can't do everything, but you have to contribute with what little you can. (Erik)*

*I might not want to get up super early on a Saturday morning and do this, but why should I stay in bed and let someone else do it? So, I guess I felt some sort of feeling of responsibility. (Adam)*

11 out of the 13 respondents also name their child(ren) as the underlying reason for feeling obligated or responsible to take on the role as coach:

*When my son started playing football, I initially tried to facilitate him a bit, by attending practices and similar. It eventually led to me being the coach of the team. (Dennis)*

*[...] because it is beneficial for your child if you are coaching the team. I mean, we get priority on all tournaments and games, and you get to be a part of controlling and organizing the practices and such. And I think that it creates good conditions for my son to develop, if I'm with him all the way. (David)*

Altogether, the decisions to commence the voluntary engagement were all based on an initial request from the club, which resulted in feelings of pressure, obligation or the like with the respondents, due to an inherent wish to help either the team or their child.

## 5.2 Continuing the Voluntary Engagement

As suggested by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2004), there is a changing nature of volunteering that cannot be neglected when trying to understand the phenomenon. This also became evident by the interviews, in which several of the respondents described their engagement as dynamic. Although the voluntary engagement for all of the respondents began with an enquiry they, due to external and internal pressure, could not turn down, the majority of them also states that their role as coach eventually developed into something more than just a responsibility:

*It started out kind of like 'okay, no one else wants to do it, I might as well do it', and then I signed up. That's how it was from the beginning, I'd say. Then somehow it became more and more exciting. [...] It has become fun, it has become challenging, and it has become developing.*  
(Fiona)

*I might have started for the wrong reason, and many people do, but eventually, when you get into it, it's very fun for the most part.* (Erik)

This further emphasizes the need for making a distinction between the motives for commencing, and for continuing, the voluntary engagement. The empirics presented below are focused on what drives the voluntary coaches to continue their engagement, once they have taken on the role. The section will start with a summarizing table of the VFI ranking made by the respondents (table 2), after which each motivational function will be discussed further. The respective motivational functions are structured according to the mutual order of their average, from left to right. As evident by the table, *values* followed by *understanding* seem to be most important to the respondents' motivation, whereas *protective* and *career* are of less importance (see appendix 10.2 for further description of respective function).

	Values	Understanding	Enhancement	Social	Protective	Career
Adam	1	2	4	3	6	5
August	1	3	4	5	2	6
Bengt	1	2	4	5	3	6
Benjamin	1	3	2	4	5	6
Carl	1	3	6	2	4	5
Daniel	1	2	3	4	5	6
David	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dennis	1	2	6	3	4	5
Erik	1	2	3	5	6	4
Fay	1	2	3	4	6	5
Fiona	1	2	3	6	4	5
Gustaf	1	2	3	4	5	6
Hanna	2	1	4	3	5	6
<b>Average</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>5.5</b>

*Explanation of color scheme: The brighter the green the higher ranking of the motivational function.*

**Table 2:** VFI Ranking

### 5.2.1 Values

As stated, the fact that it feels important to help others has by far received the highest ranking of all functions. 12 out of 13 respondents state that it is in fact the function contributing the most to their motivation for engaging voluntarily as coaches. This desire to help others, and mainly the children and adolescents, also became evident throughout the interviews. Furthermore, many of the respondents emphasize that they are an essential building block in the brickwork that is the sports movement:

*If there would have been no voluntary coaches in Sweden, we would have no sports culture at all, it wouldn't work. It all depends on engaged voluntary parents or adults who keep the operations going. And to be a part of that feels great. (David)*

*Fundamentally, I'm very positive towards doing something good for the society, voluntarily. And what I am doing now, it feels as it is where I can contribute the most to the society. [...] In some*

*way I feel that this voluntary engagement, that makes a difference somewhere, makes me happy. It feels very satisfactory, of course. (Fiona)*

Many respondents furthermore named the feeling of contributing to the society and doing something good, as an answer to the question of what they get in exchange for their voluntary engagement:

*To feel that I contribute with something. That I contribute **to** something. (Gustaf)*

*I get to spend time with my kid, and it feels very positive to be able to be a part of that. And as I was saying before, I also think it's fun to be able to contribute to the team, and to the other children that are there. That carries a lot of weight in why I am doing this. (Daniel)*

*In some way you feel that you help adolescents in the society, and especially in this region with a bit more vulnerable areas. You feel that you save many children from ending up in the street or making bad decisions when they get older. [...] So in a way it's very fun to feel like you're doing some sort of social benefit. (Erik)*

### 5.2.2 Understanding

With an average of 2.2, *understanding* is the second highest ranked motivational function. This indicates that the coaches are engaged voluntarily to gain knowledge and new perspectives of themselves, others, and the cause for which they are working, which was also mentioned in the interviews:

*[...] It's both the children's perspective to see 'won, I have developed', and to see that we have done a good job. That we have developed. Because it's not just the children, it's us as well. How we act, and deal with different situations. (Dennis)*

*That is why I'm now also engaged in a senior team, to get an insight there. I haven't had insight there before. (Gustaf)*

10 out of 13 respondents believe that they develop as individuals from being coaches. Although the respondents differ in their views on *how* they develop personally, the majority agree on that

their personal development is secondary for their engagement, as expressed by Carl: *My development comes automatically, it's a bonus.*

Moreover, most of the respondents express that their clubs provide them with the freedom to manage their teams, for instance deciding what tournaments to participate in and how to set up their practices. The extent to which the coaches manage their teams vary between the clubs. 10 out of 13 respondents believe that this freedom is important, some going even further stating that it is a precondition for their engagement:

*It's a precondition [...], if they had said 'you get to play a maximum of three tournaments here, you're going to report your game system to us', then I wouldn't have coached. (Adam)*

*[...] I can't even imagine how it would be if it was the other way around, that someone said 'you have to play, or you can't do this and that', I don't know, that feels completely foreign, I can't even imagine how that would be. (Bengt)*

When asked how they would respond if the clubs started controlling and regulating their work more, several of the respondents emphasized that external regulation would not function in a volunteer context, Hanna being one of them: *I'm thinking that [the freedom] is in some way connected to it being a voluntary assignment.* Fay expressed a similar viewpoint: *No... I don't think that works with so many volunteers.* Two of the respondents furthermore express that they would choose to terminate their engagement if their independence and freedom was compromised by the club.

The three respondents who express that freedom in their work is not fundamental for their engagement, state that support from the club is a great way to reduce the burden on the coaches in terms of workload and/or practical know-how:

*[...] If I hadn't been at [Club F], I wouldn't have any clue about how to set up a practice, you know, we get these indications and I think that's good. (Fiona)*

### 5.2.3 Social

As evident by table 2, having a shared interest for volunteering with friends and acquaintances do not seem to affect the motivation of the majority of the respondents considerably. The hypothesis that social pressure or conformity does not influence the decision to volunteer was further strengthened by the interviews:

*No, I actually don't [have any friends working voluntarily]. But I've worked in the voluntary sector my entire work life, so I know many people working voluntarily due to that. But among my friends, [...] I don't know anyone who has a voluntary engagement. (Fiona)*

Although the social function as explained by Clary et al. (1998) evidently is not a determinant for the respondents' motivation, several of them expressed that they, in line with Fiona's statement above, have become a part of a social context *due to* their voluntary engagement. All of the respondents furthermore state that they feel no specific connection to the club itself, but that they have developed personal relationships with people in the club, and a sense of belonging to other coaches:

*I feel like we have great sense of community in the group I'm in. Then I don't really see the whole picture, but we have pretty much contact within the group I'm coaching. So I think that there's a good sense of community, a friendly atmosphere, and a positive climate. (Daniel)*

*Not in the club overall, I would say, but rather in the group that we're in. Many of the parents are in a similar situation as me [...] and we all get along pretty well. That's a very important factor, I think. Otherwise I would probably not... I mean they have become my personal friends, beyond the football. It also makes it easier to continue, it doesn't cost as much. (Bengt)*

*In some way you're needed, have a sense of belonging, a feeling of togetherness, I guess. I'm sure it's because you have fun when you have someone to have fun with. To sit home alone laughing is not as fun. (August)*

The feeling of belongingness and connection to others also extends to the players in the team for many of the coaches, as expressed by Benjamin: *I have a personal relationship with each and every guy. We shake hands every practice, and they know who I am and how we work. [...] So that's super important.* All of the respondents who are coaching their own child (10/13), furthermore state that their engagement is a great way to spend time and connect with them, and that they would most likely quit as voluntary coaches if their child stopped playing football.

#### 5.2.4 Career

In line with what became evident by the VFI ranking, none of the coaches see career advancement as a main reason for being engaged voluntarily. Two of the respondents mentioned that they early on in their role as coach, in their youth, saw some sort of future career within the profession, but did not make a further connection between that aspiration and their motivation as coaches today:

*At first it was like that, absolutely. [...] And the ultimate goal was [elite club] back then.*

(Carl)

*When you were younger and a bit immature, then maybe you thought that you were going to be the next [top coach]. But that settled quite fast. [...]. And now you have realized that it doesn't matter.* (Erik)

#### 5.2.5 Protective

Although conforming to external pressure and expectations and reducing feelings of guilt seems to be an important reason for why several of the respondents became coaches in the first place, the protective function in the VFI was not seen as important in their continued engagement. August, who ranked the function second, however, states that there is an element of escaping from reality:

*[...] I think it's fun, and then it's also a bit of relaxation from my job, I think. It's completely different. I mean I'm the manager and partner of a company and there you have a huge responsibility and here it's not the same responsibility.*

August adds to this by saying: *At work you can be a bit grumpy sometimes, but I am usually always happy when I'm at practice.* This was barely touched upon during the remaining interviews, but when filling out the VFI form, several respondents made comments on this function:

*'Volunteering is a good **escape** from my own troubles', I would like to remove that [escape]. However, if you have problems, they disappear when you're at practice.* (Carl)

*'Escape from my own troubles', there is an element of that. If you have a hard time [at work] you can turn to the football.* (Benjamin)

What becomes evident by the interviews is that many of the respondents have a genuine interest in football and thus regard their engagement as a fun activity and what the authors interpret as a nice break in the everyday life. Most of the respondents express a view in line with Adam's: *I also feel like, 'why am I doing this?', well, because I think it's fun.*

### 5.2.6 Enhancement

The function enhancement refers to the psychological growth of the volunteers, and some of the coaches explicitly said that their engagement makes them feel better about themselves, contributing to an enhanced self-esteem and a sense that they are good at what they do:

*But it is selfish in a sense, that you feel good and feel satisfied with yourself. I feel good when I feel like I'm contributing.* (Benjamin)

*[...] in some way it's also, like, self-affirmation, you want to know that you are good at things, that's how it is. And I believe that I am, I am not super bad at coaching, and I hear from quite many parents who say 'we're so happy that you are their coach'.* (Adam)

*It's just fun when people ask for help, then they somehow see that I have skills they lack or something they want to learn more about. Then I guess I have also succeeded as a person and I feel like 'okay, I'm good'. [...] You get confirmation.* (Erik)

All respondents furthermore believe that they possess certain knowledge, skills or previous experience that they can contribute with as coaches:

*I was almost waiting for the opportunity to be involved and engaged. I have played a lot of football, watch a lot of football, and I think I know football quite well.* (David)

*You get caught up in it very easily, see the development of the players, see how much fun they have, and bring what you got yourself when you played football, like 'I can do this a bit better'.* (Erik)



12 out of 13 respondents state that they, to various extent, have some sort of previous football experience that they can contribute with as coaches. However, some of the coaches instead put emphasis on other skills, such as administration skills, and have taken roles where they can contribute with their specific strengths:

*[...] my entry value for why I'm here, I know that I'm very good at organizing and administering. So I am definitely an administrative coach, I keep track of all registrations and such.* (Hanna)

*[...] you could help in different roles [...] you need some form of treasurer and you need some form of team leader, and out of these roles, [team leader] is definitely what I want to be, then I have the opportunity to play with kids, rather than just send out emails. So then I thought 'but I can imagine doing this'. [...] I have done that before in some way, and I also feel safe doing it.* (Fiona)

What characterizes all respondents is that development of the players is central for their engagement as coaches. Although they were not able to express it through the VFI form, the majority of the respondents did in fact emphasize that the individual development of every team member is one of their absolute biggest motivational functions. The authors furthermore identify a pattern that it is important for the coaches to feel like they contribute to the development of the players and the team:

*[...] it has become a project in a sense, where you want to be involved and make the team better and develop the players who are there and keep making them good... and I think we do.* (Daniel)

*[...] it's not long until I retire, but then I want to be able to say 'I have trained that person once' or 'I have also seen that player, or been in contact with and contributed to'.* (Gustaf)

The authors also found that some of the coaches believe that they will terminate their engagement when they feel that their knowledge is inadequate. Adam has been coaching the same team for eight years, but acknowledges that this year will probably be his last, as the players get older and better and need a coach with more extensive football expertise.

When asked what the response has been to them becoming coaches, the respondents state that they receive support and appreciation from the club and other parents. However, all respondents emphasize that appreciation and positive feedback is not essential for their continued engagement, although it is always nice to receive, as expressed by Bengt: *That's not why I'm doing this. I don't even expect a gift, or a drawing, I don't. With that being said, of course it is nice.* In contrast, some respondents express that negative feedback from the club or other parents makes them less motivated. David describes angry emails as the downside of being a coach:

*It can be a frustration, you feel like 'I'm stuck here training the kids, I don't get a penny for this and spend a lot of time driving children back and forth' and then, when you get angry emails, [...] it's frustrating.*

## 6 Analysis

The following section will, through the lens of the chosen theoretical framework, provide an analysis of the empirical material in order to answer the research question of what motivates people to engage voluntarily as coaches in Swedish football clubs. In line with what has been suggested by other researchers (von Essen & Wallman Lundåsen, 2016; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2004), a dynamic nature of the volunteer engagement became evident by the empirical material, which will be further discussed in relation to the theoretical framework under the subsections *Commencing the Voluntary Engagement* and *Continuing the Voluntary Engagement* respectively.

### 6.1 Commencing the Voluntary Engagement

#### 6.1.1 Reducing Feelings of Guilt

In line with what has previously been described by von Essen and Wallman Lundåsen (2016), all of the respondents mentioned some sort of desire to help or facilitate either their own child or the team as a whole, when asked to describe how their voluntary engagement as coach started. What the authors furthermore found is that this desire stemmed from an empathic concern for the children, in accordance with Batson and Shaw's empathy-altruism hypothesis (1991) and Madsen et al.'s theory of biological kinship (2007).

The respondents state that before commencing their voluntary engagement, they felt worried for, and compassionate with, the kids, due to the pressing threat of the shutdown of their football team. When the coaches experienced this suffering with the children in the team, including their own child, they felt empathic emotions for them, which eventually evoked motives for reducing that suffering by stepping up as coach. In accordance with what was explained in the theory section, their own child was the main recipient of the empathic concern, and thus the most important motive for becoming a coach.

Although their choice to accept the enquiry of becoming a coach was inherently benevolent, and some level of empathic emotion did indeed seem to be present in the decision, the respondents also showed signs of having swayed for egoistic incentives. In line with Cialdini et al.'s (1987) Negative-State Relief model, the respondents acknowledged that they experienced feelings of guilt and obligation in relation to the request, which could only be reduced by accepting it. As such, the empathy did not only result in a desire to help the children in the team,

but also in a strive to relieve the own suffering. In accordance with what is emphasized by Batson and Shaw (1991), however, the authors do not disregard the fact that the respondents may have acted under the influence of both purely altruistic and egoistic motives simultaneously. What could be interpreted by the empirical material, is that the purely altruistic motives are in most cases evoked by empathy for the *own* child, and a genuine strive to help them, whereas the more egoistic motives of reducing guilt and protecting your conscience are more concerned with *other* children and the team as a whole. The fact that both empathic and altruistic motives seem to coexist among the voluntary coaches, might give some explanation as to why the voluntary engagement in the sports sector differs a lot from other voluntary sectors in Sweden, in which the emotional and physical proximity to beneficiaries is not as great.

## 6.2 Continuing the Voluntary Engagement

As discussed under section 5.2, the authors in accordance with von Essen and Wallman Lundåsen (2016) found that the respondents gradually started to shift focus from others to themselves as their voluntary engagement proceeded. Although initially striving to help their own and other children, the role as coach eventually also became a mean for expressing their own interests and feeling good about themselves.

### 6.2.1 Contributing to the Society

Several other researchers within the field have found that altruism, community concern and the like seems to be at the center of volunteer motivation (Caldwell & Andereck, 1994; von Essen & Wallman Lundåsen, 2016; Knoke & Prensky, 1984; Smith, 1981). The authors of this study do not disagree with that, but through their research found a more complex dimension to the motive that is social contribution.

The study shows that whereas the motives for commencing a voluntary engagement appear to be constituted by both genuinely altruistic incentives, as defined by Batson and Shaw (1991), and egoistic incentives, in accordance with Cialdini et al. (1987), the latter seems to play a bigger part in why you choose to continue it. The empirics throughout show that perceived contribution to society is regarded as the main reason for why you choose to continue your voluntary engagement as a coach. The respondents emphasize the importance of their work in relation to the society as a whole, and state that it is motivating to feel that they are contributing

to a greater good. What many of them acknowledge, however, is that this altruistic behavior also affects themselves positively in the end. When describing how it makes them feel, they use words as *satisfied*, *great*, and *happy*, and furthermore name the feeling of contributing to the society as something that they get in exchange for their voluntary engagement. This clearly points to negative-state relief as an underlying motive for continuing the voluntary engagement. When there is no longer a perceived immediate threat posed on their child, as when the engagement is commenced, the altruistic concern seems to become more and more driven by egocentric motives.

### **6.2.2 Autonomous Working Conditions**

It is evident in the empirics that the coaches value freedom when managing their teams, some even stating that it is a precondition for their engagement. Many of the respondents stress the importance of free choice and self-regulation in a volunteer context particularly. Most of the volunteers believe that their clubs do provide this opportunity for choice and self-direction, which fosters an autonomy-supportive climate where intrinsic motivation is enhanced (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In line with what is suggested by Deci and Ryan (2000b), the coaches furthermore feel less motivated when the club imposes too much direction. However, in contrast to previous research findings stating that a sense of autonomy has to exist in order for feelings of competence to enhance intrinsic motivation, the authors found that in the studied context it seems as if feelings of autonomy will not enhance intrinsic motivation unless accompanied by a sense of competence. The respondents who lack competence do not express a need for autonomy, and welcome directions from the club.

### **6.2.3 Expression of Competence**

The majority of the respondents state that they have played football themselves previously in their lives, which seems to instill a sense of competence in their role as coach. This can be described by White (1959), who states that people want to feel competent in the activities in which they are involved, and Deci and Ryan (2000c) who suggest that people feel more motivated when they believe that they are mastering their environments. The authors found that the respondents who experience a lack of competence in coaching a team, instead have taken roles that are more familiar to them, where they can contribute with their knowledge. The coaches further express that their commitment results in a personal development through the

acquisition of new knowledge and skills. The respondents however emphasize that the development of individual players and the team as a whole is one of the main reasons for their continued involvement, while their personal development is secondary. Moreover, the authors noticed that the coaches want to feel like their competence is a contributing factor to this development. In accordance with what is stated in the theory section, acquiring new knowledge and skills, as well as having an effect on the environment and attaining desired outcomes within it, result in an enhanced intrinsic motivation to continue their engagement. The fact that some of the coaches acknowledge that they would most likely terminate their commitment when they no longer possess sufficient competence, further adds to the view that people want to feel competent and that they master the activities they engage in.

The respondents emphasize that positive feedback and appreciation from the club not is necessary for their continued engagement, although encouraging to receive. On the other hand, some respondents express that negative feedback from parents at times reduce their motivation. This can be explained by an increased versus decreased perceived competence with the coaches (Deci, 1975).

#### **6.2.4 Sense of Relatedness**

In line with Deci and Ryan's (2000b) findings, relatedness does not seem to be as strongly connected to the volunteers' intrinsic motivation as autonomy and competence. However, the authors found that although many of the respondents do not feel a strong connection to the club in general, a sense of relatedness does prevail in their specific teams. During their commitment, the coaches build personal relationships with other coaches as well as individual players in their teams, which many of the respondents regard as a contributing factor to their continued engagement. The majority of the coaches furthermore share an interest in football, which could contribute to the perceived enhanced connection between them and their colleagues, and thus instill a sense of belongingness. When describing their engagement, expressions such as *sense of community*, *sense of belonging* and *feeling of togetherness* are used, further confirming the view that they feel connected to the people they share their voluntary commitment with.

Lastly, as stated above, the respondents describe that it is encouraging to receive support and appreciation from the club. In line with what is suggested by Feeney and Thrush (2010), support and encouraging behavior do contribute to the establishment of a secure relational base, where intrinsic motivation is more likely to flourish.

## 7 Discussion

### 7.1 The Dynamic Nature of Volunteering

When trying to answer what motivates people to engage voluntarily as coaches in Swedish football clubs, the authors have encountered themes similar to those described in previous studies within the field (see sections 2.2-2.4). Motives along the lines of community concern, feeling needed and competent, and group belongingness are not, by themselves, unfamiliar in the literature on volunteer motivation. What the authors of this study have found, however, is that these seemingly distinctive motives are more fluent and contextual than what many other researchers have previously suggested. In the empirics, it was found that the reason for commencing the volunteer engagement, i.e. altruistic motives based on both empathic concern and egoistic incentives, gradually developed into more egoistic motives, accompanied by self-centered and fulfilling drives. The motives for becoming a coach thus develop into, and blend seamlessly with, the motives for continuing as a coach. Moreover, the respondents express that in absence of these egoistic motives for continuing the voluntary engagement, they would terminate it. Although self-explanatory to some extent, this might shed even more light on the different shapes that the motivational functions of the volunteer take throughout the course of the engagement.

This description of volunteering as a dynamic and progressive phenomenon share similarities with Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2004) concepts *collective* and *reflexive* – something that will be discussed further below.

### 7.2 On a Continuum Between Collective and Reflexive Volunteering

As stated under section 2.2, Hustinx and Lammertyn (2004) suggest that modernization processes enable the distinction of old and new types of volunteering, defined as collective and reflexive, and the clustering of four different types of volunteers within. The authors of this study have found features similar to the ones characterizing the different clusters, but whereas Hustinx and Lammertyn argue that cultural frames of reference and organizational environment predetermine which type of volunteer you are and remain, would like to argue that a volunteer constantly moves on a continuum between collective and reflexive throughout the engagement. When commencing the engagement as a coach, both collective and reflexive elements prevail,

and the volunteer is driven by societal expectations as well as a desire to protect the persona. Eventually, the engagement becomes more of a tool for personal development and self-esteem, and in line with the reflexive volunteer requires flexibility (autonomy) in the work. However, as the volunteer continues the engagement, personal bonds and the expression of belongingness, as characterized by the collective doctrine, become more and more important, and a more reliable relationship with the club takes shape. Would any of the motives, as described above, disappear for some reason, the volunteer would however become more distant and start to question the continued engagement.



## 8 Conclusion and Implications

### 8.1 Answer to Research Question

The purpose of this study was to explore and explain the motives underlying volunteer engagement for coaches in Swedish football clubs, by answering the research question:

*What motivates people to engage voluntarily as coaches in Swedish football clubs?*

The findings of this study support the notion of volunteer motivation as a dynamic phenomenon. This is based on the respondents' distinct motives for commencing versus continuing their engagement as coaches, and is a critical point of departure for considering the motivation over the course of their commitment.

What motivates the coaches to commence their engagement is a desire to help their own child and other children, accompanied by an aim to reduce feelings of guilt. Thus, the altruistic motives are based on both empathic concern and egoistic incentives, with a gradually increased emphasis on the latter. As the engagement proceeds, the motives become more and more focused on the self, and the engagement also becomes a mean for expressing the coaches' own interests and satisfying their own needs. These revolve around: choice and self-direction; to feel competent and to achieve results; and to have personal and meaningful relationships in the team. When the clubs provide an environment that supports these needs, the coaches experience an enhanced motivation. On the contrary, when the needs are thwarted, particularly competence and autonomy, the coaches experience poorer motivation and question their future engagement.

### 8.2 Contribution and Practical Implications

This study contributes empirically to the rather limited field of research on volunteer motivation in sports in Sweden. Based on the knowledge of what motivates people to engage voluntarily as coaches, clubs have to be flexible and provide an environment that supports rather than thwarts the coaches' motivation over the course of their engagement. The research further contributes to the existing knowledge by adding to the discourse on the changing nature of volunteer motivation. It also gives depth to the Self-Determination Theory, by applying it to a voluntary context and linking it to Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2004) collective and reflexive volunteers. The Volunteer Functions Inventory, a framework that is quantitative and objective in its nature,

was furthermore used in a qualitative and subjective manner to structure the interview guide and the empirics. This, in order to demonstrate the interconnections that exist between the many and disparate theories on the complex phenomenon that is volunteer motivation.

### 8.3 Limitations and Future Research

The authors acknowledge that the theoretical framework presented is not collectively exhaustive in respect to the empirical material, and would like to emphasize that another set of theories presumably would have yielded a different discussion and conclusion. Due to the nature and scope of the thesis, some themes evident by the empirical material which can be of interest to research within the field are not explained by the chosen theoretical framework.

As a complement to this research, it would be of interest to study the coaches who have already terminated their engagement, in order to obtain a complete picture of their commitment from beginning to end and thus gain a deeper understanding of their motivation during the entire period. Although being presented with some hypotheses of what would make the coaches in the sample end their engagement, there are great limitations to studying what has not yet occurred.

As shown in the five national population studies conducted in the period 1992-2014, the share of volunteers involved in the sports sector has declined (von Essen et al., 2015). In 2019, a sixth population study was conducted and the results will be accessible after publication. Further studies about volunteer engagement within this field, including the motivation of volunteer coaches, will be of even greater importance if the study shows that the downward trend continues. However, new trends that have emerged during the period might call for other studies in the field of voluntary work.

## 9 References

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## 10 Appendices

### 10.1 Interview Guide

#### *Ethical Considerations*

- *Your participation in the academic study is voluntarily*
- *You and your club will be anonymized throughout the study*
- *You as a participant can at any time terminate the interview or refrain from answering questions without explaining why*
- *Do we have your permission to record the interview, in order to later on transcribe it?*
- *Do you have any questions for us before we begin?*

#### *Introduction*

1. **Could you start by telling us a bit about yourself?**
  - a. Age?
2. **Which team(s) are you currently coaching?**
3. **Do you have any sports background of your own?**
4. **Do you have a child/children who is/are active in the club?**
5. **How many hours a week do you spend on your voluntary work as coach?**
6. **Are you/have you been engaged voluntarily in anything else?**

#### *Main Section*

7. **Could you tell us a bit about how you ended up here?**
  - a. How did your voluntary engagement begin?
  - b. For how long have you been working voluntarily here?
8. **Why did you start working here voluntarily?**
  - a. Did any reasons carry more weight?
  - b. Which was the most important one, and why?
9. **What is your connection to this club?**
10. **How would you describe the sense of community in this club?**
  - a. Is it important for your role as voluntary coach?
11. **What motivates you to continue working here?**
  - a. Do any reasons carry more weight?
  - b. Which is the most important one, and why?
12. **Does the result (in games etc.) affect your motivation as coach?**
13. **Have you ever thought about quitting?**
  - a. If yes, what was the reason for that?
14. **What do you contribute with as coach?**
15. **What do you get in exchange for your voluntary work?**

- 16. How does your voluntary engagement make you feel?**
- a. Do you feel like you are doing an important effort for the society?
- 17. Do you develop from working voluntarily?**
- a. If yes, in what way?
- 18. Do you as a voluntary coach get to decide freely over your work (tournaments, practices etc.)?**
- a. What is your attitude towards this?
- 19. Have you ever felt any obligation or pressure to work voluntarily?**
- a. If yes, why?
- 20. Do you have many people in your surroundings/circle of friends who are working voluntarily?**
- a. In what way do you feel that it affects you?
- 21. What kind of appreciation do you get from the club?**
- a. What is your attitude towards it?
  - b. Is it a determinant for your continued engagement within the club?
- 22. How do you picture your future involvement in this club?**
- a. For how long do you think you will stay?
    - i. Why?
  - b. Which role/position do you think you will have then?

*Conclusion*

23. *[Ranking – VFI form]*
24. Is there anything you would like to add, or anything you feel that we forgot to ask about?
25. If we would like to get in contact with you henceforth, how can we do that?

## 10.2 Volunteer Functions Inventory Form

Rank the following motivational functions by how much they contribute to why you are voluntarily engaged as a coach from 1-6 (where 1 represents the most contributing function and 6 the least).

### **Values**

I feel it is important to help others

---

### **Understanding**

Volunteering lets me learn things and gain new perspectives about myself, others and the cause for which I am working

---

### **Enhancement**

Volunteering increases my self-esteem and makes me feel important

---

### **Career**

Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work

---

### **Social**

People I know share an interest in voluntary work

---

### **Protective**

Volunteering is a good escape from my everyday life and/or my own troubles

---

*Based on:* Clary, E. G. & Snyder, M., (1999). The Motivations to Volunteer: Theoretical and Practical Considerations. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8(5), pp.156-159.



### 10.3 Interviews

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>
Adam	44:24	02-18-2020	In person
August	28:39	02-26-2020	In person
Bengt	26:43	02-19-2020	In person
Benjamin	31:38	02-18-2020	In person
Carl	90:55	02-21-2020	In person
Daniel	25:02	03-16-2020	Telephone
David	29:41	02-23-2020	In person
Dennis	22:45	03-16-2020	Telephone
Erik	55:10	03-04-2020	In person
Fay	21:35	03-18-2020	Telephone
Fiona	44:03	03-13-2020	Telephone
Gustaf	47:03	03-16-2020	Telephone
Hanna	22:00	03-18-2020	Telephone