Volunteering Abroad: A Career-Related Analysis of Self-Initiated Development Aid Workers

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Abstract

In order to understand the career specificities of international development workers as a subgroup of self-initiated expatriates the protean career concept was used to assist the analysis of a number of career-related issues such as for instance work values and attitudes, learning orientation and career mobility. The 123 development aid workers participating in an online survey were not only altruistically motivated but also showed self-serving interests and motives. The majority managed its career independently and was guided by personal values in decisions regarding their professional life. As continuous learners they were organizationally mobile and highly adaptable to new working environments.
INTRODUCTION

While employees who are sent abroad by their international companies have been the focus of scholars researching expatriation for several decades, more empirical evidence about the group of those who gather international work experience under their own initiative as well as theoretical substantiation is still needed. The group of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) is comparably much more diverse as compared with assigned expatriates (AEs) in terms of demographic background and motivation to work abroad (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Richardson & McKenna, 2002) and employing organizations so that several subgroups of SIEs need to be formed (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). However, the vast majority of existing studies about SIEs as well as AEs concerns employees in the private sector with a lack of studies in non-profit organizations. In general, the literature on global mobility outside MNCs is relatively sparse (Toomey & Brewster, 2008) although bodies such as the UN or OECD as well as a number of NGOs, charities and religious organizations employ people on a global scale (Brewster, Dickmann, & Sparrow, 2008).

The focus of this study is on volunteer international development workers. International development workers bear characteristics of both AEs and SIEs, with more similarities with SIEs so that they can be seen to constitute one of the subgroups of SIEs. Nevertheless, there are also substantial differences between international volunteers and other expatriates, thus limiting the significance of existing expatriate literature for the context of development assistance. To sum up, development workers are an under-researched group (Hudson & Inkson, 2006) and it is difficult to make assumptions about them based on studies exploring expatriation and volunteerism separately.

Volunteering is defined in sociology as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause” (Wilson, 2000: 215). According to the German Volunteer Law, a development worker is an individual working in a developing country for a
state-approved provider of development assistance. The development worker’s service is provided without any prospect of monetary gain (AKLHUE, 2003). As in practice, international volunteers usually receive some remuneration for their work; however, it is considerably below the market value of their services. Thus, they are also referred to as “quasi-volunteers” (Smith, 1981).

Most of the literature concerning international development assistance focuses on the issues of purpose, form and effectiveness of development aid while the people working in this area often remain overlooked. However, the ability to identify and recruit the right people for the task and place them in the right projects is crucial for the success of international development aid (MacLachlan & Carr, 1999). Thus, knowledge about international volunteers is much-needed; not only for development aid agencies. More insight into the profile of a development worker would also benefit potential future employers back in the home country since they would be enabled to get a better picture of the job candidate, which in turn facilitates the decision how to leverage the special skills in the organizational context.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to contribute empirical data about international volunteers in terms of their demographic characteristics, motivation to go abroad and a number of career-related issues such as career attitudes and behaviors, learning orientation and career mobility as well as career success. The construct of the protean career (Hall, 1996, 2002) will be used as theoretical framework for the analysis.

The chapter is organized as follows: review of the issues of international volunteering with a particular focus on motivation and the protean career followed by the presentation of the hypotheses. After an outline of the sample and measures, the findings are presented and discussed. Finally practical implications of the research and suggestions for further research are given and conclusions are drawn.
INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING AND EXPATRIATION

International volunteering of development workers involves a kind of expatriation, i.e. a “process of an individual moving to live in a different country” (Brewster, 2002: 84). Literature on expatriation distinguishes between assigned expatriates, i.e. employees of an internationally operating enterprise who work and temporarily reside in a foreign country (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2008), and self-initiated expatriates, i.e. individuals who, usually, voluntarily terminate their employment in the home country, relocate abroad on their own initiative (Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997) and are hired under host country contracts (Crowley-Henry, 2007). The notion of self-initiated expatriation has also been applied to international volunteers (Fee & Gray, 2011; Hudson & Inkson, 2006).

Based on the criteria proposed by Andresen, Bergdolt and Margenfeld in this book (2012) to demarcate the three groups of SIEs, AEs and migrants, i.e. executing work abroad, mode of employment, decision of employment and initiative, international development aid workers show similarities to key characteristics of both company-assigned and self-initiated foreign experiences. As volunteering abroad is defined as a kind of work that is executed within the terms of a legal contract, development workers can be considered as expatriates. Although development aid workers most likely are the primary initiators of their international work experience, there is a major involvement of organizational control. Potential international volunteers are “selected, assigned, socialised, supervised and de-briefed” (Hudson & Inkson, 2006: 307) by sending organizations and their partner agencies abroad. Thus, due to the involvement of both the individual and the organization, international volunteers can be placed somewhere between the AEs and SIEs.

This is also corroborated when considering additional characteristics. Although the goals are primarily defined by the organization, it cannot be denied that development workers
also have stark personal motives to engage in international development assistance (Rehberg, 2005). In contrast to SIEs, international volunteers usually get cultural adjustment training and some kind of financial support for their relocation expenses by their sending organizations (AGEH, 2011; GIZ, 2011). Additionally, although development workers have only temporary contracts with their sending organizations, major organizations offer assistance upon their return in terms of individual career counseling, occupational orientation seminars or scholarships for vocational further qualification (AGdD, 2011).

In regard to individual background variables, similarities between international volunteers and SIEs can be expected. On the one hand, sending organizations require development workers to have a completed vocational training and several years of work experience (AKLHUE, 2011). On the other hand, there are also volunteer programs especially designed for young people, which enable school leavers to find international volunteer opportunities (BMZ, 2010). Thus, the group of development workers will be heterogeneous in nature as related to age, gender, education and career stage (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) as opposed to expatriates assigned by their companies, which usually turn to male, older and more experienced employees (Brookfield, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Unlike AEs and more compatible with SIEs, development workers do not work for financial gain. Moreover, as they change from first-world to third-world and often also from urban to rural areas, they also experience greater cross-cultural transitions (Hudson, 2004; Hudson & Inkson, 2006). Their willingness to relocate to an underdeveloped country is a significant distinctive feature since assigned expatriate research indicates a clear preference for developed, politically stable and safe countries (Thorn, 2009). Table 1 summarizes and contrasts the key features.

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Insert Table 1 about here
MOTIVATION FOR VOLUNTEERING

When people are asked to give reasons for their volunteer activity a number of studies show that altruistic motives, such as the desire to help others, concern for the less fortunate and compassion toward people in need, predominate (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Independent Sector, 2001; Payne, 2001; Pearce, 1993). These findings suggest that altruism is the essence of volunteering. However, tangible or intangible benefits, such as personal growth, prestige, obtaining skills for a desired future job, interpersonal relations and keeping taxes down also appear to be driving forces behind volunteering (Smith, 1981; see also Allen & Rushton, 1983; Pearce, 1993). There is also empirical evidence suggesting that while altruism seems to be the initial motivation to enter a volunteer career, volunteers seem to base their decision to continue volunteering on the ratio of costs and benefits involved in their work (Bierhoff, 2002; Pearce, 1993).

A substantial body of literature emphasizes that volunteering is multi-motivational in nature (Bierhoff, 2002; Clary et al., 1996; Pearce, 1993; Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Six functions potentially served by volunteerism are identified, with values (express or act on important values like humanitarianism), understanding (learn more about the world or exercise skills that are often unused), enhancement (grow and develop psychologically) as typically the more dominant ones followed by career (gaining career-related experience), social (strengthen social relationships) and protective (reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or address personal problems) as less important functions (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Clary et al., 1998). Additionally, a suggestion is put forward that the ‘value’ motivation plays a significant role in the decision to volunteer while other reasons are likely to influence the kind of activity volunteers engage in (Clary et al., 1996).

The few existing studies on motivation of international development workers suggest a combination of motives which can be attributed to the functions ‘values’, ‘enhancement’,
‘career’ and ‘social’ (Hudson, 2004; Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2009; Rehberg, 2005; Unstead-Joss, 2008).

Other studies on volunteer motivation (e.g. Bierhoff, 2002; Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Independent Sector, 2001; Payne, 2001; Smith, 1994; Wilson, 2000) confirm the findings of Clary et al. (1998) and yield some additional motives. Especially worth mentioning in the context of this study is the fact that religious beliefs of an individual also play a motivational role (Bierhoff, 2002; Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Payne, 2001). This leads to:

**Hypothesis 1.** International development workers have multiple motives for volunteering abroad.

**CAREERS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AID WORKERS AND CAREER MOBILITY**

Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989: 8) define career as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experience over time”. Despite focusing on work experience it does not limit careers to paid work (Inkson, 2007). Hall (2002) stresses the subjective perspective and claims that career per se does not necessarily implicate vertical advancement, success, or failure and that the latter two are best assessed subjectively by career actors themselves. He assumes that career is constituted of behaviors and attitudes associated with work-related experiences and activities. As a result, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of careers, not only external, i.e. observable career choices and behavior, but also internal aspects of career, such as values, attitudes, and motives, have to be considered. Very apposite for the study of development workers is Hall’s (1996, 2002) concept of the protean career since individuals exhibiting a protean career attitude base their career decisions on personal values, needs and search for self-fulfillment. Protean career actors also view their work in the
context of life as a whole and rely on themselves for professional progression. Based on the line of argumentation, it is assumed that

Hypothesis 2. The majority of international volunteers display a protean career attitude.

As the notion of career includes attitudes and behaviors, the following hypotheses assess whether the protean career attitude results in corresponding action.

Hall (2002) argues that due to increased complexity in the current work environment, instead of a single life-long career cycle, contemporary careers increasingly resemble a series of many, two to four years lasting learning cycles. Within each learning cycle the individual passes through “yet smaller cycles of goal setting, effort, psychological success, and identity change” (Hall & Chandler, 2005). The protean careerist repackages “his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities to fit the changing work environment in order to remain marketable” (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009: 1544). In a study with 528 international volunteers, Koch and Widmaier (2006) found that the participants had an above average general education and professional qualification. Almost half of the study participants had two occupations. These facts indicate that development workers are perpetual learners who are motivated for further occupational training. This leads to:

Hypothesis 3. International volunteers have a high level of formal education and engage frequently in further qualification measures.

Although a new learning cycle does not necessarily bring about a drastic career transformation involving an occupational change or a change of employer, individuals with protean careers are expected to exhibit greater career mobility. The change in values, personal needs as well as the continuous learning orientation and search for challenging job assignments is likely to cause a person to make career changes from time to time.
Professionally skilled individuals with a continuous learning attitude know that their knowledge and skills are valued in the external job market and they will be loyal to an organization only as long as they feel that that particular organization offers them the best opportunity for professional development at that particular point in time (Crowley-Henry, 2007). This fact could lead to higher organizational mobility. However, literature is inconclusive on this issue and it is suggested that protean career attitude and organizational mobility may correlate but a protean careerist does not have to be constantly on the move (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006).

Feldman and Ng (2007) distinguish three kinds of career mobility: Occupational mobility refers to changes that entail a new work environment and require fundamentally new skills, training and vocational preparation. An occupational change is usually only possible after a period of occupational re-training. Job mobility implies a transition in work responsibilities or change in hierarchical levels while the career actor remains in his or her original occupational field. Examples for job changes are transfers to other departments or promotions. Job changes can take place within an organization or can also be accompanied by a change of employer, i.e. organizational mobility. Coppin and Vandenbrande (2007) reported a positive relationship between international mobility and voluntary employer change intentions. This leads to the assumption that

*Hypothesis 4. International development workers have a high (a) occupational, (b) job and (c) organizational mobility.*

According to the protean career theory, people interpret career success in individual terms of their central values. Therefore, the subjective career success (e.g. satisfaction with overall career achievements, progress of income, career advancement, skill development, and the job, organizational commitment, professional identification; Feldman & Ng, 2007;
Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Steinbereithner, 2006; Valcour & Tolbert, 2003) rather than the objective aspect of career success (e.g. salary (growth), frequency of promotion, occupational status; Heslin, 2005) is the main driving force behind career development of a protean careerist. De Vos and Soens (2008) found a positive relation between protean career attitude and career satisfaction, which leads to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5. International development workers have a high subjective career satisfaction.

METHODS

Sample Characteristics

The target group of the study are development aid workers who are/were employed at different German non-profit organizations that work closely with the federal government or are founded and sponsored by religious organizations. Study participants were either currently on or had recently returned from their international assignments. Some individuals were not compensated at all while others were reimbursed for their cost-of-living and premiums for social insurance. We chose an online survey as they are better suited to be sent to expatriates in various countries (Dillman, 2000). Potential participants were contacted via e-mail or posts in topic-related forums and on sending organizations’ walls on online social networks.

One hundred and twenty-three individuals were recruited. There were more women (49 men, 70 women, 4 unreported) and singles (49.6% single, 42.3% married /having a partner, 8.1% divorced /separated). Male development workers were more likely to have children than females. The age on departure ranged from 18 to 56 resulting in a mean age of 30.89 years (SD = 9.14). It was the first position in a foreign country for 27 participants in the sample and the remaining 94 volunteers showed a median number of foreign positions of 4.
At the time of the survey in 2011, the international volunteers (107 German, 14 foreign, 2 unreported nationality) spent on average three years abroad with the length of assignment ranging from 6 months to 12 years ($M = 2.99; SD = 2.62$). The majority of those having a family were accompanied by their spouse (54.2%) and children (76.2%) to the host country. Prior to the foreign assignment, most of the study participants were either pupils/students (31.6%), full-time (38.2%) or self-employed (8.8%) while approximately one in ten volunteers was without a job (11.8%). The remaining volunteers were either part-time employed, on vocational further training (4.4% each) or housewife/husband (0.7%).

**Instruments and Measures**

**Motives to volunteer.** To assess the volunteer motivation, twelve motives grouped into three categories ("Achieving something positive for others", "Quest for the new", "Quest for oneself") developed by Rehberg (2005) were adopted. Sample items included “Helping, giving, doing good”, “Becoming acquainted with new cultures” and “Professional orientation, clarification, and development”. We used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = to no extent, 5 = to a great extent). A factor analysis with varimax rotation carried out with the present study sample identified three factors with eigenvalues higher than one which accounted for 52.7% of the total variance. The produced factors exactly matched the category pattern suggested by Rehberg. Moreover, participants were given opportunity to add own motives to the list.

**Protean career attitude.** Career attitude was measured using the 14-item Protean Career Attitude Scale developed by Briscoe et al. (2006), which consists of the subscales Self-Directed Career Management (e.g. “Overall, I have a very independent, self-directed career”; $\alpha = .81$) and Values-Driven Scale (e.g. “I'll follow my own conscience if my company asks me to do something that goes against my values”; $\alpha = .75$). A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “to little or no extent” to 5 “to a great extent” was used.
Career mobility. To assess career mobility we used three items to measure occupational, job and organizational mobility (Feldman & Ng, 2007). Additionally, the reason of career changes (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Taris & Feij, 1999) and job tenure were assessed.

Subjective career success. Subjective career success was assessed with five items concerning overall career success (“I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career”) and satisfaction with some selected aspects of career (e.g. “I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income”) (Greenhaus et al., 1990: 86) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale yields $\alpha = 0.80$.

Control variables and other information. As control variables, age at the beginning of the assignment, gender, level of education, employment status and income as an indicator of objective career success were captured.

RESULTS

In Figure 1 motives for the volunteer engagement of development aid assignees are summarized. The reasons within the category “Achieving something positive for others” are primarily altruistic in nature. The category “Quest for the new” covers causes that relate to the desire to get to know new cultures and people as well as learn foreign languages. The last motives are connected with issues of personal and career development and belong to the category “Quest for oneself” (Rehberg, 2005).

The majority of respondents report being considerably or greatly motivated by the ‘interest in new cultures’. Additionally, almost 80% of development workers expect an opportunity to ‘gain experience’ and ‘advance themselves’. The wish to ‘do something useful’
and ‘achieve or change something’ also seems to play a very important role in the decision to volunteer abroad. ‘Professional orientation and development’ is also among the most common reasons.

In Hypothesis 1 diversity of motives was hypothesized. Only four individuals report altruistic reasons as the primary driving force behind their international volunteering. Surprisingly, there are also nine individuals who do not attach much value to altruistic causes but indicate being rather motivated by ‘personal and professional development’ issues and motives ascribed to the category "Quest for the new". Additional motives reported were for instance ‘seeing for oneself’ and ‘working towards global justice’. A few respondents got engaged in international volunteering due to lack of employment opportunities in their home country. For one development worker, the foreign assignment was associated with a high-level job which he could not get in Germany given his low work experience. Similar to that, another participant states that foreigners from developed countries are closer to national decision and opinion makers, which makes them more important than they would have been in their home country. A number of foreign assignees report being motivated by their religious conviction. In general, the great majority of participants indicate varied motivation. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is fully supported.

The hypotheses 2-4 aim at examining the protean career attitude and some selected aspects of career behavior of international volunteers. In Hypothesis 2 it was postulated that the majority of development workers would exhibit a protean career attitude. Figure 2 shows the scatter plot of scale means and the allocation to the corresponding career attitude group, as developed by Briscoe & Hall (2006). A small but significant positive correlation (r = .409; p < .000) between the scales was observed. It emerges that 76.7% of international volunteers are values-driven and self-directed in their career decisions and thus, have a protean career attitude. Only three individuals (2.6%) belong to the group of dependent careerists who rely
on their employer for career progression and do not set own priorities for their career. 7.8% can be regarded as ‘rigid’, i.e. being very values-driven in their career but lacking adaptability skills, which results in inability to fully shape one’s career. 12.9% show a reactive career orientation, i.e. they adapt well to new working environments in terms of performance and learning demands but are not guided by personal values in their career decisions. Nevertheless, the majority of those with a rigid, dependent and reactive career attitude show a tendency toward the protean orientation. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

In Hypothesis 3 it was predicted that international volunteers have a high level of formal education and frequently engage in further professional qualification measures. Figure 3 features information on general education and vocational training of volunteers as well as their further professional training patterns. Compared to Germany’s general population, the proportion of formally highly educated people among development workers is very high (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2010). Additionally, almost 80% of international volunteers take measures to advance their professional qualification at least once a year; a behavior that is in line with the protean career attitude. In this context, measures were defined as both formal learning, such as taking part in seminars, and independent learning of new skills, such as e-learning, reading journals relevant for one’s profession etc. As a result, Hypothesis 3 is fully supported.

Hypothesis 4 postulated high career mobility levels of international volunteers. Table 2 summarizes relevant information regarding the issue.
Occupational mobility obviously involves the highest degree of change since this kind of shift requires fundamentally new skills. According to the job mobility indices developed by the Danish Technological Institute, Germany’s occupational mobility index is 0.06 (ranging from 0 to 1 with 1 indicating the highest mobility rate) and ranks among the last three European countries (Andersen, Haahr, Hansen, & Holm-Pedersen, 2008) suggesting that occupational changes are not very common. In the current sample, more than half of development aid workers have three or more different occupations. This indicates an above-average occupational mobility as well as willingness and ability to invest in further vocational training. The finding supports Hypothesis 4a.

With respect to job mobility, the study participants have been on average 11.9 years in the labor force and over 65% of them report at least three job changes. As job changes not necessarily do but can entail organizational changes, a high organizational mobility would provide additional support for Hypothesis 4b. The study participants have worked for a mean of four different employers, which results in average job tenure of approximately three years, whereas the job tenure of Germany’s general population is at an average of 10.8 years (IAB, 2010). To sum up, the study results provide evidence supporting Hypothesis 4c and, following the previous line of argumentation, potentially also Hypothesis 4b. Taking all factors into account, it should be safe to assume that – compared to the general population – the study participants exhibit a high overall career mobility. Additionally, it is important to note that in the current sample, the lion’s share of career transitions was at least partially initiated by international volunteers themselves while forced mobility was the exception rather than the rule (see Table 2).
With respect to subjective career satisfaction the overall mean scores (see Figure 4) suggest that the study participants are reasonably satisfied, however, it differs by aspect of career being considered and current employment status. Respondents were least satisfied with ‘income’. The overall expectancy value of monthly income, which is also a measure of objective career success, is €1,825. If the groups of self-, full- and part-time employed are taken together and analyzed separately from other employment status groups, the value rises to €2,417. The average income per month in Germany was €3,074 in 2009 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010). Volunteers are most satisfied with their ‘skill development progress’. This finding supports the assumption that study participants would exhibit a continuous learning orientation.

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant gender differences except for the level of satisfaction with the progress made toward achieving ‘overall career goals’ with female international volunteers reporting a significantly higher satisfaction (Md_m = 4, Md_f = 4; p < .05). A correlation analysis indicated no relationship between age or number of years in labor force and career satisfaction.

If current employment status is controlled for, a cross-tabulation analysis with Pearson’s Chi-square test for significance (see Figure 4) showed that full-time employed and students are the most satisfied with ‘overall career success’ and with the degree of progress made toward meeting personal ‘goals for advancement’ and ‘income’ while those in vocational further qualification are comparably discontent with all of the three areas. Unemployed are rather dissatisfied with their ‘overall career success’ and people currently managing households as their main occupation indicate little satisfaction with the progress
made toward achieving their ‘goals for advancement’ and ‘income’. As a result, support for Hypothesis 5 is partially found.

**DISCUSSION**

In relation to demographic characteristics, international volunteers closely resemble the group of SIEs. In contrast to company-mediated expatriation, the field of international development assistance offers more women, younger people and singles the opportunity to gain international experience; however, the majority of those having a partner and children are accompanied by their families.

International development workers were moved by multiple motives which are not only altruistic. They exhibit a strong ‘desire to serve others’ and the vast majority also show interest in ‘internationalism’ as well as ‘personality development’ and ‘professional advancement’. The finding that a number of international volunteers report being motivated by their religious conviction complies with the volunteer literature (Lukka & Locke, 2000) and fits into the concept of the protean career which postulates that career decisions will be values-driven.

The majority of international volunteers exhibited a protean career attitude that resulted in corresponding career behavior. First, development assistance usually entails time-limited project work in an international context, which resembles the contemporary notion of work (Hudson, 2004) in international corporations. Second, international volunteers of the current study have a high level of formal education and over three-fourths of them engage in further vocational qualification at least once a year in order to adapt to new working conditions and remain marketable in a competitive environment. International volunteers can be seen to be self-directed in career management and are likely to seek out organizations.
where they can perform personally meaningful work and have an opportunity for continuous learning and skill development.

Accordingly, the study participants displayed high career mobility and most of career transitions were fully or partially initiated by international volunteers themselves. These findings indicate an autonomous and proactive attitude toward one’s career. Moreover, international assignees’ willingness to cross not only organizational but also national boundaries is a sign of ability to adjust to unfamiliar settings.

Although a high level of subjective career satisfaction was postulated based on the presumption that discontentment with current working conditions would be addressed with adequate career transitions, the overall level of career satisfaction was not high and it varied by aspect of career under consideration and especially by the current employment status with those currently unemployed or in full-time further vocational training reporting lower levels of satisfaction. These outcomes reflect Hall and Chandler’s (2005) reasoning that over the course of one’s working life a career actor’s self-confidence can fluctuate. A protean career is seen as a series of learning cycles and, particularly at the beginning of a new career cycle, individuals face temporary setbacks and failures, which can lead to temporary lower levels of career satisfaction.

In light of the fact that international volunteers engage in development work without any prospect of monetary gain, one could be inclined to think that to these individuals the income component is rather secondary when it comes to career satisfaction. Yet, respondents regard their income level to be an inherent part of their overall career success and income is the aspect of career they are least satisfied with. International volunteers who were content with the achievement of their ‘goals for income’ tended also to report higher satisfaction levels with their ‘overall career success’ ($r = .431; p < .001$) and with the extent to which they felt their ‘overall career goals’ ($r = .475; p < .001$) were met. Considering the fact that the
selected group is very well educated, an above-average income could be expected. However, compared to the population’s average, the study participants are an under-paid group. Hence, from an objective point of view on career success, international volunteers have not been very successful. Possible explanations for this fact are that, first, non-profit organizations often pay less than profit-oriented organizations (Warren, 2008) and, second, the higher share of women in the study sample combined with a potentially lower pay level (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010) is likely to result in a lower average income.

**Implications for Practice**

The results of the motivation analysis allow a number of practice implications for development aid agencies and other non-profit organizations. In order to have a competitive advantage in a situation of “increased competition between these organizations for the limited resources available” (Dolnicar & Randle, 2007: 350), organizations need to provide opportunities for personal growth and professional development, so that international volunteers are enabled to balance altruistic service to others with self-oriented interests and motives such as self-development goals (Lips-Wiersma, 2002).

Implications for potential employers of former international volunteers are threefold. First, international volunteers can be described as very well-educated and adaptable individuals who can be expected to have a set of transferable skills due to their organizational and international mobility. The vast majority of them fit the description of a protean career actor. For organizations that are looking for independent, competent and proficient employees as temporary resources for projects of limited duration returned volunteers might be a good option to consider. Second, the study participants exhibited a high and in most cases self-initiated job and organizational mobility, which indicates that they are more loyal to their personal needs and development goals than to their employing organization. Corporations that
strive to retain this kind of employees need to emphasize individual career planning (Briscoe, Hoobler, & Byle, 2010) and will have to support them (Biemann & Andresen, 2010) by offering opportunities for continuous personal growth and enhancement of work-related knowledge and skills. Third, since international volunteers are value-oriented in their career decisions and most of them demonstrated a desire to serve others it is to be expected that they tend to “asses how the organization as a whole is serving others” (Lips-Wiersma, 2002: 394) and will be more likely to work for socially responsible businesses.

Finally, despite the fact that international volunteers worked in the non-profit sector, they regard their income to be an inherent part of career and it is also the aspect where they see the most room for improvement if compared to other components of career satisfaction. Therefore, organizations should also consider financial incentives as part of the package offered to their employees.

Limitations

Most of the study participants are German which limits the cross-national generalizability of the results. Additionally, given the self-report nature of the data, social desirability bias may compromise the accuracy of responses. Moreover, the results could also be distorted by selection effects. More than half of the participants were recruited via Foerderungswerk, an organization that is concerned with professional reintegration of former development workers and offers help with vocational orientation and further development upon return. Not all returned international volunteers use the services of the organization so that there is a possibility that a disproportionate number of individuals specifically interested in further vocational training were contacted. Finally, self-selection bias may also jeopardize the generalizability of results.
Implications for Future Research

As empirical evidence on international volunteers is lacking, a number of directions for future research can be suggested. First, further studies across nationally diverse samples are needed in order to establish generalizability of the results. Second, the field would benefit if a more comprehensive international volunteering motivation inventory was developed. For example, religious conviction has been shown to play a motivational role and Hudson (2004: 172) stresses the importance of the right timing in terms of the “assignment fitting a particular career and life stage”. Little is known about the adjustment process of development workers in the host country. This issue is of particular interest since they experience a higher degree of change as compared to other expatriates. Moreover, more longitudinal analysis is needed to explore the long-term impact of the foreign experience on volunteers with regard to personality growth, skill development and career.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at providing an insight into the profile of an international development aid worker, thus attempting to fill the gap in the literature on expatriation. Particular emphasis was placed on demographic characteristics, motivation to volunteer in the international context as well as a number of career-related factors. As expected based on the results of other studies (Lough et al., 2009; Rehberg, 2005), the percentage of female expatriates in development assistance is much higher than in traditional organizational foreign assignments. Over two-thirds of the study population were aged between 20 and 40. In line with expectations, the overall gender and age structure resembles that of SIEs. A number of altruistic motives coupled with more self-centered goals such as desire for personal growth and professional advancement as well as interest in new cultures appeared to be the driving force behind the decision to engage in voluntary work abroad. The majority of study
participants exhibited a protean career attitude. A high degree of fit between the protean career ideal and development workers’ career behavior was revealed. The majority of international assignees were very learning-oriented individuals who are in charge of their own career. The fact that respondents were organizationally and internationally mobile is a sign of willingness and ability to adapt to unfamiliar settings. Not all of them are satisfied with all aspects of their career, however, the findings on subjective career satisfaction show parallels to issues discussed in the protean career literature. Thus, it can be concluded that the research participants fit the description of a protean careerist.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared areas</th>
<th>Assigned expatriates</th>
<th>Self-initiated expatriates</th>
<th>International development workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Company and possibly individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision of employment</td>
<td>Decision is made by home country organization</td>
<td>Decision is made by host country organization</td>
<td>Decision is made by home country organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals/Motives</td>
<td>Personal and professional motives with a dominance of organization-related goals</td>
<td>Personal and professional motives with a dominance of personal goals</td>
<td>Personal motives as well as sending organization and local partner agency goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual background</td>
<td>Traditionally male, well educated, advanced age and career stage</td>
<td>Heterogeneous with regard to gender, age, education and career stage</td>
<td>Heterogeneous with regard to gender, age, education and career stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding/Compensation</td>
<td>Company salary, overseas allowances</td>
<td>Personal savings, local company salary</td>
<td>Varies depending on organization; personal savings, allowances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repatriation</td>
<td>Promise of a similar level job</td>
<td>Usually no prearrangement</td>
<td>Repatriation assistance funded by sending organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Comparison of characteristic features of different international employees
## Occupational mobility (N = 122)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of people with</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one occupation or currently in</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two occupations</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three occupations</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reason for occupational change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>own initiative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external influence</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Job mobility (N = 120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of people with</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no job changes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one job change</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two job changes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three job changes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four job changes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five job changes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reason for job change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>own initiative</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external influence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not reported</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Organizational mobility (N = 122)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of organizations worked for</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Number of organizational changes as a result of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>own initiative</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>termination of contract by</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employer</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mutual agreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Number of years in labor force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>current sample</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general population</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Average job tenure in years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divided by gender*</th>
<th>2.25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Divided by age***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0.53</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 20</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥50</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Career mobility of international volunteers
### Motives to volunteer abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping, giving, doing good</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving or changing something</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being geared to ethical values</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling useful, doing something useful</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming acquainted with new cultures</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing something different, getting away</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting deeply acquainted with a new culture</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting new people, making new friends</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning or using foreign languages</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining experience, advancing oneself</td>
<td>4.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional orientation and development</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering or transcending personal limits</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1:** Motives to volunteer abroad
Figure 2: Career attitudes of international volunteers
Figure 3: General education, vocational training and frequency of engagement in further qualification.
Note: Asterisks refer to the level of significance: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Figure 4: Level of satisfaction with selected aspects of career by employment status