



HOW CAN WE MAKE YOU STAY? IDENTIFYING MOTIVATING FACTORS TO VOLUNTEER RETENTION IN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

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Many non-profit organizations depend on volunteers to provide services to their clients thus helping to alleviate some of the costs and financial burdens non-profits face. A volunteer's motivation and satisfaction drivers are varied thus making the task of attracting and retaining volunteers a difficult one. Since volunteers are a vital part of any non-profit and volunteer supported organization, retention initiatives are crucial to the organization's success. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of organizational support, group integration, empowerment and participation efficacy on volunteer satisfaction and retention. Over 100 volunteers, from a Central Florida organization, were surveyed to: 1) measure their motivating factors and satisfaction with various aspects of their volunteer experience and 2) measure their intentions to remain as a volunteer. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression suggest that participation efficacy and organizational support are significant predictors to intent to remain with the organization.

Contribution/Originality: This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by examining the satisfaction drivers affecting volunteer satisfaction and retention in non-profit organizations. The results show that not all factors identified by previous studies exert an influence on intention to remain as a volunteer. The results show that organizational support and participation efficacy exert the most influence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of volunteering has gained increased attention since the 1980's with emphasis being placed on the services they provide and the people that volunteer (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Many non-profit organizations, including some tourism organizations such as heritage sites, museums, sporting events and festivals, depend on volunteers to assist in their daily activities (Cuskelly & Harrington, 1997; Holmes, 2003; Jago & Deery, 2002; Smith, Baum, Holmes, & Lockstone-Binney, 2014). Volunteers serve a range of functions in non-profit organizations from volunteer staff members providing office support for daily activities to serving as board members (National Council of Nonprofits, 2021). However, the non-profit sector is facing challenges as the number of people willing to volunteer has decreased over the years (National Council of Nonprofits, 2021). Research has shown that non-profit organizations experience high turnover among volunteers (Bidee et al., 2013). This poses a problem for non-profit organizations, many of which operate on limited budgets. To emphasize the importance of volunteers to non-profit organization, Harrison (1995) estimates that volunteers provide services that amount to over \$150 billion dollars annually. Volunteers in the London Olympic Games contributed 7 million hours of labor

or an equivalent of \$70 million of paid staff (Kim, Kim, Kim, & Zhang, 2019). This figure highlights the importance of understanding a volunteer's satisfaction with the volunteer experience to assist in the retention of volunteers.

Volunteering has been defined as "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or organization" (Wilson, 2000). Alternatively, Millette and Gagné (2008) defined volunteering as any unpaid help provided to parties to whom the volunteer has no obligations. For the purpose of this study a volunteer is defined as an unpaid worker that gives of their talents and time to an organization. As non-profit organizations function on limited resources they depend on volunteers to provide services to their constituents thus, making volunteers a vital part of non-profit organizations (Aboramadan, Hassi, Alharazin, Dahleez, & Albashiti, 2019; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991). Research in the volunteer arena has been focused on the motivation to volunteer with limited attention being placed on the volunteer's satisfaction factors (Aboramadan et al., 2019; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002). Understanding the volunteer's satisfaction of their experience, can help increase the retention of current volunteers and reduce recruitment efforts and training time (Cho, Wong, & Chiu, 2020). Furthermore, it is important to investigate volunteer satisfaction as most human service organizations depend on the labor of volunteers to help their constituents (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991). As such, retaining volunteers is an area that requires increased attention due to the cost in hours and resources organizations spend on the training of volunteers (Cho et al., 2020; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991). A dissatisfied volunteer can leave the job at any point of their volunteer experience because they do not have a contract and are not legally bound to the organization; therefore, it becomes important to understand satisfaction drivers (Kim et al., 2019). The authors propose that understanding the factors that influence satisfaction with the volunteer experience is imperative to influencing retention. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of volunteer satisfaction across different aspects of the volunteer experience on the volunteer's intention to remain with the organization. Therefore, the research question for this study is: Do the satisfaction factors of group integration, empowerment, organizational support and participation efficacy help predict the volunteer's intent to remain with the organization?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Volunteer Satisfaction

Research in volunteerism has been constantly evolving over the years as researchers have been trying to gain a better understanding of this important component of non-profit organizations. In the 2000's, research focused on the personality traits, factors affecting satisfaction, job characteristics and satisfaction drivers of volunteers (Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Cho et al., 2020; Finkelstein, 2008; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002; Kim et al., 2019; Millette & Gagné, 2008). Research found that a volunteer's characteristics, motivations and satisfaction drivers are different and, due to this diversity, it is hard to attract and retain volunteers (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Research examining volunteer motivations is scarce; further demonstrating the need to expand the understanding about the specific satisfaction drivers of this vital resource for the many non-profit organizations (Aboramadan et al., 2019). Additionally, there is a lack of research identifying which factors of the volunteer experience impact volunteer satisfaction further highlighting the need for expanded investigation due to its impact on future volunteer intentions (Doherty, 2009). The current study focused on understanding the impact of volunteer satisfaction with specific aspects of the volunteer experience on their intent to remain with the organization. The majority of research on satisfaction has focused on the paid worker with limited research focused on the unpaid worker (Aboramadan et al., 2019; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002). This lapse in the volunteerism literature must be examined as satisfaction drivers for this group differ from those of the paid worker (Aboramadan et al., 2019; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002). Research has shown that satisfaction is a strong predictor among paid workers in relation to their intent to leave and the turnover levels within the organization (Kim et al., 2019; Miller, Powell, & Seltzer, 1990; Spector, 1985). With that in mind, some attempts have been made to examine satisfaction of volunteers by applying constructs used to study the paid worker (Aboramadan et al.,

2019; Gidron, 1983; Spector, 1985). In a study examining volunteer's satisfaction factors, Gidron (1983) found that overall job satisfaction is related to job content and job context. Specifically, the volunteers in the study reported satisfaction is derived from a challenging and interesting job, use of their skills and knowledge, and a job that requires responsibilities. Knowing that the satisfaction constructs of paid workers are different from volunteer satisfaction constructs, Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2002) created a multi-faceted index for the volunteer sector based on dimensions that emerged from the review of the volunteer literature from 1981-1995. This index was created with the intent to help determine the factors that drive volunteer satisfaction, and termed the *Volunteer Satisfaction Index (VSI)*. The VSI includes four dimensions (i.e. organizational support; participation efficacy; empowerment which combined communication quality and work assignment; and group integration) with a total of 22 questions. The predictive validity of the instrument with intent to remain was partially supported by the study, as organizational support did not emerge as a predictor to intent to remain with the organization. The VSI has been adopted by others scholars since its creation, Kim et al. (2019) used the instrument to examine media volunteers at the London Olympic Games. The authors found that organizational support was the only factor that showed a causal relationship between satisfaction and volunteer retention. However, the authors clarify that even though there is no causal relationship between the factors of participation efficacy and group integration on intention to re-participate the results show high correlations between the factors.

Recent research on volunteer satisfaction has been used to examine the different factors impacting satisfaction and its link to volunteer retention. Satisfaction has been examined by authors as one of the main factors that influences the volunteer experience (Lachance, Bakhsh, Thompson, & Parent, 2021). Findings suggests that among the other factors examined, satisfaction has a strong positive influence on the volunteer experience. Cho et al. (2020) examined satisfaction as a direct and a mediating factor between volunteer management and intention to continue as a volunteer. They found that volunteer satisfaction has a direct and indirect impact on intention to continue. In addition, they found that the aspects of volunteer management of orientation and training, empowerment, and social interaction had a positive impact on intention to continue volunteering. Intention to remain with the organization has been used in several studies in the volunteer setting as it has been linked to retention rates (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002). The volunteer's donation of time, money and talents provide society with invaluable help and benefits (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002). Because non-profit organizations depend heavily on volunteers to render services, closer attention must be paid to the volunteer, their satisfaction and consequently their intention to remain as a volunteer with the organization. It is expected that satisfied volunteers will be more likely to remain active and continue to help with their chosen organization (Finkelstein, 2008). Research in the area of volunteer satisfaction in non-profit organizations that takes all these aspects into consideration is limited emphasizing the importance of the current study. Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2002) explained that identifying factors of volunteer satisfaction is paramount as satisfaction increases the likelihood of retention. The literature shows a variety of dimensions may impact a volunteer's intention to remain with an organization. Thus, understanding those factors is important to the volunteer's satisfaction with the experience and consequently their desire to remain with the organization. Satisfaction factors investigated in this study are: group integration, empowerment, organizational support and participation efficacy a discussion on each factor is included in the next section.

2.2. Hypothesis Development

Group integration refers to the relationships between volunteers and between the volunteers with paid staff. Group integration has been examined as having a positive effect on volunteer satisfaction (Field & Johnson, 1993; Gidron, 1984; Henderson & Sowa, 2019) with the findings supporting the notion that group integration has a positive effect on satisfaction. Similarly, Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2002) found that group integration has a high correlation with satisfaction. Group integration and the social interactions involved with volunteering have a

positive effect on the volunteer's experience, job satisfaction and intention to continue as volunteer with the organization (Cho et al., 2020). Opposite to these findings, a study on the volunteers at mega sporting events found that group integration was not a contributing factor to satisfaction (Kim et al., 2019). Based on the literature the following hypothesis was formulated:

H: Group integration provided by the volunteer experience is a positive predictor to intention to remain with the organization.

In this study, the empowerment construct is composed of communication quality and work assignment. Satisfaction measured from a communication perspective has been examined by Field and Johnson (1993) investigating information flow, quality and quantity of information finding that communication has a positive relationship to satisfaction. In addition, Wharton (1991) studied job description as an aspect of communication. The author found that a clear job description helps provide a realistic expectation of the job and can create a more satisfying volunteer experience. On the aspect of work assignment, Gidron (1983) measured it as the placement of the right volunteer in the right job based on skill set. Research has shown that the right expectations and correct placement can increase job satisfaction (Gidron, 1983; Wharton, 1991). Furthermore, other studies have examined different factors of volunteer management including empowerment (Cho et al., 2020). The results show that when considering empowerment as part of volunteer management it has a positive effect on job satisfaction and a volunteer's intention to continue with the organization (Cho et al., 2020). Given the relationships discussed in the literature, the following hypothesis was drafted.

H: Empowerment capabilities provided by the volunteer organization is a positive predictor to intention to remain with the organization.

Organizational support refers to a volunteer's belief that they have been provided the training and resources needed to accomplish a task (Kim et al., 2019). Organizational support, from an educational and emotional perspective, has been examined in previous studies (Cady, Brodke, Kim, & Shoup, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; McBey, Karakowsky, & Ng, 2017; Ozminkowski, Supiano, & Campbell, 1990). The findings suggest that support provided by the organization to the volunteer, related to training and general information, has been linked to increased levels of satisfaction (Cady et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Ozminkowski et al., 1990). Similarly, organizational support in the form of training has been found to influence job satisfaction and intention to continue (Cho et al., 2020). However, Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2002) found that organizational support was not a driver to intention to remain as a volunteer with the organization. Similar results have been found by Aboramadan et al. (2019) in which organizational support was not found to exert an influence on work engagement and willingness to continue as a volunteer. Given the conflicting findings, the authors suggest the following hypothesis:

H: Organizational support provided by the volunteer organization is a positive predictor to intention to remain with the organization.

Participation efficacy is defined as the expectation to help others with the knowledge that the job conducted will have an impact on someone's life (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002). Research has found that this participation efficacy has a positive relationship with satisfaction as most people state that the primary reason they volunteer and remain with the organization is to help others (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; Finkelstein, 2008; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Similarly, Finkelstein (2008) found that volunteers reported greater satisfaction if their experience was related to their motivation to volunteer (i.e. helping others). In a study of volunteer firefighters, the authors found that participation efficacy was one of the factors that contributed to volunteer satisfaction (Henderson & Sowa, 2019). However, studies of media volunteers at the London Olympics found that participation efficacy is not a contributing factor to satisfaction (Kim et al., 2019). Given the context of this study, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H: Participation efficacy provided by the volunteer experience is a positive predictor to intention to remain with the organization.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from unpaid volunteers from a regional chapter of a national non-profit organization. The pool of available volunteers performs various tasks such as office support, fund raising, and support staff at various types of events associated with the organization. The sample was composed of unpaid volunteers at a non-profit organization helping critically ill children in the Central and Northern Florida region. The instrument was provided to the volunteer coordinator, who contacted 560 volunteers in the Central Florida region.

The data for the study was collected using an instrument adapted from the literature. The survey was developed using constructs of an instrument created by Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2002) called the Volunteer Satisfaction Index (VSI). This instrument was designed to measure factors that influence volunteer satisfaction based on dimensions that emerged from the literature. The VSI includes five dimensions measured with 22 questions to examine volunteer satisfaction: 1) group integration, 2) empowerment, 3) organizational support, and 4) participation efficacy. Each of the four dimensions was measured by a variety of questions. Organizational support was measured with three questions and group integration was measured by six questions. A question used to measure organizational support was: "The ability of getting help when I need it." Intention to remain with the organization was used as the construct to measure the consequence of satisfaction. Intention was measured using one question: "If nothing else changes, do you intend to remain as a volunteer with this organization". All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree).

Table 1. Demographics.

Demographic Characteristics	Percentage
Gender (N= 101)	
Female	81.2%
Male	18.8%
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	83.8%
Hispanic/Latino	7.1%
Black/African American	5.1%
Asian	3%
Native American	1%
Age Range	
18-29	12%
30-39	25%
40-49	19%
50-59	20%
60+	24%
Employment Status	
Employed full-time	59.4%
Retired	20.8%
Not employed	11.9%
Employed part-time	7.9%
Education	
Undergraduate	61.4%
Master or Doctorate	19.8%
High School	12.9%
Other	5.9%
Income before taxes	
Less than \$15,000	3.2%
\$15,000-24,999	5.3%
\$25,000-34,999	8.5%
\$35,000-44,999	13.8%
\$45,000-54,999	12.8%
\$55,000-59,999	7.4%
More than \$60,000	48.9%

4. RESULTS

The response rate was 18% or 103 out of 560 surveys sent. Only 101 surveys were completed in full and usable for statistical analysis with two surveys deleted due to missing data. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 28. Survey respondents were mostly female (81.2%) and 18.8% male. In regards to ethnicity, 83.8% of the participants identified as White, followed by Hispanic/Latino with 7.1%, African American (5.1%), Asian (3.0%), and Native American (1%). The majority of the respondents were under the age group of 30-39 representing 25% of respondents, people 60 and over represent the second highest group of participants with 24%, followed by age groups 50-59 (20%), 40-49 (19%), and 18-29 (12%). In terms of employment status, more than half of the respondents were employed full time (59.4%) followed by retired volunteers (20.8%), not employed (11.9%), and employed part-time (7.9%). In regards to income, almost half of the participants (48.9%) reported to have a total household income of \$60,000 or more. All demographic details provided in Table 1.

Data analysis involved multiple stages. First, the multivariate assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence were verified, multicollinearity was not present in the data (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Reliability for each construct was tested; Cronbach Alpha coefficients exceeded the lower recommended limit of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010) coefficients ranged from 0.90 to 0.94. See Table 2 for coefficients.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha for study construct.

Construct	α
Organizational support	0.941
Empowerment	0.895
Participation efficacy	0.903
Group integration	0.914

The correlation coefficients were analyzed to assess collinearity, almost all correlations for independent variables with values between 0.70 and 0.90 and 0.40 and 0.70, are considered high and moderate respectively (Hair, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2007) with one correlation value is falling under the weak category (0.292). In addition, variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 10 indicate that multicollinearity is not an issue (Hair et al., 2010). Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	VIF
Intent to remain	6.58	1.11	1.000					
Organizational support	6.28	1.00	0.395	1.000				2.109
Empowerment	5.97	0.90	0.420	0.717	1.000			3.652
Participation efficacy	6.22	0.88	0.592	0.592	0.739	1.000		2.289
Group integration	5.26	1.20	0.292	0.485	0.671	0.545	1.000	1.870

A hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that organizational support, empowerment, participation efficacy, and group integration have an impact on a volunteer's intention to remain as a volunteer with the organization. After controlling for demographic factors (e.g. gender, ethnicity and age), the four volunteer factors were entered in blocks. Block 1 included organizational support accounts for 19% of the variance on intention to remain as a volunteer with the organization. Block 2 which included organizational support and empowerment accounts for 23% of the variance. Block 3 included the addition of participation efficacy accounted for 39% of the variance. Finally, block 4 included organizational support, empowerment, participation efficacy and group integration accounted for 39% of the variance. The results show that volunteers that experienced more organizational support ($\beta = 0.096$, $p < 0.001$) and had higher level of participation efficacy ($\beta = 0.605$, $p < 0.001$) are more likely to remain as a volunteer with the organization. See Table 4 for hierarchical regression results.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analysis of predictors.

Predictor variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4
Gender	0.067	0.062	0.064	0.067
Ethnicity	-0.013	-0.022	-0.057	-0.057
Age	-0.169	-0.163	-0.153	-0.151
Organizational support	0.364	0.175	0.097	0.096*
Empowerment		0.266	-0.119	-0.097
Participation Efficacy			0.601	0.605*
Group Integration				-0.038
R ²	0.19	0.23	0.39	0.39
R ² Change	0.13	0.03	0.16	0.00

Note: *p<.001.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of the multiple regression show participation efficacy and organizational support as the significant predictors to intention to remain as a volunteer with the organization. Participation efficacy emerged as the main overall predictor to intention to remain. This is not surprising, as previous research has shown that helping others has been linked to satisfaction, motivation to keep volunteering and the main reason people volunteer (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; Cady et al., 2018; Finkelstein, 2008; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). The findings of this study suggest that the main driver for people to volunteer and remain with their volunteer work is the desire to help and witness the effects of their efforts.

Organizational support emerged as the second strongest predictor to intent to remain. This result lends support (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002) to finding that organizational support is one of the predictors to intention to remain and volunteer satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings of the study support previous research where educational and emotional support has been linked to increased levels of satisfaction, in turn influencing intention to remain (Cady et al., 2018; Gidron, 1983; Ozminkowski et al., 1990). The findings of the current study suggest that organizational support has an impact on the reason people volunteer thus influencing satisfaction and further impacting intention to remain as a volunteer with the organization.

The results show that non-profit organizations that depend on volunteers to provide their services need to pay close attention to participant's satisfaction with the volunteer experience. By gaining a better understanding of the factors driving the volunteer's satisfaction it will allow the organization to identify and make efforts to capitalize on those satisfaction needs and increase their retention rates. That is, a volunteer that is satisfied with their volunteer experience is more likely to remain with the organization. The results suggest that efforts need to be placed on strategies that influence organizational support, empowerment and participation efficacy.

In regards to organizational support and empowerment, the findings suggest that organizations need to provide support to volunteers in order to complete tasks and allow them certain freedoms to perform assigned tasks. Strategies for organizational support and empowerment would complement each other to influence those satisfaction needs. That is, volunteer coordinators should provide proper training, clear guidelines and parameters to the volunteers to perform the assigned tasks. In addition, coordinators need to empower volunteers to do what is needed to achieve the assigned goals. Providing volunteers the freedom to complete a task and make decisions without asking permission will have a positive impact on their experience as a volunteer, which is likely to impact their intent to remain with the organization.

In terms of strategies to support participation efficacy, volunteer coordinators should implement a wide-ranging communication plan to keep volunteers informed of the results of their efforts to tap into those feelings of participation efficacy. Specifically, the organization and volunteer coordinators need to highlight the work volunteers do and the communities they help. The communication should include pictures, stories and anecdotes to invoke those feelings of participation efficacy among volunteers. These efforts will positively impact the volunteer experience and their intentions to remain as a volunteer with the organization.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One limitation of the study is the results are only generalizable to the volunteers or non-paid workers that willingly engage in volunteer work. Another limitation is the sample group, only volunteers in the United States were surveyed; therefore, caution should be placed when generalizing the results to other populations. In addition, the participants surveyed volunteered with a specific type of organization that focuses in helping children diagnosed with a critical illness. The type of organization and their goals may provide further motivation for volunteers to remain with the organization. It would be interesting for a future study to collect information from volunteers in another context or type of organization to determine if there is a difference between the volunteers and their motivations.

As previously mentioned, future studies should be conducted with other types of volunteer organizations to continue testing the constructs and their predictive validity with intent to remain. Further investigation, will allow to determine if the type of organization has an effect on the importance and predictive power of each construct. In addition, it would be interesting to examine the difference in participant demographics on intention to remain with the organization. For example, employment status may greatly influence a volunteer's ability or time availability to continue to volunteer.

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