

**Are Volunteers Attracted by the Part or by the Whole?
The Case of the Belgian Red Cross**

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Abstract

This article explores volunteer attachments in a large multi-service national volunteer organization, the Red Cross, which seeks to establish a universal standard of reference through locally rooted service provision. We ask whether volunteering for locally run chapters contributes to the strengthening of volunteers' loyalty to the parent organization as a whole, or whether volunteer loyalty is directed primarily at the organization's parts, i.e., the local chapters in which the volunteering takes place. The analysis reveals a complex mixture of holistic and local tendencies. We conclude that holistic community development among volunteers for the Red Cross is a goal more easily attained at the cognitive level than at the affective level.

Key Words:

volunteers, loyalty, Red Cross, Belgium

Introduction and Background

The principle of holism is based upon the idea that the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Phillips, 1977). In light of this principle, this paper explores the question of whether in a large, national organization with different local chapters serving a multiplicity of clients and attracting volunteers from a diverse population, do volunteers see themselves as volunteering for the larger organization, or for the local chapter which directly engages them? We therefore examine volunteer attitudes to determine if "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" at the organizational level. The answer to this question has direct implications for the recruitment and retention of volunteers in large multi-service organizations with many branches.

Red Cross Flanders (RCF) serves the population in Flanders, which is one of the two main regions in Belgium and home to its Dutch-speaking inhabitants (Red Cross Flanders, 2007). The organization engages more than 14,000 volunteers annually. These volunteers offer an interesting case study in holistic community development for a number of reasons. Firstly, RCF serves a variety of populations through its different activities. Volunteers are engaged in services across the country and internationally, in addition to being locally rooted with 300 local chapters. Secondly, known as an organization of the people, RCF attracts volunteers from all segments of the population (Genné, 2003) which is in line with the Red Cross goal of recruiting volunteers who reflect the diversity of the

communities it serves (International Federation Red Cross, 2009).

RCF (like its parent organization, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent) is guided by the seven fundamental principles elaborated in its mission: humanity, impartiality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality (Belgium Red Cross, 2006). This framework provides a standard of reference for all of its members, paid and volunteer, ensuring that all activities have one purpose: to prevent and alleviate human suffering without discrimination while protecting human dignity. With the aim of forwarding this goal, RCF undertakes a diversity of activities in the communities it serves, including first aid and other service delivery, health services improvement, advocacy, training, disaster management, and capacity building.

Given the broad scope of the organization, its popularity and reputation in Belgium, and its holistic approach and principles, this article explores whether RCF is successful in building a holistic community of loyal volunteers. Does volunteering for the various independently run RCF chapters, all governed by a central mission, contribute to the strengthening of loyalty to RCF as a whole, or is this loyalty directed only at the local chapters?

The phenomenon of volunteerism emerges from a sense of belonging among individuals to organizations, communities, or other groups (Beck, 1998; Eckstein, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 1998). Group membership allows volunteers to reaffirm their shared identity and facilitates socialization and the strengthening of group ties. Because volunteers are not financially reimbursed for their time, their involvement in group activities demonstrates a sense of commitment towards the mission of the organization as a whole, rather than purely towards the work undertaken (Cameron,

1999). This logic supports the hypothesis that the loyalty of volunteers is largely directed toward the central organization, rather than toward its various local chapters.

Recent trends indicate that short-term volunteer assignments are becoming more common, with organizations increasingly relying on episodic volunteers instead of traditional volunteers (Handy, Brodeur & Cnaan, 2006; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Inglehart, 2003; Macduff, 2004). Furthermore, the organization itself appears to be shifting from being the central focus of volunteer action to being a kind of enabling structure, or a mediator between a volunteer and a specific project (Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001). This implies that volunteering is becoming more and more structurally detached, with a concomitant de-territorialization of volunteer commitment, as volunteers increasingly resemble consumers or clients in a market-driven model (Evers, 1999). The fact that volunteer agencies are commonly acting as generators of function-based social capital (Putnam, 2000) suggests that volunteers are more likely to show commitment to the local branch in which they volunteer than to the central organization.

In RCF, volunteers are responsible for governing the organization, defining the organizational objectives, and putting them into practice with the assistance of only a limited number of paid staff (Meijs, 1997). RCF chapters are obliged to meet standards that specifically relate to the services they provide, the recruitment of volunteers, and funding. In addition to the core services mentioned earlier, volunteers are involved in a variety of programs that vary depending on local needs and facilities, but often include emergency relief, international humanitarian legal aid, tracing missing persons, and reuniting families (Belgium Red Cross, 2006). To address the needs of the local community, RCF operates through

its chapters. Each chapter is involved in several activities and must contribute sufficient financial resources to ensure the continued functioning of the organization.

Two crucial threads run through all programs across the various chapters. Like all Red Cross volunteers worldwide, RCF volunteers must adhere to the same mission, which is to improve the situation of the most vulnerable people. The RCF seeks to unite a large diversity of volunteers and activities through its mission with its Seven Fundamental Principles. This unity is explicit in the RCF's declaration of intent: "Red Cross Flanders is more than a philosophy, an organization, or institution. It is an active movement of convinced, competent, and trained volunteers who are motivated by their desire to help others free of charge" (Rode Kruis-Vlaanderen, 2008, ¶ 8). Given the single guiding mission of the RCF, its intent of unity, and the many chapters that locally engage volunteers, there could be an interesting interplay between the various ways in which the mission is interpreted locally and how this affects volunteers' attitudes in the various regions.

One way to test whether RCF volunteers have a greater sense of being part of the organization as a whole or rather to their local chapter is to examine attitudes of loyalty among volunteers. If volunteering builds a holistic community in RCF, irrespective of where it occurs, we should expect no differences in measures of loyalty among volunteers to various chapters of the Red Cross. If, on the other hand, loyalty is built at the local level, then measures of loyalty should vary across individual chapters as the unique characteristics of each local unit contribute to the development of loyalty among its volunteers. From the perspective of holistic community development, the crucial question is whether volunteers regard themselves as attached to

the parent organization or to the local chapter that directly engages them. We hypothesize that if, controlling for socio-economic variables, no differences exist in attitudes and measures of loyalty, then we may conclude that RCF does indeed reflect a holistic organizational culture.

Methods

To explore RCF volunteers' attitudes on loyalty we use scales developed by Hustinx and Lammertyn (Hustinx, 2003, 2005; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2004). Personal in-home interviews were conducted with 652 RCF volunteers who make up a representative sample of the organization as a whole. The respondents were selected from central volunteer records on the basis of a multistage sampling procedure. In the first step, the sample was geographically limited by means of a random selection of 50 (out of 270) local chapters of the RCF (equally spread over the five Flemish regions). All volunteers were interviewed using a standardized questionnaire. The age and gender characteristics of the sample are representative of the volunteer population studied (for a more detailed discussion, see Hustinx, 2003, pp.120-133).

As the key measure of local uniqueness, we used five Flemish regions (Limburg, Antwerp, Flemish Brabant, East and West Flanders) instead of the 50 separate RCF chapters. We aggregated local multiplicities not only for the sake of methodological clarity, but also because the five Flemish regions represent distinct geographical, political, and cultural entities (see www.flanders.be for details). Geographically, they differ in levels of urbanization. The research area included the three cities of Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, centered in the regions of Flemish Brabant, Antwerp, and East Flanders (resp.). The outer regions, Limburg and West Flanders represent more rural areas. The regions

directly elect their own councils that shape their respective political environments, and each region has its own unique culture, identity, and dialect. Inhabitants of each region perceive their respective residents, problems, and lifestyles differently and hence interpret the types of actions appropriate for helping vulnerable populations uniquely. For these reasons, we consider it legitimate to aggregate the 50 separate chapters into five homogeneous regions when examining the uniqueness of local volunteer experiences in chapters.

To explore RCF volunteers' attitudes and loyalty we used two analyses. First, we examined organizational characteristics that are of value to the volunteer. In a large organization with a diversity of activities and chapters, what organizational characteristics do volunteers value, those

that reflect the whole or the part? This measure would give us some initial insight into our research question. The respondents were asked to choose one item that they viewed as most important from a list of eight organizational features.

Fifty-four per cent of the respondents rank the service activity of their chapters first (Table 1). In addition, 20.8 % of responses mention the (refresher) courses and high quality standard of the services provided which relate to the specific units in which the volunteers participate. In contrast, the mission of RCF as a whole and the opportunity to be part of an international organization are notably less valued by the RCF volunteers. The Chi-square test shows that this ranking does not differ across the five regions. The findings provide an initial challenge to the centrality of RCF as a

Table 1
Most Important Organizational Characteristics to RCF Volunteers in the Five Regions

	LIMB	ANT	FL BRAB	EAST FLA	WEST FLA	TOTAL RCF
The service activity in which you participate as a volunteer.	51.42	52.09	51.62	47.12	67.49	54.34
The high quality standard of the assistance in your program.	10.49	6.88	19.91	11.37	8.21	10.55
The courses and refresher courses offered	10.51	13.91	8.91	9.98	8.71	10.29
The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross mission	5.39	6.92	5.42	11.88	5.39	6.94
The public opinion, the reputation of the Red Cross held by the public.	6.98	9.75	5.35	9.49	2.84	6.89
The good and the smooth working of the Red Cross.	8.69	5.38	6.14	6.01	3.32	6.09
The large number of activities to choose from as a volunteer.	6.26	4.56	2.65	5.15	4.05	4.79
The opportunity to be part of an international organization.	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.10
(n)	(163)	(120)	(72)	(117)	(136)	(608)

χ^2 test — $\chi^2 = 35.89$, $df = 28$, $p = 0.14$

whole among the factors that volunteers see as important (Table 1). It is clear that the characteristics that volunteers value most are the service activity in which they participate and the benefits that they themselves receive from the activity, both of which underscore the importance of their particular local attachments. These are followed in importance by characteristics reflecting a more holistic attachment to RCF, as expressed by its mission and principles or by public opinion of the organization.

We next asked respondents to rank, using a Likert-type format, a series of statements that indicated their agreement with the mission of RCF and their loyalty to the organization, as part of a broader assessment of the attitudinal and motivational bases of Red Cross volunteering (for a more detailed discussion, see Hustinx, 2003, 2005; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2004). In total, 147 items were subjected to an initial iterated principal factor analysis with squared multiple correlations as prior communality estimates and an orthogonal (varimax) rotation method. A Scree Test suggested 11 meaningful factors with 57 remaining items. The rotation to a final factor solution involved an oblique (promax) rotation. All items had factor loadings greater than .35 and a simple structure in which items have high loadings on one factor only (Hatcher, 1994; Kim & Mueller, 1994).

The factors retained for the purposes of this analysis evaluate the volunteers' levels of loyalty and attachment to the mission of the organization as a whole. The items for these scales are as follows:

a) Loyalty (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$, factor loadings of items between brackets)

1. As a volunteer, I use every means necessary to ensure the continued existence of the Red Cross (0.36).

2. If I see other Red Cross volunteers, I feel strongly related to them (0.44).

3. When a Red Cross volunteer appears in the media, I'm proud of being a Red Cross volunteer myself (0.49).

4. It is important to make clear to other volunteers that they should adhere to what the Red Cross expects of them (0.39).

5. I like other people to know I'm a Red Cross volunteer (0.55).

6. I always try to convince other people to volunteer with the Red Cross (0.62).

b) Importance attached to mission of RCF (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$, factor loadings of items between brackets)

1. What appealed to me most were the fundamental principles of the mission of the organization (0.72).

2. The variety of programs of the Red Cross appealed to me (0.59)

3. The Red Cross plays an important role in our society and I wanted to be part of it by volunteering (0.54).

4. I value the international collaboration within the Red Cross movement (0.51).

By summing respondents' scores on the retained items per factor, individual scale scores were generated and converted into the original 5-point scales by dividing the summated scores by the number of items. Our analysis compared the converted mean scores on these two scales across the five regions. If the thesis of holistic volunteering holds, we would expect to see no differences between the regions with respect to the scores. This null hypothesis is represented symbolically as: $H_0: M_1 = M_2 = M_3 = M_4 = M_5$, where M_i represents the means of the different regions.

Table 2
ANOVA and Tukey's Studentized Range Test for Pair-wise Differences between the Five Regions

	F	Mean	SD	Regions' Mean Scores (SD)				
				LIMB	ANT	FL BRAB	EAST FLA	WEST FLA
Mission RCF	2.43	3.24	.96	3.33 (0.96)	3.06 (0.89)	3.20 (0.79)	3.32 (0.94)	3.09 (1.13)
Loyalty RCF	7.91 ***	3.65	.77	3.78 (0.78) b, c	3.34 (0.88) a	3.47 (0.79) d	3.67 (0.68) b	3.69 (0.74) b

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note -Tukey's Studentized Range (HSD) test for pair-wise differences in mean scores. Different superscripts (a vs. b), (c vs. d) point to significant differences between the specific volunteer programs at a .05 significance level

We used a one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) with the dependent variable being the two scales and the independent variables being the five regions in which RCF volunteers engage. Where the overall ANOVA test was significant, we used the Tukey's HSD multiple comparison test to indicate which pairs of groups are significantly different. (We used the Tukey's HSD because the various regions have unequal numbers of volunteers.)

Table 2 reports the ANOVA summary table and the pair-wise comparisons of mean scores between the regions. We found significant differences between mean scores for the measure of loyalty by region; the null hypothesis was thus rejected with respect to the loyalty scale. However, volunteers in the various regions do not differ in their valuation of the mission of the RCF.

It nonetheless should be noted that, in spite of their statistical significance, the differences in mean levels of loyalty are not very pronounced. We tentatively conclude that the RCF is holistic in its mission, but that loyalties are built at the local level. The organization's mission does not appear to be a very important factor determining

volunteer involvement with RCF, seeming instead to be little more than a very open and generic statement that appeals equally and at low levels across the board, and only at a cognitive level.

Although significant differences were identified between the regions for loyalty, the measures of association and comparisons of mean scores (Table 2) do not explain which aspects of the complex organizational and volunteer diversity within the regions account for this variation. To understand which factors exactly contribute to the region-based differences in organizational attachment, we would need to separate the effect of the regions from the effect of other variables that may be highly correlated with them, which would require multivariate analysis. These factors would include gender, age, and education of the volunteers, as well as likely variations in length of service and intensity of involvement. We assessed the impact of volunteering on attachment to the organization controlling for the effects of individual characteristics (Table 3). The results of the regression models indicate that volunteers' loyalties towards the RCF differ, even when

controlling for gender, age, education, and the length of service and hours of volunteering. This implies that loyalty is a function of the unique characteristics of the local setting that build and strengthen volunteers' organizational attachment, rather than a function of the mission or values of RCF as a whole.

On the other hand, RCF may be perceived as a holistic organization with respect to its mission, since differences in background profiles and volunteer experiences only have a weak explanatory power in volunteer's attachment to the mission. The predictive power of the regression model for the importance attached to the mission of the RCF is very low (.04), whereas the regression model for loyalty produces an acceptably high

proportion of explained variance (.23) (Lattin, Carroll, & Green, 2003). This corroborates the findings from Table 2.

In examining the net effects of the predictor variables (i.e., the impact of each predictor variable on the dependent variable independently of the impact of the other independent variables in the model), significant results emerged for both regression models. Two findings lead us to conclude that the length of service and intensity of involvement represent better measures than the geographically aggregated measure of regional variation. First, the standardized regression coefficients reveal that time spent volunteering has a greater impact on local volunteer experiences than does the region in which the volunteering occurred.

Table 3
Impact of Individual and Volunteer Characteristics on Attachment to the Organization

	MISSION	OLS regression R ² =0.05, F = 3.78, p = .0001	LOYALTY	OLS regression R ² =0.24, F = 21.81, p < .0001
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β
Intercept	15.71 (0.88)	.	21.38 (0.96)	.
Sex (ref=male)	-0.16 (0.32)	-0.02	0.23 (0.35)	0.02
Age (continuous)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.09	-0.003 (0.01)	-0.01
Education (continuous)	-0.57 (0.15)	-0.17***	-0.89 (0.16)	-0.21***
Length of service (continuous)	0.07 (0.02)	0.16***	0.11 (0.02)	0.20***
Monthly hours of volunteering (continuous)	-0.17 (0.14)	-0.05	1.15 (0.15)	0.27***
Regional variation (ref=Limburg)				
Antwerp	-0.76 (0.45)	-0.08	-1.86 (0.49)	-0.17***
Flemish Brabant	-0.25 (0.56)	-0.02	-1.01 (0.61)	-0.07
East Flanders	0.11 (0.47)	0.01	-0.43 (0.51)	-0.04
West Flanders	-0.74 (0.46)	-0.08	-0.33 (0.49)	-0.03
Adj. R ²		0.04		0.23
N		619		620

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

The analysis indicated that the longer the volunteer stays, the more s/he learns about the organization as a whole (mission), and the more likely s/he is to accept the organization's mission cognitively. Yet, loyalties are principally built through long-term and intensive participation. Thus, the more intense the participation by the volunteer, the greater the volunteer's loyalty (and vice versa.) Secondly, regional variation explains differences in levels of loyalty only. A sharp regional contrast exists between loyalty levels in the provinces of Limburg and Antwerp. This might be explained by the fact that Antwerp is Flanders' largest and most economically developed urban area whereas Limburg is among its most rural areas. (Brussels, the capital city, was not included in the survey.) The findings reflect the common reality that in more rural areas, people still build stronger ties at the local level. Volunteering is thus still firmly rooted in a locally bound community of reference, but may be less so in more urbanized regions (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Okun & Michel, 2006; Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

The likelihood of success in holistic community building efforts may also depend on the type of volunteers RCF recruits. We find education negatively and significantly correlated with either scale. It may be a spurious relation, or it may suggest that higher educated people are less likely to be swayed by mission statements, and may evaluate their experiences more critically.

Conclusions

This paper explored whether volunteers in a large multi-service organization with many chapters and myriad locally initiated activities have a sense of being part of the organization as a whole. We have argued that RCF is an interesting case as it seeks to unite a diverse population of volunteers through its mission. The

question addressed was whether RCF has succeeded in creating a holistic volunteer community with loyalties extending beyond its local diversity. It was hypothesized that this success would be evident if volunteers showed similar attachments to the central organization irrespective of the regions in which they volunteer.

This hypothesis was tested using two attitudinal scales measuring the importance volunteers attached to the mission of RCF and their loyalty to the organization. The 50 separate units that engaged volunteers were aggregated as a measure of local variation that best captured the differences in politics, culture, and language. Our empirical findings revealed a complex mixture of holistic and local tendencies among RCF volunteers. At one level, RCF is somewhat successful in building unity among its volunteers regarding its mission, but at another, volunteer loyalties show the salience of the local variations.

Initial analysis indicated that the organizational characteristics most valued by volunteers were their own service activities at the local level, and not to the RCF's mission or reputation. These latter characteristics appealed to volunteers at a relatively low and mainly cognitive level. Further analysis corroborated this - regional variations and volunteer participation had little bearing on the importance of the mission. Thus, RCF succeeded in building a holistic volunteer community at a cognitive level with regard to its mission.

Loyalty, on the other hand, was strongly interwoven with local volunteer experiences. Loyalty correlated with participation at the local level and with region (as seen by the difference between urban and rural regions). This suggests the likelihood that it is the characteristics of the local experiences of volunteering that strengthen attachments among volunteers, and not the characteristics of the

organization as a whole. It also seems to indicate that the importance of the mission is a cognitive measure and is relevant to the whole, but loyalty, a measure of affective commitment, is germane to the parts, that are the chapters in which they engage.

In sum, large multi-service organizations are most likely to succeed in building a holistic volunteer community if they emphasize adherence to, and communication of, the mission among the volunteers of their local chapters. Although there is a value attached to the mission of RCF, it is not of central importance to the volunteers. A mission statement, with its universal guiding principles, cannot succeed in nurturing loyalty on its own; volunteers build loyalties through participation and affective organizational commitment. High levels of embeddedness in a relatively closed community of reference and frequent and longer-term involvement in volunteer activities are the factors most likely to generate strong organizational attachments.

Our findings suggest that volunteer loyalty cannot be attained through broad statements of principles and mission. Loyalties are earned on the ground by providing volunteers with experiences and services that they enjoy and value. As the competition for volunteers becomes more acute (Wymer & Starnes, 2001), our findings suggest that they may disavow universal statements about mission in favor of considerations regarding what experiences or services they may receive at the local levels. Hence, marketing that is attuned to the local differences is more likely to succeed than a 'one type fits all' call for volunteers.

Our findings correlate well with research on the relationship marketing paradigm explored in literature on volunteer recruitment and retention, where the relationship between the individual and organization is found to be an important

organizational attribute that builds volunteer loyalty. Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003) suggested that organizations improve marketing success by strengthening the ties between the organizations and identities that people find important. This research suggests that these identities and ties have to be relevant at the local level, because loyalty is about affective commitment and experiences. Thus, it is not simply sufficient to emphasize shared values between an organization and its volunteers.

In a large, complex, national or international organization with many chapters that respond to local conditions, a strong mission statement may be necessary to keep all various units on the same page and its reputation intact; however, it is not sufficient to garner the loyalties of individual volunteers. Policies designed to strengthen the ability of chapters to satisfy volunteers through locally attuned activities are justified. This will require attention on the ground to local differences and the consideration of these differences in the development of strategies to recruit and retain volunteers. It is reasonable to conclude that, for large multi-service national or international organizations, becoming a holistic volunteer organization is a goal more easily attained at the cognitive level than at the affective level.

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