

**Factors Promoting Perceived Organizational Care:  
Implications for Volunteer Satisfaction and Turnover Intention**

Simon M Rice

Research Assistant

School of Psychology, Australian Catholic University,  
115 Victoria Pde. Fitzroy, VIC 3065 Australia

Tel: + 613 9953 3127 \* FAX: + 613 9953 3205 \* E-mail: rice.simon@gmail.com

Barry J Fallon Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology

School of Psychology, Australian Catholic University,  
115 Victoria Pde. Fitzroy, VIC 3065 Australia

Tel: +613 9953 3108 \* Fax: + 613 9953 3205 \* E-mail: barry.fallon@acu.edu.au

**Abstract**

*Turnover is costly for any organization regardless whether it is paid staff or volunteers who leave. Policies and retention strategies that promote satisfaction and ongoing commitment to the organization are essential for maintaining an effective and skilled volunteer workforce. This study draws comparisons between the satisfaction and intention to stay of volunteers (n = 2,306) and paid employees (n = 274) within an emergency services organization on variables that reflect organizational care for the individual. Results indicate that 52% of volunteer satisfaction and 20% of volunteer intention to stay is explained by the three organizational care variables studied: recognition, respect, and welfare. Consistent with prediction, in each case the organizational care variables explained greater variance for volunteers compared to paid employees. Findings highlight the importance of organizational policies promoting positive relatedness amongst volunteers in prompting ongoing volunteer commitment and satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** volunteers, satisfaction, commitment, retention.

Volunteer organizations provide essential services to the community that private and public sectors cannot, or will not provide (Mathieson, 2007). Recent economic trends have resulted in reductions to charitable giving, corresponding to an increase in the need for services provided by nonprofit organizations utilizing volunteers (National Council of Nonprofits, 2010). Evidence from Australia suggests a reduction in both volunteer time commitments and numbers of actual volunteers (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2006), and that recruitment of volunteers within specific sectors such as the

emergency services is becoming increasingly difficult (Parkin, 2008).

Should volunteer contributions significantly decrease in the longer term then governments will presumably need to provide replacement services at significant cost (Ganewatte & Handmer, 2009). Volunteer turnover also is expensive for organizations given the administrative, recruitment, training, and supervision costs necessary to recruit and maintain a volunteer workforce (Brudney & Duncombe, 1992). In minimising volunteer turnover, it is prudent for volunteer resource managers to be mindful of volunteer satisfaction, and the ways in which satisfaction contributes to

volunteer's perception of, and commitment to the organization (Starnes, 2007). One commonsense approach to maintaining volunteer numbers is to minimise workforce attrition through retention practices that increase morale and engagement, and provide personal benefit to volunteers (Hager & Brudney, 2004; McLennan & Bertoldi, 2004).

Volunteers are more likely to remain committed to an organization in instances where their service to others is accompanied by rewards of social interaction and praiseworthy work (Pearce, 1983). Research suggests that lack of organizational support (Nelson, Netting, Borders, & Huiber, 2007), workgroup conflict and dysfunction (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009), exclusion and bullying (McLennan, Birch, Cowlishaw, & Hayes, 2009), and lack of recognition (Howard, 2003) each contribute to volunteer turnover. Research also indicates that volunteers primarily derive their satisfaction and commitment to the agency from relatedness needs (e.g. the maintenance and development of respectful and secure relationship with others), while paid employees derive their job satisfaction and intent to remain from autonomy needs such as having choice and self-control in one's work related actions (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2009). These differences between paid employees and volunteers indicate that it is important to specifically study the attitudes of volunteers rather than generalising from research conducted among paid employees (e.g. Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007).

The current study was designed to explore the relationship between aspects of organizational care perceived by volunteers and paid employees, and the way in which organizational care relates to intention to stay with the organization. Key differences were to be explored in management practices for volunteers and paid employees. As the research was conducted within the

one organization, many other factors, e.g. organization culture, which would have an impact on the outcome variables being investigated, were held constant.

Volunteers comprise a distinct group in any organization as they do not receive remuneration in return for their labour. Given that pay, financial security, and advancement opportunities do not apply to volunteers in the same way as they do to paid employees (Brief, 1998), it was predicted that perception of organizational care for the individual (e.g. informal recognition, the organization's concern for volunteer welfare, and respect amongst members within the organization) would explain greater variance in satisfaction and ongoing commitment for volunteers compared to paid staff.

### **Methods**

Data were collected from paid and volunteer members of a state wide emergency service provider within Australia. Surveys were returned by 2839 members of the organization. Of these 2580 were complete without any missing data. These surveys form the basis of the present research. There were 2306 volunteers, of which 246 were female, and, 274 paid employees, of which 70 were female. Of the paid employees, 226 were full time, 9 were part time and 39 were casual. For the paid employees in terms of position within the organization, 212 indicated they were general staff, 52 were management, and 10 were executive. The sample of usable data represents a response rate of approximately 26% for the paid employees and 4% for the volunteer members. While these response rates are not ideal, comparison of the demographic and geographic variables between the respondents and all possible members of the organization did not differ markedly.

Participants completed a large questionnaire package designed to assess organizational climate. A subset of the measures assessing the five variables of interest were utilised for the current study. All questionnaire items were presented to participants on a seven point scale where 1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*. The five variables of interest in the present study were as follows: Intention to Stay (three items for taken from Colarelli (1984) e.g. *'I intend to be a member of my organisation for at least the next 12 months'*); Satisfaction (five items adapted from Price and Mueller's (1986) measure of job satisfaction, e.g. *'I am satisfied with my role'*); Recognition (three items taken from Martin and Bush (2006) e.g. *'Members can count on a pat on the back from the organization when they perform well'*); Welfare (three items taken from Patterson et al. (2005) e.g. *'My organization tries to look after its members'*); and, Respect Amongst Members (five items developed by the authors for the present research e.g. *'Members of my organization treat each other with respect'*). In all instances, reliability of the measures was satisfactory (see Table 1 for Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients).

Participants were made aware of the research project via a promotional campaign where notices were placed in the organizations publications and posters were displayed at local depots and offices. Members of the organization in positions of leadership were encouraged to notify their respective units of the project and encourage participation. All members of the organization were sent copies of the questionnaire as an insert within the organisations quarterly magazine. The survey insert included a reply paid envelope addressed to the researchers. Email reminders were sent to members of the organization throughout the data collection

period. Ethical approval for the project was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

## Results

To assess the validity of the underlying factor structure of the five items developed to assess respect amongst members, principal components analysis was undertaken separately for volunteers and paid employees. As each analysis revealed a uni-dimensional factor structure with all factor loadings > .6 (for volunteers KMO = .816, Bartlett's test of sphericity  $p < .001$ , variance explained = 57.57%; for paid employees KMO = .805, Bartlett's test of sphericity  $p < .001$ , variance explained = 56.85%) there was confidence that the five items made for a meaningful scale.

Means, SD's, correlations and reliability coefficients were calculated for the five scales of intention to stay, satisfaction, recognition, welfare, and concern for members for both samples (see Table 1). To compare the set of means of the volunteers with the set of means of the paid staff, a multivariate analysis of variance was used. The analysis indicated that volunteers reported significantly higher ratings for the five scales in comparison to paid employees,  $\Lambda = .946$ ,  $F(1, 2574) = 29.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .054$ . The same pattern also followed for each variable at the univariate level (see Table 1 for  $p$  values).

Correlation coefficients for volunteers and paid staff are displayed in Table 2. All observed correlations were significant, within the weak to moderate range. Five of the correlation coefficients were higher for the Volunteers than the Paid Staff, while two were the same and three were lower for the Volunteers.

To test the study hypothesis that personal aspects of the work experience would explain greater variance in

satisfaction and intention to stay for volunteers compared to paid staff, a series of multiple regression analyses were undertaken. Satisfaction and intention to stay were used as outcome variables, and recognition, respect and welfare were entered as predictors (see Table 3). In support of the study's hypothesis the regression equations explained significantly more variance in volunteers' satisfaction ( $R^2 = .52$ ), and intention to stay ( $R^2 = .39$ ) in comparison to paid employees ( $R^2 = .20$  for satisfaction and  $R^2 = .11$  for intention to stay). Table 3 indicates that for volunteers, recognition, respect, and welfare significantly predicted both outcome variables. In contrast, while all three variables predicted satisfaction for the paid employees, recognition and welfare failed to predict paid employees intention to stay. Highlighting the importance of organizational culture, inspection of the standardised beta coefficients indicated that the variable assessing respect amongst members was the strongest predictor of satisfaction and intention to stay for both volunteer and paid employees.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The present study draws noteworthy comparisons between volunteers and paid employees within the one organization, and provides important data to assist with the retention and engagement of the volunteer workforce. Results indicate that the present sample of volunteers rated all five of the organizational variables more favourably (e.g. higher ratings) compared to the paid employees. This suggests that in comparison to paid employees, the volunteers perceived their involvement with the organization as more satisfying, involving better recognition processes, generating greater respect amongst colleagues, and embodying greater concern demonstrated toward the volunteer population. It is therefore unsurprising that

in comparison to paid employees, volunteers indicated they were significantly more likely to remain committed to the organization within the short to medium term. This finding also demonstrates that volunteers experience the organization in different terms than do paid employees, highlighting the need for further specific research into the factors that contribute to the experience of being a volunteer (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007).

Consistent with previous research indicating that the satisfaction of volunteers is primarily determined by positive relationships with colleagues (e.g. Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2009; McLennan, Birch, Cowlshaw, & Hayes, 2009), the current study reported that organizational care variables (reflected in items assessing recognition, respect amongst members and concern for volunteer welfare) significantly predicted volunteer satisfaction and intention to stay. Of note, the three predictor variables explained 52% of variance in volunteer satisfaction and 20% of variance in volunteer intention to stay. By any standards, these are large adjusted  $R^2$  values, giving volunteer resource managers and volunteer program managers valuable clues into the determinants of what volunteers enjoy about their involvement, and what keeps volunteers committed to the organization in the longer term.

Research from paid employees indicates that job satisfaction predicts turnover intention, and that turnover intention is the strongest predictor of actual turnover (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Given the moderate positive correlations observed in the current study between satisfaction and intention to stay, a similar pattern appeared within the present sample. Hence, findings highlight the importance of volunteer organizations ensuring they attend to recognition, respect amongst members, and

concern for members welfare in ensuring ongoing commitment to the organization.

Correlations between recognition, respect and welfare and both satisfaction and intention to stay were consistently higher for volunteers compared to paid employees. As volunteers do not receive the same financial incentives from the organization that paid employees receive (Brief, 1998), the attitudes of volunteers are based more heavily on the interpersonal aspects of their involvement. So what can volunteer organizations do to maximise the sense of organizational care experienced by their volunteer workforce? Previous research provides some suggestions. Increasing volunteer recognition and acknowledgement can be achieved through sponsoring attendance at professional development activities (e.g. Hagar & Brudney, 2004), offering scholarships or study awards (e.g. Aitken, 2000), or hosting volunteer appreciation functions. Increasing respect amongst volunteer members may require the development of organizational policies that promote equal opportunity, tolerance and diversity (for a discussion of inclusion practices for volunteers with diverse abilities see Miller, Scoglio and Schleien, 2010). Organizational practices that increase volunteer's sense of organizational welfare may include increasing program support including the provision of well defined and communicated tasks, and suitable training at a professional standard e.g. (Nelson, Netting, Borders, & Huiber, 2007). Given that volunteers typically report feelings of camaraderie and connection to colleagues as a key benefit to their volunteering, volunteer organizations should seek to foster a strong sense of "we", by encouraging positive activities that promote a social identity (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009). Further, volunteer organizations should give proper attention to scheduling and rostering volunteers and adjust schedules to meet the

constraints of volunteers (e.g. Miller, Powell & Seltzer, 1990).

Given the high rating for volunteers' intention to stay (the mean was 6.13, rated on a seven point scale), the present cohort of volunteers appear highly committed to ongoing service with the organization. Future research may benefit from exploring volunteer samples with lower rates of ongoing commitment, and exploring whether perceived organizational care can be identified as predicting lower rates of volunteer commitment.

In summary, this study highlights that volunteer ratings of satisfaction and intention to stay are contingent on aspects of perceived organizational care, and that these aspects are more important to volunteers than paid employees. Findings imply that those volunteer organizations able to maximise positive relatedness factors (e.g. recognition and appreciation of volunteers, care and welfare for volunteers, positive relationships amongst volunteers) are likely to benefit from higher retention rates. While this may require initial investment in policy and program development within the volunteer organization, longer term benefits could be expected from reduced costs associated with volunteer recruitment, training, administration and supervision.

---

## References

- Aitken, A. (2000). Identifying key issues affecting the retention of emergency service volunteers. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 15, 16–23.
- Baxter-Tomkins, T., & Wallace, M. (2006). Emergency service volunteers: What do we really know about them? *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 11, 7–12.
- Baxter-Tomkins, T., & Wallace, M. (2009). Recruitment and retention of volunteers in emergency services.

*Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 14, 1–11.

Boezeman, E. J., & Ellemers, N. (2007). Volunteering for charity: Pride, respect, and the commitment of volunteers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 771–785.

Boezeman, E.J., & Ellemers, N. (2009). Intrinsic need satisfaction and the job attitudes of volunteers versus employees working in a charitable volunteer organization. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82, 897–914.

Brief, A. P. (1998). *Attitudes in and around organizations*. London: Sage.

Brudney, J. L., & Duncombe, W. D. (1992). An economic evaluation of paid, volunteer and mixed staffing options for public services. *Public Administration Review*, 52, 474–481.

Colarelli, S. M. (1984). Methods of communication and mediating processes in realistic job previews. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69, 633–642.

Ganewatte, G., & Hanmer, J. (2009). The value of volunteers in state emergency services. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 24, 26–32.

Hager, M. A., & Brudney, J. L. (2004). *Volunteer management practices and retention of volunteers*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Howard, H. (2003). Volunteerism in emergency management in Australia: Direction and development since the national volunteer summit of 2001. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 18, 31–33.

Mathieson, K. (2007). Using information technology (IT) volunteers: A conceptual framework. *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 24, 35–46.

Martin, C. A., & Bush, A. J. (2006). Psychological climate, empowerment, leadership style, and customer-oriented

selling: An analysis of the sales manager-salesperson dyad. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34, 419–438.

McLennan, J., & Bertoldi, M. (2004). *Enhancing volunteer recruitment and retention project*. Occasional Report Number 2004:2: Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre.

McLennan, J., Birch, A., Cowlshaw, S., & Hayes, P. (2009). Maintaining volunteer fire-fighter numbers: Adding value to the retention coin. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 24, 40–47.

Miller, L. E., Powell, G. N., & Seltzer, J. (1990). Determinants of turnover among volunteers. *Human Relations*, 43, 901–917.

Miller, K. D., Scoglio, P., & Schleien, S. J. (2010). Inclusive volunteering: Community and family perspectives. *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 17, 3–12.

National Council of Nonprofits. (2010). *State budget crises: Ripping the safety net held by nonprofits*. Washington DC: National Council of Nonprofits.

Nelson, H. W., Netting, F. E., Borders, K. W., & Huiber, R. (2007). Volunteer attrition: Lesson's learned from Oregon's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 24, 65–72.

Parkin, D. (2008). Future challenges for volunteer based emergency services. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 23, 61–67.

Patterson, M. G., West, M. A., Shackleton, V. J., Dawson, J. F., Lawthom, R., Maitlis, S., Robinson, D. L., & Wallace, A. M. (2005). Validating the organizational climate measure: Links to managerial practices, productivity, and innovation. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 26, 397–408.

Pearce, J. L. (1983). Job attitude and motivation differences between volunteers

and employees from comparable organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 68, 646-652.

Price, J., & Mueller, C. (1986). *Handbook of Organisational Measurement*. White Plains, N.Y.: Pitman Publishing Inc.

Starnes, B. J. (2007). Trust, job satisfaction, organizational commitment,

and the Volunteer's Psychological Contract. *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 24, 26-30.

Tett, R. P., & Meyer, J. P. (1993). Job satisfaction, organisational commitment, turnover intention, and turnover: Path analyses based on meta-analytic findings. *Personnel Psychology*, 46, 259-293.

---

### About the Authors

Simon Rice is a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne. He is concurrently undertaking a Master of Psychology (Clinical) and is involved in both organisational and clinical research.

Barry Fallon is foundation chair of Psychology at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne. He is an Organisational Psychologist with over 30 years academic and consultancy experience. He is the current Academic Editor of the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Organisational Psychology and is a past President of the Australian Psychological Society.

### Appendix: Respect Amongst Members Scale

The following questions refer to respect amongst the members of your organisation. Please respond where 1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*.

1. Members of my organization treat each other with respect.
2. Members of my organization readily take action when others are not being treated with respect.
3. Bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination are not tolerated at my organization.
4. My organization respects work life balance with respect to my family, personal, religious and lifestyle preferences.
5. My organization attracts members from diverse cultural, social and religious backgrounds.

**Table 1**

*Reliability Coefficients, Means, SD's, and F-test Results for Volunteers and Paid Employees*

	Volunteers (N = 2306)		Paid Employees (N = 274)		F	p	$\eta^2$
	$\alpha$	M (SD)	$\alpha$	M (SD)			
Intention to Stay	.79	6.13 (1.35)	.83	5.73 (1.53)	20.48	<.001	.008
Satisfaction	.90	5.32 (1.36)	.90	4.90 (1.40)	24.27	<.001	.009
Recognition	.87	4.42 (1.53)	.89	3.71 (1.48)	53.58	<.001	.020
Respect	.81	5.04 (1.31)	.81	4.15 (1.31)	113.11	<.001	.042
Welfare	.69	4.78 (1.31)	.73	4.60 (1.34)	5.00	.025	.002

*Note.* Df = 1, 2578 for the univariate tests.

**Table 2**

*Intercorrelations for Volunteers and Paid Employees*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Intention to Stay	-	.55**	.36**	.40**	.38**
2. Satisfaction	.66**	-	.65**	.66**	.50**
3. Recognition	.26**	.54**	-	.65**	.57**
4. Respect	.33**	.57**	.67**	-	.53**
5. Welfare	.27**	.50**	.57**	.56**	-

*Note.* Volunteers correlations above diagonal, Paid Employee correlations below diagonal, \*\* denotes  $p < .01$



**Table 3**

*Predictors of Satisfaction and Intention to Stay for Volunteers and Paid Employees*

Outcome Variable	Predictor Variable	Volunteers		Paid Employees	
		<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Satisfaction	Recognition	.33	16.30***	.21	3.18**
	Respect	.40	20.26***	.32	4.80***
	Welfare	.10	5.63***	.20	3.33**
		Adj $R^2 = .52$		Adj $R^2 = .39$	
		$F = 850.93***$		$F = 59.21***$	
Intention to Stay	Recognition	.10	3.62***	.01	.17
	Respect	.23	9.06***	.25	3.18**
	Welfare	.20	8.48***	.13	1.73
		Adj $R^2 = .20$		Adj $R^2 = .11$	
		$F = 192.27***$		$F = 12.58***$	

*Note.* \*\* denotes  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* denotes  $p < .001$