Employee Experiences with Volunteers

Assessment, Description, Antecedents, and Outcomes

Steven G. Rogelberg, Joseph A. Allen, James M. Conway, Adrian Goh, Lamarra Currie, Betsy McFarland

Volunteers frequently serve public and nonprofit organizations, among them libraries, parks and recreation departments, social service groups, and religious organizations. Research on volunteers and volunteerism traditionally focuses on antecedents to volunteering and outcomes for volunteers. In this study, we attempt to build on the existing literature by examining the volunteer experience from the paid employee's vantage point. Using a sample of employees who work alongside volunteers in animal care organizations (N = 270), we examine how employees described the volunteers with whom they interact. Although these assessments were generally positive, there was considerable variability. This appears to be explained, in part, by each organization's volunteer resources management practices. Results also indicate that employees who reported less satisfactory experiences with volunteers also reported being more stressed, overworked, and less committed to the organization, and having a greater intention to quit. Importantly, these results held up even after controlling for general job satisfaction. Implications of these findings for theory and practice are discussed.

VOLUNTEERS SERVE IN MANY public and nonprofit organizations: libraries, parks and recreation departments, social services, religious organizations, schools, public health and safety offices, community and economic development agencies, nursing facilities, emergency services, and the arts. Volunteers often fill administrative, consulting, leadership, or direct service roles. Recent Bureau of Labor statistics (2008) indicate that about 61.8 million people, or 26.4 percent of the U.S. population, volunteered through

or for an organization at least once between September 2007 and September 2008.

Much research has been dedicated to understanding why individuals choose to volunteer or not (Clary and others, 1998). Some work focuses on the extent of volunteerism and its economic impact (Brudney and Duncombe, 1992; Brudney, 1993; Brudney and Gazley, 2002; Mook, Sousa, Elgie, and Quarter, 2005). Other work focuses on management of volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Brudney and Nezhina, 2005; Grossman and Furano, 1999; Hougland and Shepard, 1985; Naylor, 1985). This work often identifies key management practices (recognition, training, and evaluation, for example) for effectively using volunteers. Related to this, some research has examined volunteer satisfaction and retention (Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley, 2001; Gidron, 1984; Liao-Troth, 2001; Netting, Nelson, Borders, and Huber, 2004). These efforts focus on the volunteer experience: what makes it fulfilling and satisfying, the answers often being in contrast to paid workers (for example, Pearce, 1983). Other work looks at improving the volunteer experience by considering or seeking to change employee behaviors and attitudes. This includes research on employee training programs for how to work with volunteers (Haeuser and Schwartz, 1980), employee appreciation of volunteers (Lipp, 2008; Liao-Troth, 2001), and employee acceptance of volunteers (Mendez, 2004; Netting, O'Connor, Thomas, and Yancey, 2005).

In this study, we examine the volunteer experience from a vantage point generally not considered in the literature: that of employees, and specifically how they perceive and are affected by volunteers.

Employee Experiences with Volunteers

Employee experiences with volunteers should be of great interest to researchers as well as volunteer coordinators and managers. Like all relationships, employee-volunteer relationships are influenced by both parties (Netting, Nelson, Borders, and Huber, 2004). If employee experiences with volunteers are negative (or vice versa), it follows that their relationships likely will be strained (Mausner, 1988). Poor relationships can lead to volunteer stress and dissatisfaction (Kulik, 2006). Likewise, poor volunteer relationships and poor experiences with volunteers in general would likely lead to employee stress and discontent. Volunteer and employee turnover may ensue. Given this, the costs of turnover can be extremely high in terms of decreased organizational productivity, poor organizational morale, staff replacement costs, volunteer replacement costs, and decreased ability to serve the public (McElroy, Morrow, and Rude, 2001).

Despite the potential importance of employees' experiences with and perceptions of volunteers, little empirical research exists on the

topic—with two exceptions. In a large case study, Wandersman and Alderman (1993) found that two-thirds of staff reported conflicts (generally minor in scope) between workers and volunteers. The principal problems included personality clashes, volunteers not pulling their weight, lack of communication, disagreement over how to handle situations, and negative volunteer attitudes toward the staff. In a study conducted by Laczo and Hanisch (1999), employees completed a coworker satisfaction measure targeting volunteer workers. They found initial evidence that "intergroup perceptions of coworkers" was somewhat related to employee job withdrawal, work satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

In our study, we used questionnaires to explore employee experiences with volunteers in nonprofit animal control organizations and humane societies. These organizations typically engage in similar functions: sheltering strays and owner-relinquished animals; promoting animal adoption; rescuing injured, abused, or neglected animals; and offering spaying and neutering services. There are an estimated four to six thousand animal shelters in the United States (Humane Society of the United States, 2008). Most of these organizations use volunteers to some extent (McFarland, 2005). Volunteers' tasks include animal care and nurturing, dog walking, office administration, fundraising, training, board service, and event planning.

We addressed three principal research questions. Research question 1 focuses on how employees describe their experiences with volunteers; namely, we examine their assessments of the volunteers with whom they interact. Research question 2 examines some potential antecedents of these assessments. In addition to looking at individual and organizational demographic variables such as gender or organizational size, we examine whether the volunteer resource management practices in use at animal welfare organizations relate to the employees' reported experiences with volunteers. A host of key volunteer resource management practices have been identified in the literature that are designed to promote successful use and integration of volunteers into the work environment (for example, Navarre, 1989; Safrit and Schmiesing, 2004; Wilson, 1976). These practices typically span recruitment, screening, orientation and training, placement, supervision and evaluation, recognition, retention, and record keeping. To the extent that advocated volunteer resource management practices are in place, it follows that volunteers should be better able to serve the organization and effectively work with paid staff, ultimately translating this to more positive employee perceptions of their experiences with volunteers.

Research questions 3a and 3b examine how employee experiences with volunteers relate to key personal and organizational attachment-related outcomes. Question 3a concerns the personal outcomes of stress and perceptions of workload. To the extent that employees have positive experiences with volunteers—where

volunteers aid and work positively with the employees—we would expect less stress and a more manageable perceived workload. Conversely, if employee experiences with volunteers are negative, we expect volunteers to serve as a source of stress and additional workload. Support for these notions comes from conservation-of-resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). This theory suggests that stress results from three conditions: (1) when valued resources, both psychological and physical, are lost or taken away; (2) when there is a threat to extant resources; and (3) when individuals realize no additional resources despite an investment of time and energy. Poor employee experiences with volunteers suggest that employees may not be receiving the help and support they need, despite perhaps working to instruct, train, supervise, and guide the volunteers; in other words, a resource gain is not occurring despite the potential resource investment. Furthermore, bad relationships in and of themselves can serve as a resource drain. On the other hand, positive experiences with volunteers can lead to a gain in available resources in the form of additional help, reduced workload, and social support.

Poor employee experiences with volunteers suggest that employees may not be receiving the help and support they need, despite perhaps working to instruct, train, supervise, and guide the volunteers.

Research question 3b builds off question 3a, but focuses on organizational attachment and withdrawal-related outcomes associated with positive or negative experiences with volunteers. In question 3b, we ask whether poor experiences with volunteers can be tied to feelings of reduced commitment to the organization and a desire to quit. Although it might appear unlikely that unhappy experiences with volunteers could have such far-reaching effects, it is possible that from an employee perspective volunteers are agents of the organization itself. After all, it is the organization that recruits, assigns, and retains the volunteers. If employees have bad experiences with volunteers over time, they may perceive that the organization is in effect culpable. Thus they may become less committed to the organization and develop a desire to leave.

Taken together, the three research questions are designed to examine the topic of volunteers in the workplace from a perspective often not considered: that of the employee. Ultimately, this research can advance scientific understanding of the impact of volunteers in the workplace and improve volunteer resource management practices. Furthermore, it helps augment extant literature examining models and determinants of job satisfaction for employees, specifically those in nonprofit organizations. This literature has consistently found that although much of what we know about job satisfaction collected in for-profit organizations extends to nonprofits (for example, Blunt and Spring, 1991; Ronen, 1977), there are some differences. For example, perceptions of the agency's mission take on increased importance for understanding employee job satisfaction in nonprofit organizations (Brown and Yoshioka, 2003). This study helps determine whether experiences with volunteers serve as another important and unique factor to consider in working to understand and improve nonprofit employee well-being and morale.

Methods

A paper-and-pencil questionnaire and an identical Internet-based questionnaire were created. Prior to administration, ten individuals (graduate students and shelter employees) participated in pilot testing. Pilot testing focused on questionnaire ease of use, completion time, and item clarity. No substantive problems were identified, but certain scales were dropped because of the time needed to complete them.

Study participants were recruited from three separate sources: a national animal welfare conference (Humane Society of the United States Expo), a regional animal welfare conference (Michigan Partnership for Animal Welfare Conference), and an email listserv provided by the Humane Society of the United States. At the conferences, research assistants distributed paper questionnaires to attendees. To participate in the study, the attendee had to be employed by an animal control organization or humane society and interact with volunteers as part of the job. Given the opportunistic nature of these data collection efforts, response rates could not be obtained. Self-reported job titles include executive director, volunteer coordinator, adoptions coordinator, animal care specialist, veterinarian, euthanasia technician, animal control officer, kennel attendant, kennel supervisor, receptionist, and trainer.

Participants were also recruited from a listserv via email invitation. The listserv included individuals who attended an animal welfare training program sponsored by the Humane Society of the United States. The program dealt with implementing animal behavior programs to keep pets from being surrendered readily to the shelter. Because the listserv contains inactive members and old email addresses, it is difficult to know the exact number of individuals who received the invitation, and thus a response rate could not be calculated. Once again, to participate in this study the individual had to be an employee in an animal control organization or a humane society and interact with volunteers on the job. Self-reported job titles were nearly identical to those given by conference attendees. In all three participant recruitment efforts, the questionnaire was labeled "work experiences."

The final sample consisted of 270 participants: 194 participants completed the paper version of the questionnaire, and 76 respondents completed the online version. Consistent with most extant work examining modality differences (for example, Rogelberg and Stanton, 2007), there were no significant differences between these two sets of respondents on the variables assessed in this study. Most of the participants were between twenty-five and fifty-five years of age (82.7 percent), and 88.8 percent of the sample were female. Of the 270 participants, 71.1 percent supervised others, 80.6 percent worked thirty hours a week or more (full-time employee status), and 38.9 percent reported currently volunteering for another organization. In terms of

education, 1.6 percent had some high school education, 9.1 percent graduated high school, 33.6 percent had some college courses, 36.4 percent graduated from college, 7.5 percent had some graduate work, and 11.9 percent had a graduate degree. The participants represented organizations from across the United States: 16.2 percent were from the Northeast, 30.8 percent from the Southeast, 17.8 percent from the Midwest, 6.9 percent from the Northwest, 23.1 percent from the Southwest, and 5.3 percent indicated "other." The organizations ranged in size from fewer than 35 employees and volunteers (26.7 percent) to more than 250 employees and volunteers (24.2 percent). Of these organizations, 30.6 percent were located in urban settings, 27.7 percent in rural areas, 40.1 percent in suburban areas, and 1.7 percent reported "other." On the basis of similarity of organizational demographic profiles provided by employees, we estimate that they worked at 220 organizations (we assumed that participants worked at the same organization if nearly identical organizational demographics were reported). Given the independence of the data collected, within-organization analyses were not possible.

> *Participants were asked to consider the majority of volunteers they work with or interact with in connection to their jobs and then rate how well a set of words or phrases describe the volunteers.*

Measures

Questionnaire items are listed in the Appendix. Because of copyright issues, items from the Job in General scale are not included.

Employee Experience Ratings of Volunteers. Employees provided ratings of volunteers by way of a modified adjective scale similar to those used in measuring other job-related attitudes (for example, the Job Descriptive Index; Smith, Kendall, and Hulin, 1969). Participants were asked to consider the majority of volunteers they work with or interact with in connection to their job and then rate how well a set of words or phrases describe the volunteers. Sample items include "effective," "lazy," "well-trained," and "inconsiderate." The rating scale ranged from 1 ("to no extent") to 5 ("to a great extent").

The adjectives in this twenty-item measure came from three sources. First, we examined the adjectives used in the coworker facet measure making up the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, and Hulin, 1969). Some of the adjectives could be applied quite readily to a rating of volunteers. Second, we conducted six informal interviews with shelter employees regarding their feelings about volunteers. We keyed in on particular words and phrases to consider for the measure. Third, we reviewed the employee and volunteer literature to identify terms used to describe volunteers (Mausner, 1988; Netting, Nelson, Borders, and Huber, 2004).

We conducted a principal-axis factor analysis with Varimax rotation to assess the dimensionality of the measure. From the scree plot and the eigen values, there was one dominant factor and one secondary factor. Examination of the second factor revealed that it

contained all the negatively worded items in the scale (that is, the negatively worded items loaded on the factor). Thus the second factor is best explained as an item construction artifact rather than serving as evidence that a second construct underlies the measure (Schriesheim and Eisenbach, 1995). The unidimensionality of the measure was further supported by high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = 0.92). Prior to creating a composite volunteer experience scale consisting of the mean of the individual experience items, the seven negatively worded items were reverse-scored so that high scores for individual items and the scale itself represented a more favorable assessment and thus more positive experiences with volunteers.

Volunteer Resource Management Practices. Twelve volunteer resource management practices were rated by participants. A sample practice is "a staff member designated as volunteer coordinator." Participants simply indicated whether or not they had the practice ("yes," "no," or "I don't know"). The practices included in this study are not all-inclusive. They have, however, been recommended in the animal welfare literature as critical to volunteer program success (McFarland, 2005).

Stress. General occupational stress was quantified using a two-item measure adapted from Motowidlo, Packard, and Manning's original scale (1986). A sample item is "How often do you find your work stressful?" The items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). The scale had reasonable internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha = 0.74). According to Nunnally (1978), in the early stages of research modest reliabilities of 0.70 are generally acceptable.

Workload. Workload demands were measured using four items adapted from Remondet and Hansson's work control measure (1991). Sample items include "My workload is too heavy" and "I have more work to do in a day than should reasonably be expected." The items were rated using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("very often"). The internal consistency reliability for this measure was good (coefficient alpha = 0.73).

Organizational Commitment. Organizational commitment was measured using the affective commitment subscale from the Commitment Scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). A sample item is "I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization." This four-item measure was rated using a scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The scale's internal consistency was lower than what is commonly found in the literature (coefficient alpha = 0.65). It is important to note that the main problem with low reliability is that it attenuates relationships and makes it

harder to find significance. If one has significant relationships using low reliability variables, then the low-reliability concern is not too problematic.

Intention to Quit. Intention to quit employed a three-item measure developed by Price and Bluedorn (1979). A sample item is "I may look for another job soon." Items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). This measure had high internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha = 0.84).

Job Satisfaction. Global job satisfaction was measured using the Job in General scale (Ironson and others, 1989). The measure contains eighteen descriptor items asking participants to rate what their work is like most of the time, using a three-point scale ("yes," "no," or "?" if unsure). Scoring transformations described in the user manual were implemented. For positively worded items, "yes" is coded 3, "?" is coded 1, and "no" is coded 0. For negatively worded items, "yes" is coded 0, "?" is coded 1, and "no" is coded 3. Sample items include "pleasant," "bad," and "ideal." As advocated, a summed composite of the responses was calculated, with higher scores indicating greater overall satisfaction. The internal consistency reliability was high (coefficient alpha = 0.85).

Demographics. We used a variety of individual and organizational demographic variables in this study: age, gender, education, number of employees, geographic region, and location. Details are given in the Appendix.

Results

Describing Employee Experiences with Volunteers

Research question 1 involved employees' feelings about their experiences with volunteers as indexed by their assessment of the volunteers. Table 1 shows percentage frequency of employees responding to each response scale value for each item. Keying in on the two most affirmative response scale values, "to a good extent" or "to a great extent," we found results quite favorable. Employee experiences, on average, were generally positive. Despite this overall favorability, there was still considerable variation in ratings across employees. This is illustrated by the "well-trained" item, where only 12 percent of employees rated the volunteers they interact with as well trained to a "great extent," 39 percent rated them as well trained to a "good extent," 35 percent as well trained to "some extent," and 14 percent as well trained to a "little extent" or "no extent."

Table 1. Item Response Distribution for Experiences with Volunteers (Percentage)

Item	To No Extent	To a Little Extent	To Some Extent	To a Good Extent	To a Great Extent
Effective	1	1	20	54	24
Lazy	48	42	6	3	1
Inefficient	38	43	16	3	0
Hard-working	0	5	13	48	34
Disorganized	20	46	28	4	2
Responsible	0	5	20	53	23
Supportive	1	4	18	43	34
Judgmental	15	30	36	12	6
Understanding	1	8	30	43	18
Helpful	0	2	14	48	35
Know what they are doing	0	9	30	48	12
Open-minded	0	10	42	35	12
Insensitive	51	33	11	4	1
Friendly	0	2	12	54	32
Kind	0	1	11	51	37
Difficult	22	43	26	6	2
Angry	58	31	8	2	0
Inconsiderate	57	31	10	1	0
Approachable	2	3	19	53	22
Well-trained	2	12	35	39	12
Independent	3	12	36	33	16

Antecedents of Employee Experience Ratings of Volunteers

Research question 2 involved antecedents of employees' assessments of volunteers. Potential antecedents included individual demographics (age, gender, education), organizational demographics (location and size), and volunteer resource management practices in place at the organization.

Individual and Organizational Demographics. As shown in Table 2, gender was the only individual demographic variable significantly related to volunteer experience ratings; age and education showed nonsignificant relationships. The gender point biserial correlation ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$) indicates more positive experiences for female workers. Organizational demographics were examined using a correlation coefficient for number of full-time employees and one-way ANOVAs for two location variables: geographic region, and urban, suburban, or rural location. None of these variables showed significant relationships with employee feelings about the volunteer experience.

Volunteer Resource Management Practices. Table 3 lists the various volunteer resource management practices instituted at our sample's places of employment. Seven of the practices showed

Table 2. Correlations of Volunteer Attitudes with Potential Antecedents and Outcomes

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Volunteer attitudes	3.78	0.49	1.00										
2. Age	3.09	1.14	0.09	1.00									
3. Gender	1.18	0.58	0.21*	0.00	1.00								
4. Education level	3.77	1.16	0.10	0.07	0.04	1.00							
5. Full-time employees	36.35	62.96	0.00	−0.06	−0.11	0.07	1.00						
6. PVP, total	5.97	3.21	0.27*	−0.10	0.36*	0.17*	0.18*	1.00					
7. PVP, significant	3.42	2.10	0.32*	−0.10	0.31*	0.18*	0.21*	0.96*	1.00				
8. Stress	3.72	0.77	−0.22*	−0.18*	0.11	−0.09	−0.02	0.14*	0.06	1.00			
9. Workload	3.31	0.86	−0.27*	−0.04	−0.02	−0.06	0.01	−0.02	−0.02	0.59*	1.00		
10. Organizational commitment	4.27	0.67	0.26*	0.08	0.08	0.07	−0.02	0.14	0.10	−0.13*	−0.08	1.00	
11. Intention to quit	2.16	0.99	−0.23*	−0.21*	0.07	−0.03	−0.12	0.01	−0.01	0.29*	0.36*	−0.39*	1.00
12. Job satisfaction	42.86	11.84	0.113	−0.13*	−0.03	0.10	0.15*	0.10	0.13*	−0.26*	−0.19*	0.30*	−0.41*

Note: N ranges from 210 to 230. PVP = positive volunteer practices. *p* < 0.05.

Table 3. Percentage Frequency for Volunteer Practices

Volunteer Practice: Does your organization have . . .	Percentage Frequency	Correlation with Volunteer Experiences
A designated volunteer coordinator (staff member or volunteer)	79.3	0.01
A mandatory structured volunteer training	76.2	0.17*
A volunteer performance evaluation system	22.6	0.17*
A formal policy for handling volunteer problems	50.5	0.25*
A policy for dealing with employee-volunteer conflict	48.4	0.24*
Volunteer job descriptions	76.9	0.10
Formal volunteer recruitment efforts	58.0	0.24*
An interview or screening process for the "hiring" of volunteers	59.9	0.25*
A process for documenting volunteer activity (hours)	83.0	0.12
Materials for volunteers concerning euthanasia	31.1	0.12
A regular survey it administers to volunteers to assess how they are doing	13.2	0.12
Social gatherings to promote volunteer-employee interactions	59.1	0.30*

*$p < 0.05$.

significant positive correlations with employee ratings of the volunteer experience: volunteer training, performance evaluation, volunteer problem policy, volunteer-employee conflict policy, formal volunteer recruitment efforts, screening process for volunteer "hiring," and volunteer-employee social gatherings. Next, we created two composite variables. The first index was a sum of all volunteer practices in which an organization engaged. The second index focused only on the seven volunteer practices that were shown to be individually correlated with employee ratings of the volunteer experience. For this index, we summed how many of these seven practices a shelter had implemented. One limitation of the second composite is that the relationship with volunteer satisfaction may be inflated by capitalization on chance. Both composites were significantly ($p < 0.05$) related to volunteer satisfaction, with rs of 0.27 and 0.32, respectively. These data suggest a potential cumulative effect of volunteer resource management practices: increased number of practices was associated with higher rating of the volunteer experience.

Personal Outcomes of Employee Experience Ratings of Volunteers

Research question 3a concerned the potential personal outcomes associated with ratings of the volunteer experience. Table 2 includes correlations between employee evaluations of volunteers and employee stress and workload. The relationship with stress was negative ($r = -0.22$), as was the relationship with workload ($r = -0.27$), such that poor experiences with volunteers were associated with higher level of stress ($p < 0.05$) and greater perceived workload ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4. Regression Analysis Involving Organizational Commitment and Satisfaction with Volunteers

Model	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE B	β
Step 1: Control variable						
Job satisfaction	0.12**	0.12**		0.02	0.00	0.35**
Step 2: Key predictor						
Satisfaction with volunteers	0.17**	0.16**	0.04**	0.30	0.09	0.21**

Note: N = 212. All coefficients are reported for the final step. Dependent measure: organizational commitment.
**$p < 0.01$.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Involving Intention to Quit and Satisfaction with Volunteers

Model	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE B	β
Step 1: Control variable						
Job satisfaction	0.16**	0.16**		−0.03	0.00	−0.41**
Step 2: Key predictor						
Satisfaction with volunteers	0.19**	0.18**	0.03**	−0.35	0.13	−0.17**

Note: N = 212. All coefficients are reported for the final step. Dependent measure: intention to quit.
**$p < 0.01$.

Attachment-Related Outcomes of Employee Experience Ratings of Volunteers

For research question 3b we focused on two attachment-related outcomes: organizational commitment and intention to quit (see Table 2). Both of these variables showed significant ($p < 0.05$) relationships with employee experiences with volunteers, with correlations of $r = 0.26$ (positive) for organizational commitment and $r = –0.23$ (negative) for intention to quit, such that positive experiences with volunteers were associated with greater organizational commitment and lower intention to quit the organization. We then controlled for job satisfaction in these analyses because it has been shown to be related to both of these outcomes (for example, Siegall and McDonald, 1995; Cohen, 1997). Experiences with volunteers accounted for unique variance in organizational commitment (Table 4) beyond overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, experiences with volunteers accounted for unique variance in intention to quit (Table 5) beyond overall job satisfaction.

Discussion

In this study we examined the volunteer experience from the perspective of employees. The first part of the study examined employee descriptions of the volunteers they interact with on a host of dimensions. Overall, the ratings were quite positive. More than

80 percent of employees described volunteers as hardworking, helpful, friendly, and kind to a "good" or "great" extent. On the other hand, only 50 to 60 percent of employees described volunteers as knowing what they are doing or being open-minded, well trained, and independent to a "good" or "great" extent. Across employees, there was considerable variability in ratings of the quality of one's experiences with volunteers, with some employees reporting very positive experiences and others reporting more neutral to even negative experiences. These ratings in turn were quite predictive of personal and attachment-related outcomes; namely, employees with poor experiences with volunteers reported being more stressed, overworked, and less committed to the organization, and they expressed greater intention to quit the organization. Importantly, these results held up even after controlling for general job satisfaction.

Our cross-sectional research design does not allow us to determine the causal direction or underpinnings in the observed relationships involving employee feelings and experiences with volunteers. It may be the case that poor experiences with volunteers drive employee discontent and stress. Alternatively, discontented employees may blame volunteers for their job dissatisfaction. On the basis of conservation-of-resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and its supporting evidence (for example, Hobfoll and Freedy, 1993), we postulate that the former explanation is more likely. When employees' experiences with volunteers are negative, they are likely not receiving the help and support they need, despite perhaps working to instruct, train, supervise, and guide the volunteers; a resource gain is not occurring despite the potential resource investment. Furthermore, bad relationships in and of themselves can serve as a resource drain. This is akin to research showing that a lack of social support at work can serve to put at risk or reduce available employee resources (Hobfoll and Freedy, 1993; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, and Granrose, 1992) and thus lead to negative individual and organizational-attachment outcomes.

If these theoretical and empirical arguments are indeed viable, our findings argue against the notion of volunteers serving as a mere background variable for employees (that is, something not substantively attended to and easily ignored when things do not go well). As a background variable, the potential impact of "bad" volunteers for an organization is limited to merely having certain tasks go incomplete. To the contrary, these findings suggest that ineffective volunteers can take a toll on the employee workforce and lead to negative personal and organizational outcomes. That is, given our findings regarding organizational commitment and intention to quit, negative employee experiences with volunteers seem to translate into ill feelings toward the organization itself. This may be because agents of the organization itself (the volunteer coordinator, management) select, prepare, and retain volunteers.

Employees with poor experiences with volunteers reported being more stressed, overworked, and less committed to the organization, and they expressed greater intention to quit the organization.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any field research, this study has limitations that suggest caution against overgeneralization and prompt future research. In comparison to a single organization sample, our cross-organizational data are particularly useful for observing variability in volunteer resource management practices and perhaps providing a better overall slice of the employee population in animal welfare organizations. It did not allow, however, more thorough examination of employee experiences with volunteers within a particular organization. Most notably, we were unable to assess how volunteers perceive the same employees and why. Attachment and stress outcomes for volunteers could also be studied in such a design.

Future work would benefit from a deeper and more nuanced examination of volunteer resource management practices. For example, instead of examining the existence of volunteer orientation programs in general, the types, number, and timing of orientation and training programs conducted for volunteers (and employees) should be studied. Indeed, each practice examined in this study could be broken down into more detail to yield enhanced insights. Other classes of antecedents not studied here but worthy of attention might focus on the volunteer coordinators or the executive directors themselves, and the specific behaviors and approaches they take to creating and promoting an organizational culture conducive to effective use of volunteers.

Cross-sectional data such as ours do not allow strong causal inferences. As a result, additional work could benefit from looking at experiences with volunteers and employee well-being across time (for example, a diary study conducted over the course of a week). This type of methodology permits longitudinal modeling of relationships, which in turn would allow us to better evaluate whether our causal supposition is appropriate.

Our data sample was mostly female. Although this is quite consistent with animal shelter employee demography (K. Intino, Humane Society of the United States, personal communication, April 16, 2009) and nonprofit organizations in general (Gibelman, 2000), a more gender-balanced sample would help to assuage external validity concerns. It would also permit a better test of our initial finding that females appear to have more positive experiences with volunteers than do males.

Given the diversity of our employee sample, we did not have enough data to do meaningful analyses within job types. Because each job type may connect with volunteers quite differently, future work should attempt to examine patterns of findings within job types or at least attempt to control for job type. Although an examination of the volunteer research literature generally suggests that research findings have not been moderated by

nonprofit type (for example, Brudney, 1993, 1999; Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1991), future work should replicate our results in different types of public, private, and nonprofit organizations that use volunteers.

Recommendations

Given the apparent importance of employee experiences with volunteers, the question then becomes, How can positive experiences with volunteers be promoted? Our data demonstrate the importance of volunteer resource management practices in answering this question. Specifically, employees reported more positive experiences with volunteers when their organization had any (and especially all) of these factors: a mandatory structured volunteer training; a volunteer performance evaluation system; a formal policy for handling volunteer problems; a policy for dealing with employee-volunteer conflict; formal volunteer recruitment efforts; an interview or screening process for the "hiring" of volunteers; and social gatherings to promote volunteer-employee interactions. In examining these practices, we find they are all about getting the right individuals to volunteer, preparing them properly, and establishing relevant foundational policies. Collectively, these practices represent a proactive approach to volunteer resource management.

The most obvious and general implication of this project's findings is that nonprofit leaders cannot take for granted employee experiences with volunteers.

For considering and conducting these activities and interventions, employee input and engagement are recommended. Psychological literature suggests that participation and involvement in an effort yields buy-in and greater commitment to the action in question (for example, Cotton and others, 1988). Therefore, to the extent that employees themselves can be involved in the volunteer program's practices and activities, employees may ultimately be more likely to help promote the success of volunteer programs.

The most obvious and general implication of this project's findings is that nonprofit leaders cannot take for granted employee experiences with volunteers. These experiences matter to employee morale and stress, which in turn affects the nonprofit's ability to effectively deliver services to those in need. Therefore, another recommendation stemming from these data is to monitor employee perspectives and thoughts on volunteers. Treat employees as a stakeholder group when examining and evaluating a volunteer program's effectiveness. Consider employee expectations, reactions, and input in working to design or improve volunteer resource management programs.

Conclusions

Given the great extent of volunteerism in public, private, and nonprofit organizations, we set out to examine how employees perceive and are potentially affected by volunteers. Employee experiences

with volunteers were shown to be quite relevant to understanding personal and attachment-related outcomes. More specifically, positive experiences with volunteers can promote employee well-being and retention, whereas negative experiences can promote stress and a wilting commitment to the organization. This study offers additional evidence (and validation of sorts) for the need to proactively and carefully introduce and manage the volunteer component of the workplace. The effects of a slew of ill-prepared, poorly supervised, or unmotivated volunteers is more far-reaching than just lack of work getting done in a timely manner.

On the flip side, our data suggest that positive experiences with volunteers may lead to a host of positive outcomes for the employee and the organization. Positive experiences were associated with greater organizational commitment, less intention to quit, and less personal stress for employees. These positive outcomes, taken together, can lead to a more stable organizational environment better able to meet the needs of the public. In summary, although past research has shown that volunteer satisfaction is affected by employee attitudes and behavior (for example, appreciation and respect), this study documents that the relationship goes both ways; employee satisfaction appears to be affected by volunteers.

STEVEN G. ROGELBERG *is a professor and director of the Organizational Science program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.*

JOSEPH A. ALLEN *is a doctoral student in the Organizational Science program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.*

JAMES M. CONWAY *is professor of psychology at Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Connecticut.*

ADRIAN GOH *is a doctoral student in the Organizational Science program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.*

LAMARRA CURRIE *is a research assistant at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.*

BETSY MCFARLAND *is senior director of the Companion Animals section at the Humane Society of the United States.*

Appendix: Questionnaire Items

Volunteer Experiences

Think of the *majority* of volunteers you work with now or interact with in connection with your work. How well does each of the following words or phrases describe these people?

Effective
Lazy
Inefficient
Hardworking
Responsible
Supportive
Judgmental
Understanding
Helpful
Know what they are doing
Open-minded
Insensitive
Friendly
Kind
Difficult
Angry
Inconsiderate
Approachable
Well-trained
Independent

Volunteer Resources Management Practices

Does your organization have . . .

A designated volunteer coordinator (staff member or volunteer)
A mandatory structured volunteer training
A volunteer performance evaluation system
A formal policy for handling volunteer problems
A policy for dealing with employee-volunteer conflict
Volunteer job descriptions
Formal volunteer recruitment efforts
An interview or screening process for the "hiring" of volunteers
A process for documenting volunteer activity (e.g., hours)
Materials for volunteers concerning euthanasia
A regular survey it administers to volunteers to assess how they are
    doing
Social gatherings to promote volunteer-employee interactions

Stress

Please indicate how often you experience the following:

How often do you find your work stressful?
How often during the past month have you felt used up at the end of the day?

Workload

Indicate how frequently the following happens at work:

My workload is too heavy.
I have more work to do in a day than should reasonably be expected.
There is enough time in a work day to complete all the tasks assigned to me.
I have been forced to do a coworker's work in addition to my own.

Intention to Quit

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I may look for another job soon.
I often think of quitting my present job.
I intend to stay in my present job.

Organizational Commitment

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it.
I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization.
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.

Demographics

Age (*circle one*): 18–24   25–34   35–44   45–54   55 or older
Gender (*circle one*):   Male   Female

Which of the following best reflects the highest level of education you have received? (*check one*)

    [ ] Some high school   [ ] Graduated high school
    [ ] Some college   [ ] Graduated college
    [ ] Some graduate work   [ ] Graduate degree

Estimate the total number of people currently working at your organization:

    Full-time employees _____

    Part-time employees _____

    Volunteers _____

What region of the U.S. is your shelter located in? (If outside the U.S., please specify)

    1 – Northeast   2 – Southeast   3 – Midwest   4 – Northwest

    5 – Southwest   Other:

Which best describes your shelter's location?

    1 – Urban   2 – Rural   3 – Suburban   Other:

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