

Dispositional and Organizational Influences on Sustained Volunteerism: An Interactionist Perspective

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Community service often involves sustained prosocial actions by individuals. This article focuses on one kind of such actions, volunteerism. Volunteerism involves long-term, planned, prosocial behaviors that benefit strangers, and usually occur in an organizational setting. A selective review of the literature on the correlates of volunteerism is presented. One part of the review concerns the relationship between dispositional variables and volunteerism; it includes new data from an on-line survey that show significant relationships among personality traits, religiosity, and volunteer activities. The other part concerns how organizational variables, alone and in combination with dispositional variables, are related to volunteerism. A theoretical model of the causes of sustained volunteerism is presented and the practical implications of this model are discussed.

Among social psychologists, there is a long history of interest in when and why people act prosocially (Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995). Until relatively recently, research on prosocial behavior focused primarily on a very specific kind of prosocial action—bystanders intervening to provide immediate and short-term help to a physically distressed stranger. In the last few years, however, more attention has been given to prosocial behaviors that continue for an extended period of time—sustained prosocial actions. There are a number of different kinds of behaviors that might be classified as sustained prosocial actions (e.g., working as a firefighter, caring for a chronically-ill loved one), but this article is primarily concerned with volunteerism.

Because volunteerism can mean different things to different people, in the first section of the article I define the term, discuss its most salient attributes, and consider the differences and similarities between volunteerism and other kinds

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of prosocial behaviors. In the next section, I use an interactionist perspective or framework to discuss the variables associated with volunteerism. I begin this section with a selective review of published research on the dispositional correlates of volunteerism and present some new data from an on-line survey that provide information about how dispositional variables are related to volunteerism. Then, I turn to the question of how organizational variables, alone and in combination with dispositional variables, are related to volunteerism. In the final portion of the article, I present a conceptual model of direct and indirect influences on sustained volunteerism and discuss some practical implications of the model.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism can be defined as long-term, planned, prosocial behaviors that benefit strangers and occur within an organizational setting. Based on this definition, volunteerism has four salient attributes: longevity, planfulness, nonobligatory helping, and an organizational context. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

Longevity. Volunteering is usually a relatively long-term behavior. For example, a recent national survey of volunteerism in the United States (Independent Sector, 1999) found that almost 50 percent of the people who volunteer do so on a regular rather than a one-time basis. Another recent survey of volunteers found that more than 90 percent of them wanted to engage in long-term volunteer activities (VolunteerMatch, personal communication, September 15, 2001). And longitudinal studies of volunteers have found that once people begin to work regularly as a volunteer, a large percentage of them continue this activity for several years (Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Penner & Fritzsche, 1993).

Planfulness. Volunteering is typically a thoughtful and planned action. On first inspection, data from national surveys of volunteers would seem to contradict this statement. For example, in its national survey the Independent Sector (1999) found that about 90 percent of the people asked to volunteer agree to do so. However, it seems unlikely that requests to become a volunteer are directed at a random group of people or that people impulsively agree to become a volunteer at the moment they are asked to volunteer. It seems much more probable that the targets of these requests have previously indicated some interest in becoming a volunteer and are already, for whatever reason, favorably disposed toward this activity. Further, the work of Davis et al. (1999) suggests that before people actually agree to volunteer, there is some thoughtful consideration of both the costs and benefits of engaging in this action. This decision process can be contrasted with the one that usually precedes helping in emergencies. In such instances, the helping decision is made very quickly, without much (or sometimes no) conscious thought,

and is greatly influenced by the salient characteristics of the particular situation that confronts the potential helper (Dovidio & Penner, 2001).

This is not to suggest that volunteering is totally immune to situational forces. For example, in the first few days after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the number of people who contacted one on-line service to volunteer for different charities almost tripled; more people offered their services as volunteers than at any other time in the service's three year history (VolunteerMatch, personal communication, September 15 2001). But it seems reasonable to argue that these people's behavior was still much more thoughtful, planned, and deliberate than bystander interventions in emergencies. The events that inspired the volunteering occurred at some distance from where the modal volunteer lived; and volunteering required locating the on-line service, selecting an organization that needed volunteers, and providing personal information so the organization could later contact the volunteer. Also, the events of September 11 produced increases in volunteering for all the organizations listed by this service. For example, while organizations that provided emergency services showed the largest increases, there were also substantial increases in the number of people who wanted to volunteer for organizations that provided services for animals, children, gays and lesbians, seniors, and numerous other target groups (VolunteerMatch, personal communication, September 15 2001). This suggests that many of these people had thought about volunteering for a certain kind of organization well before the day of the attacks.

Nonobligatory helping. Because the recipients of a volunteer's beneficence are either strangers or an organization that serves these individuals, the volunteer is not motivated by a sense of personal obligation to a particular person (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Omoto and Snyder characterize this kind of prosocial behavior as "nonobligated helping." By contrast, when helping is directed at a close friend or relative, it typically results from a prior, personal, and reciprocal relationship between the helper and the recipient; thus, there is some implicit or explicit personal obligation to help (Dovidio & Penner, 2001; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998).

Organizational context. Finally, volunteerism is far more likely than other kinds of helping to take place within an organizational setting. There are certainly individuals who, on their own, engage in sustained, nonobligated helping of virtual strangers (see Colby & Damon, 1992). However, most volunteers (perhaps as high as 85 percent) work as part of an organization (Independent Sector, 1999). Thus, organizational variables are far more important in volunteerism than in one-to-one, interpersonal kinds of helping.

My research on variables that might affect volunteerism has been guided by this conceptualization of its most salient attributes. For example, the fact that volunteerism involves long-term, planned helping led me to devote substantial attention

to dispositional variables and their relationship to volunteerism. This is because dispositional variables are more likely to manifest themselves in enduring behaviors than in transitory ones, such as bystander interventions. Similarly, the fact that volunteerism is likely to occur in an organizational setting has led me (and other researchers) to pay attention to the organizational variables that might influence it.

A selective review of research on these two classes of variables and volunteerism follows. In the interest of clarity, the dispositional and the organizational correlates of volunteerism are discussed separately. However, my approach to volunteerism is firmly imbedded in an interactionist perspective. Specifically, two assumptions are made about the variables discussed below. First, neither dispositional nor organizational variables can, by themselves, provide a full explanation of why people initially decide to volunteer and then continue to volunteer over an extended period of time. Second, the two classes of variables affect one another and interact to affect volunteerism. That is, the influence of many organizational variables on volunteerism may be moderated and/or mediated by dispositional variables and vice versa. This point is discussed in more detail shortly.

Dispositional Variables and Volunteerism

In the present context, “dispositional variables” will be used as a generic term for several different enduring attributes of individuals. These include things such as their personal beliefs and values, personality traits, and motives. The notion that dispositional variables, especially personality traits, are related to prosocial behaviors has not always enjoyed wide acceptance among helping researchers. Indeed, in one of the first comprehensive monographs on helping, Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, and Clark (1981) concluded that the search for a prosocial personality had been “futile.” One reason for this conclusion was that, at that time, most helping studies concerned bystander interventions in emergencies. In such circumstances situational demands are often so strong that they may suppress the influence of dispositional variables on helping decisions (Epstein, 1979).

However, there may have been another reason for the dismal findings concerning the personality correlates of prosocial actions. Most researchers did not, in fact, search for the “prosocial personality”; rather they studied how a very specific personality trait related to a very specific kind of helping. When significant findings were obtained, attempts to “replicate” them often involved a quite different kind of helping. Most of these replications failed, but not because personality is unrelated to helping, but rather because the salient characteristics of the criterion measure had changed. Thus, perhaps what the null results really showed is that one relatively specific personality trait is unlikely to be related to a wide range of helping behaviors (Penner, Escarraz, & Ellis, 1983). This line of reasoning led my students and me to search for the personality characteristics that form the core of a “prosocial personality” (Penner, Fritzsche, Craig, & Freifeld, 1995).

The Prosocial Personality

Penner et al. (1995) began their search for the prosocial personality with the identification of personality traits that had been found to correlate with some kind of prosocial behavior in at least two published studies. Then, the list of traits was reduced by excluding a trait if: (1) there was no coherent theoretical explanation of *why* it correlated with prosocial or helpful actions; or (2) it did not correlate with other, independent measures of prosocial tendencies. Following this, a factor analysis was performed on the remaining measures. Both quantitative and theoretical considerations led to a two-factor solution. The first factor was called Other-oriented Empathy; it appears to primarily concern prosocial thoughts and feelings. People who score high on this factor are empathetic and feel responsibility and concern for the welfare of others. The second factor was called Helpfulness; it appears to concern prosocial actions. High scorers on this factor have a history of being helpful and are unlikely to experience self-oriented discomfort in response to others' distress (Penner et al., 1995). In passing, it should be mentioned that this empirically derived "description" of the prosocial personality is quite similar to Oliner and Oliner's (1988) description of the personality traits of Christians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust and to Colby and Damon's (1992) summary of the personal characteristics of the 23 lifelong altruists they studied.

The instrument that measures the prosocial personality is called the Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB). Scores on the two factors of the PSB correlate from .25 to .50 depending on the sample (Penner et al., 1995; Rioux & Penner, 2001). Other-oriented Empathy and Helpfulness appear to be not only empirically distinct, but conceptually distinct as well. For example, scores on the Other-oriented Empathy dimension strongly correlate with measures of personality attributes such as agreeableness and nurturance, but scores on the Helpfulness dimension do not. Conversely, scores on the Helpfulness dimension correlate strongly with measures of dominance and assertiveness, but scores on the Other-oriented Empathy dimension do not (Penner et al., 1995). Also, whereas scores on the Other-oriented Empathy dimension correlate with affective and cognitive responses to distress in another person, scores on the Helpfulness dimension do not (Penner & Fritzsche, 1993).

Despite these differences, scores on both dimensions of the prosocial personality do correlate with prosocial behaviors. Among the behaviors that have been found to correlate with one or both of them are: speed of response in simulated emergencies, the frequency of mundane, everyday acts of helping over a month, frequency of helping co-workers, willingness to mentor co-workers, and willingness to serve as an organ donor (see Allen, 1999; Cicognani, 1999; Dovidio & Penner, 2001; Borman, Penner, Allen, & Motowidlo, 2001). Here, however, the behavior of primary interest is volunteerism.

Volunteerism. The research on the prosocial personality strongly suggests that its two dimensions are related to various aspects of volunteer behavior. For example, Penner and Fritzsche (1993) found that scores on both dimensions distinguished volunteers at a homeless shelter from a matched group of non-volunteers. Further, within the volunteer sample, the short-term and long-term volunteers differed in their scores on both dimensions. In another study, Penner and Finkelstein (1998) administered the PSB to volunteers at an AIDS service organization. Five and eleven months later they measured the level of general volunteer activities and the amount of time the volunteers spent with someone who was HIV-positive or had AIDS. Among male volunteers, Other-oriented Empathy (but not Helpfulness) correlated significantly with subsequent levels of general volunteer activities and the amount of time the volunteers personally spent with someone who was HIV positive or had AIDS. Additionally, in this and other studies scores on the Helpfulness dimension significantly correlated with the number of service organizations for which volunteers worked (Little, 1994; Sibicky, Mader, Redshaw, & Cheadle, 1994; Penner & Fritzsche, 1993).

These studies contained relatively small samples of volunteers who worked in a restricted number of service organizations. More recently, I was able to use the Internet to collect data from a much larger sample of volunteers working in a wide variety of service organizations in the United States. In May of 1999 *USA Weekend*, a Sunday supplement magazine that is carried by 560 American newspapers, contained an article about "altruism" (Paul, 1999). A portion of the article discussed research on the prosocial personality and invited readers to visit the supplement's website, "USA WEEKEND ONLINE," and complete a "test" that measured how prosocial they were. Readers who went to the website were linked to a copy of the PSB, along with some questions about their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, income, education, gender, ethnicity) and religious beliefs (whether they were affiliated with a specific religion, and how religious they were). They were also asked if they had volunteered in the last year. If they had, they provided information about: the number of charities for which they volunteered, the nature of their primary charity, how much time they spent working for that organization, and their tenure as a volunteer for that group. In order to insure anonymity, responses to the questionnaire were sent to a file on the *USA Weekend* server and then the data, stripped of all identifiers, were forwarded to me in a spreadsheet format.

More than 1100 people completed the survey. About 76 percent of them reported having worked as a volunteer during the previous 12 months. (These people were classified as "active volunteers.") The respondents were overwhelmingly of European ancestry (90 percent) and predominantly female (77 percent); about 48 percent had completed at least some college and the same percentage had a total family income of \$40,000 or more. About 60 percent self-identified as Protestant or Catholic; another 25 percent said they belonged to other religions; and the

remaining 15 percent said they were not members of any organized religion. Overall, 45 percent of the respondents described themselves as “very” or “extremely” religious (henceforth, this variable will be called *religiosity*). Seventy-six percent of the respondents indicated that they had volunteered in the last year. (This was substantially higher than the 55 percent volunteer rate found in Independent Sector’s [1999] national survey of volunteering in the United States.)

It would be hard to claim that this was a representative sample of American volunteers and non-volunteers. In addition to the obvious biases introduced by who reads *USA Weekend* and who has access to the Internet, there was probably a large self-selection bias in who opted to respond to the survey. For example, it seems reasonable to argue that the over-representation of active volunteers among the total respondents represents some sort of self-affirmation of their beliefs that they were prosocial individuals.

Thus, while the demographic profile of volunteers obtained in this study (i.e., predominately, wealthy, well-educated women of European ancestry) was quite similar to the profile found in another recent survey of volunteers (VolunteerMatch, personal communication, September 15, 2001), these data cannot be used to provide population estimates of the incidence of volunteerism in United States or the proportion of volunteers with a particular demographic attribute. However, a number of survey researchers now argue that even though a sample may be biased from a random sampling perspective, the *patterns* of correlations obtained from such a sample usually closely approximate those obtained from an unbiased sample (see Brehm, 1993; Dillman, 2000; Krosnick, 1999). Therefore the data from this on-line survey can be used to study the dispositional correlates of volunteerism.

The data analysis was conducted in two stages. In the first, the key question was: What variables distinguished those respondents who were active volunteers from those who were not? In the second stage, only the active volunteers were considered and the key question was: What variables distinguished the more active volunteers from the less active ones? The latter set of analyses presented a much more difficult predictive task because most of the active volunteers had a long history of substantial involvement in volunteer activities and, thus, there was a substantial restriction of range with regard to the criterion variables (i.e., number of organizations, etc.). For example, about 68 percent of the volunteers reported that they worked for multiple charities; more than 70 percent said they spent at least a few hours every week as a volunteer for their primary charity; and a majority (about 68 percent) reported they had worked at the charity for at least two years. Nonetheless, the latter analyses permitted a much more fine-grained examination of the correlates of volunteerism. That is, they enabled us to identify the variables associated with different levels of activity among a group of active volunteers. In the interest of brevity and clarity, only a small portion of the findings from this survey will be discussed and specific results will be presented only when they

speak directly to the dispositional correlates of altruism.¹ Because of the extremely large sample size, alpha was set at .01; all statistics reported below were significant at that level or beyond.

Volunteers versus Non-volunteers

Active volunteers and non-volunteers did not differ with respect to age, education, gender, or income. However, as expected, volunteers scored significantly higher than non-volunteers on both the Other-oriented Empathy and Helpfulness dimensions of the prosocial personality, $t_s(1084) = 7.06$ and 5.75 , respectively. Turning to religion, it was found that people who belonged to an organized religion were more likely to be volunteers (80 percent) than people who did not belong (62 percent), $\chi^2(2) = 21.29$; and, relative to non-volunteers, volunteers scored higher on the religiosity measure (i.e., how religious they were), $t(1084) = 7.50$. To eliminate the possibility that the associations between the religion-related questions and volunteering might have been due to the individuals who volunteered for religious organizations (about 22 percent of the sample), these people were excluded and the data reanalyzed. Even with these people excluded, all the significant findings described above remained significant.

Correlates of Volunteer Activities

Table 1 presents the intercorrelations among the three aspects of volunteer activities—number of organizations worked for, length of service at primary charity, and amount of time spent as a volunteer at that charity—and the correlations between these measures and the demographic and dispositional variables noted above. The first thing that can be seen from this table is that the three activities were substantially intercorrelated (all $r_s > .40$). This should be kept in mind as I discuss the correlates of each kind of activity.

With regard to the demographic correlates of volunteer activities, age was significantly and positively associated with number of organizations and length of time spent working for that organization ($r_s = .15$ and $.24$, respectively); education was significantly and positively associated with all three activities ($r_s = .17$, $.24$, and $.10$, respectively); and income was significantly and positively correlated with number of organizations ($r = .11$). Gender (coded as a dummy variable) was not correlated with any of the volunteer activities.

The religiosity measure was significantly correlated with all three measures of volunteer activities. The stronger people said their religious beliefs were, the more organizations they worked for ($r = .23$), the longer their tenure as a volunteer ($r = .24$), and the more time they spent working as a volunteer ($r = .16$). (The

¹ A complete set of all the analyses is available from the author.

Table 1. Correlates of Volunteer Activities

	Number of Organizations	Volunteer Length	Volunteer Time	Age	Education	Gender	Income	Religiosity	Other-Oriented Empathy
Number of Organizations									
Volunteer Length	0.51								
Volunteer Time	0.41	0.41							
Age	0.15	0.24	0.05						
Education	0.17	0.24	0.10	0.38					
Gender	0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.03	-0.01				
Income	0.11	0.07	-0.03	0.02	0.21	-0.02			
Religiosity	0.23	0.24	0.16	0.06	0.07	0.03	0.02		
Other-Oriented Empathy	0.24	0.16	0.11	0.10	0.13	0.14	0.00	0.17	
Helpfulness	0.25	0.18	0.16	0.26	0.12	0.08	0.03	0.09	0.53

Note. $n = 847$; Gender was coded as: 1 = male, 2 = female.

$r_s > .10, p < .01$.

$r_s > .12, p < .001$.

$r_s > .15, p < .0001$.

same pattern was obtained when people who said they belonged to a religion were compared to non-belongers in χ^2 analyses.) These relationships remained even when respondents who worked for religious organizations were excluded from the analyses.

Other-oriented Empathy was significantly and positively correlated with all three activities ($r_s = .24, .16, .11$, respectively); and the same was true for the relationships between Helpfulness and these activities ($r_s = .25, .18, .16$, respectively).

The final question asked of the active volunteer data concerned whether religious beliefs and the prosocial personality dimensions would explain variance in volunteer activities that was not explained by demographic characteristics. To answer this question, three hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted in which each of the volunteer activities was regressed onto: age, education, gender, income, religiosity, Other-oriented Empathy, and Helpfulness. In all the regressions, the four demographic variables (i.e., age, education, etc.) were entered as a block at the first step and the three dispositional variables (i.e., religiosity, Other-oriented Empathy, etc.) were entered as a block at the second step. The critical question was whether there would be a significant change in R^2 when each block was added to the equation.²

When number of volunteer organizations was regressed onto the predictor variables, the overall $R^2(.14)$ was significant, $F(7, 839) = 19.37, p < .001$. Both the demographic and dispositional blocks of variables added significant amounts of variance accounted for to the equation. Specifically the ΔR^2 (i.e., change in R^2) for the demographic variables was .045, $F(4, 842) = 9.94$; the ΔR^2 for the dispositional variables was .094, $F(3, 839) = 30.41$. In the regression involving length of time as a volunteer the $R^2(.14)$ was also significant, $F(7, 839) = 20.06$. Again both the demographic and dispositional blocks of variables added significant explained variance to the equation— ΔR^2 demographic variables .085, $F(4, 842) = 19.45$; ΔR^2 dispositional variables .058, $F(3, 839) = 19.07, p < .001$. Finally, although the R^2 for amount of time spent volunteering was much smaller than the R^2 s for the other two activity measures (.06), it was significant $F(7, 839) = 7.71, p < .001$. However, only the block of dispositional variables produced a significant $\Delta R^2, F(3, 839) = 12.75$.

A brief discussion of these findings would seem worthwhile. Education was positively correlated with all three measures of volunteer activities. This finding was consistent with other studies of the demographic correlates of volunteering (e.g., Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Statistics Canada, 2001). Some have speculated that the reason for this relationship is that better educated people have the kind of jobs that allow them more time to devote to their volunteer activities

² In the interest of brevity and clarity, the analyses that included religious affiliation, a categorical variable with five levels, are not discussed in this article. These are available from the author.

(Schroeder et al., 1995). But others have suggested another explanation. For example, on the basis of data from several case studies Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) argued that people from upper social economic classes (e.g., better educated people) may be more willing to volunteer because this provides them with a way to give some additional meaning to their lives. That is, they need something beyond their jobs to make them feel fulfilled.

Let us now turn to the association between religiosity and volunteerism, which was not a primary focus of this study, but the findings are interesting. Religiosity was positively associated with all three kinds of volunteer activities. This finding has also been obtained in a recent national survey of volunteers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001). Further, in the present study religiosity produced the strongest associations with volunteer activities. It would be premature to conclude from these findings that being religious is invariably positively associated with volunteerism. In fact, there is other evidence that different kinds of religious motivations and beliefs may moderate when and for whom religious people offer their services as volunteers (Jackson & Esses, 1997). However, these results do suggest that one should include some measures of religiosity in any comprehensive examination of the causes of volunteerism.

The two dimensions of the prosocial personality were significantly associated with all three aspects of volunteer activities. This finding is quite consistent with earlier work by Penner and his associates on the personality correlates of volunteerism. (Although, interestingly, this is the first study in which the relationship between Other-oriented Empathy and the number of organizations for which a person volunteers was as strong as the relationship for Helpfulness; see Penner et al., 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998) The findings are also consistent with the results from other studies that have examined long-term, voluntary prosocial behaviors among paid employees of large organizations (e.g., Allen, 1999; Fecteau, Allen, Fecteau, Bordas, & Tears, 2000; Midili & Penner, 1995; Penner, Midili, & Kegelmeyer, 1997; Negrao, 1997; Rioux & Penner, 2001; Tillman, 1998). In all of these studies, significant, positive associations have been found between the two dimensions of the prosocial personality and self-reports of sustained prosocial actions. And in two of the three studies where peer reports of prosocial behaviors were also obtained, significant positive relationships were found. Thus, the relationship between the prosocial personality and sustained prosocial actions in an organizational setting is probably not restricted to unpaid volunteers.

Motives

Before I turn to the research on organizational variables, I want to briefly discuss the role of motives in volunteerism. This is because the model presented in Figure 1 gives a prominent place to motives as causes of volunteerism. The

discussion here is necessarily brief—but a much more detailed treatment of motives has been provided by Clary et al. (1998).

The theoretical rationale for research on the role of motives in volunteerism comes from Snyder's functional approach to prosocial behaviors, which focuses on the function or purpose served by such behaviors (see Clary & Snyder, 1991; Snyder, 1993). This approach is predicated on the notion that much of human behavior is motivated by specific goals or needs. Thus, if one wants to understand why a person has engaged in some behavior, one needs to identify the purpose or need served by that behavior. In the case of volunteering, people engage in this behavior, at least in part, because it serves one or more of their goals and needs.

There is a substantial body of work (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998) that suggests personal motives play an important role in volunteerism. For example, in the longitudinal study described earlier, Penner and Finkelstein (1998) also measured the motives of the AIDS volunteers. They found that among the male volunteers "value expressive" motives, measured at the beginning of the study, correlated significantly with subsequent levels of both general volunteer activities and the amount of time a volunteer spent with someone who was HIV-positive, or had AIDS. Clary and Orenstein (1991) and Davis, Hall, and Meyer (2001) have obtained similar results in studies conducted in several different kinds of volunteer organizations. And Rioux and Penner (2001) have found that motives also play a significant role in long-term, voluntary prosocial behaviors among paid employees of large organizations.

Organizational Variables and Volunteerism

As noted earlier, once a person has made the decision to volunteer, volunteerism usually occurs in an organizational context. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the organizational variables that are most likely to influence a volunteer's behavior in this context. A review of the theoretical and empirical literature suggests that two kinds of organizational variables should have an impact on volunteerism. They are: (1) an individual member's perceptions of and feelings about the way he or she is treated by the organization and (2) the organization's reputation and personnel practices. A few studies have examined how perceptions and feelings affect volunteerism. For example, Omoto and Snyder (1995) found that satisfaction with the organization was significantly associated with length of tenure as a volunteer; and Penner and Finkelstein (1998) and Davis, Hall, and Meyer (2001) found that organizational satisfaction was associated with the amount of time spent working as a volunteer. Further, Penner and Finkelstein (1998) and Grube and Piliavin (2000) both found a significant positive relationship between organizational commitment and the amount of time people reported working for a service organization.

These findings are consistent with research by industrial and organizational psychologists on the correlates of sustained, voluntary prosocial actions among

paid employees of organizations. For example, Organ and Ryan (1995) conducted a large meta-analysis of the correlates of these kinds of behaviors and found that “job attitudes” (i.e., job satisfaction with the job, perceived organizational fairness, organizational commitment, and perceived leadership supportiveness) consistently correlated with self- and peer-reports of prosocial actions directed at individuals and the organizations themselves. (See also Borman et al., 2001; Midili & Penner, 1995; Rioux & Penner, 2001.)

Turning to reputation and practices, I am aware of only one study that has directly addressed how an organization’s reputation affects volunteer activities. Grube and Piliavin (2000) reported that ratings of the prestige of an organization were positively associated with number of hours worked for the organization and negatively associated with intent to leave it. I am not aware of any studies that have investigated the impact of personnel practices on volunteers’ behavior, but the industrial and organizational psychology literature would suggest they are important. For example, Graham (in press) argued that if companies want to increase voluntary prosocial actions among their employees, they need to design jobs that are highly motivating and interesting, and that provide feedback to the job occupant. Skarlicki and Latham (1996) provided some direct evidence that changes in organizational practices can affect employees’ inclinations to act prosocially. They manipulated the level of organizational justice displayed by officers of a union and then subsequently measured prosocial behaviors among union members. They found that such behaviors occurred significantly more often among members whose officers had received the organizational justice training and that this relationship was directly linked to perceived organizational justice among the members. This suggests that an organization that treats its workers fairly can reasonably expect an increase in voluntary prosocial actions among its employees. This should be true whether the organization is for profit and the employees are paid or the organization is a charity and the “employees” are volunteers.

Thus, volunteers who are satisfied with their job, committed to the organization, have positive affect while on the job, and believe they are being treated fairly should display a higher level of volunteer activity.

Interactions Between Dispositions and Organizational Factors

Although the dispositional and organizational correlates of volunteerism were presented separately, it must be reemphasized that these two classes of variables are not independent of one another. Consistent with the interactionist theme presented earlier, they influence one another and the resultant interactions between them influence sustained prosocial actions. A few examples serve to illustrate this point. Consider, first, the relationship between job attitudes and the dimensions of the prosocial personality. Midili and Penner (1995) found that paid workers who scored high on Other-oriented Empathy also reported high levels of job satisfaction,

perceived more organizational justice, and had a more positive mood on the job. (The last finding was replicated by Rioux and Penner [2001].) This suggests that the prosocial personality may affect sustained prosocial actions both directly and indirectly, through its influence on the job-related thoughts and feelings.

The relationships among motives and organizational and personality variables provide another example of why one needs to take an interactionist perspective on the causes of sustained prosocial actions. Among both volunteers and paid workers, the strength of prosocial motives is associated with job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, perceived organizational justice, organizational commitment) *and* the two dimensions of the prosocial personality (Forde, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Rioux & Penner, 2001). At this point it is impossible to decipher the causal links among these variables, but the findings underscore the point that it would be unwise to talk about the impact of motives on volunteerism independently of their relationship with the other correlates of this behavior. This position is implicitly and explicitly reflected in the model of sustained volunteerism that is discussed below.

Sustained Volunteerism: A Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of the causes of sustained volunteerism. Because this is a conceptual or structural model, I will not discuss how the latent variables shown in the figure would be measured or operationalized. However, measures for all the variables in the model do exist. The model is based on my own work and the work of other researchers who study volunteerism (e.g., Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Lee, Piliavin, & Call, 1999; Clary et al., 1998). It should not be viewed as a definitive statement on the causes of sustained volunteerism, but rather as a working model that will hopefully be of heuristic value to others interested in this and related kinds of sustained prosocial behaviors.³

The model is organized temporally and begins with the *Decision to Volunteer*, the point at which the person makes a commitment to become a volunteer. The data on volunteering in the days following the September 11 attacks strongly suggest that *Situational Factors* (e.g., historical events) can have an impact on a person's *Decision to Volunteer*. However, the model assumes that *Situational Factors* are less influential causes of this decision than are the variables discussed below. Therefore, the path from *Situational Factors* to *Decision to Volunteer* is represented by a broken line.

A much more potent determinant of the *Decision to Volunteer* is *Volunteer Social Pressure*, which is a potential volunteer's subjective perceptions of how significant others feel about him/her becoming a volunteer and his/her motivation

³ Penner et al. (1997) proposed a very similar model of the causes of sustained prosocial behaviors among paid employees of organizations.

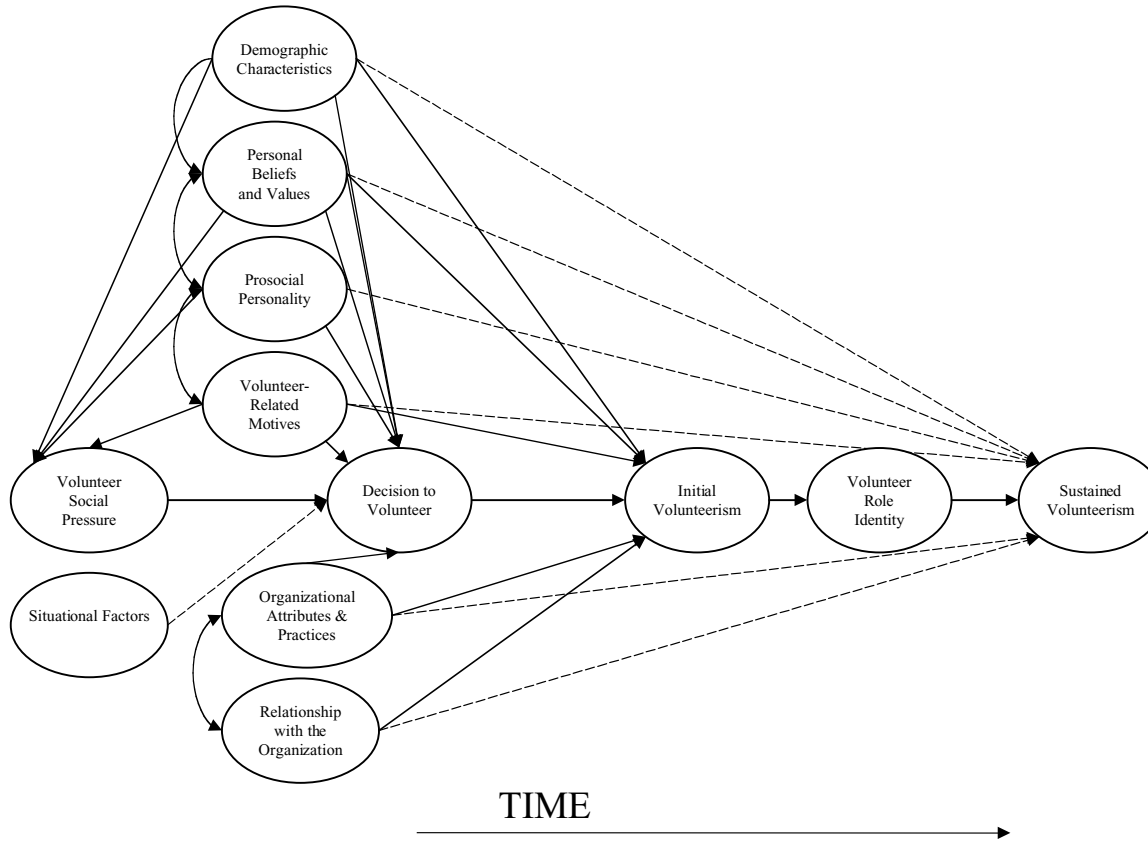


Fig. 1. The Causes of Sustained Volunteerism. The figure represents a conceptual model of the direct and indirect influences on sustained volunteerism. The stronger causal relationships are represented by solid lines; the weaker ones by dashed lines.

to comply with these feelings. Several studies have found that before people decide to volunteer they are exposed to both explicit and implicit kinds of social pressures. The greater these pressures, the more likely the person is to volunteer (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Independent Sector, 1999; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Thus, the second (and stronger) causal path in the model is from *Volunteer Social Pressure* to *Decision to Volunteer*.

However, as suggested earlier, it does not seem likely that the targets of social pressure to volunteer are randomly selected; some people are more likely to be asked to volunteer than others. Similarly, it does not seem likely that all people respond affirmatively to implicit or explicit pressures to volunteer; some people are more likely to agree than others. Therefore, the model identifies some additional direct and indirect causes of the *Decision to Volunteer*. Each of these is described below.

The model proposes that one demographic variable, three dispositional variables, and one organizational variable are related to the *Decision to Volunteer*. The first of these, *Demographic Characteristics*, is made up of things such as age, income, education, etc. (Strictly speaking, this is known as a “composite” variable [Bollen & Lennox, 1991].) The three dispositional latent variables are: *Personal Beliefs and Values*, which involves religious beliefs and other yet unspecified values and beliefs related to prosocial tendencies; *Prosocial Personality*, which concerns personality traits associated with prosocial thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and *Volunteer-Related Motives*, which concerns the motives that underlie volunteering (see Clary et al., 1998). The organizational latent variable that influences the *Decision to Volunteer* is *Organizational Attributes and Practices*, which, as discussed earlier, involves an organization’s reputation, values, and practices. The model posits that the dispositional variables directly influence both the likelihood that a person will be the target of social pressure to become a volunteer and the decision to volunteer itself. However, *Organizational Attributes and Practices* influences only the *Decision to Volunteer*. That is, the model proposes that, because of their attributes and practices, some organizations are more likely to attract certain volunteers than others.

Once the decision to become a volunteer is made, then the question becomes: What factors are responsible for differences in *Initial Volunteerism*? *Initial Volunteerism* is the amount of time and effort a person expends during the early stages of his/her tenure as a volunteer. The research presented in this article and elsewhere strongly indicates that differences in levels of *Initial Volunteerism* covary with differences in *Demographic Characteristics*, *Personal Beliefs and Values*, *Prosocial Personality*, *Volunteer-Related Motives*, *Organizational Attributes and Practices* and one other organizational variable, *Relationship with the Organization*. *Relationship with the Organization* involves the kinds of job attitudes presented earlier (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, etc.). Note, that in the interest of simplicity and clarity, the figure does not show any bidirectional links between

the dispositional variables and the organizational variables. However, it is a core assumption of the model that there are reciprocal influences within and among the different classes of variables. Thus, each of the causal variable's impact on *Initial Volunteerism* is both direct and indirect.

The next path in the model is from *Initial Volunteerism* to *Volunteer Role Identity*. *Volunteer Role Identity* is a concept developed primarily by Piliavin and her associates (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Piliavin, Grube, & Callero, this issue) and concerns the extent to which a person identifies with and internalizes the role of being a volunteer; that is, the extent to which this role and the relationships associated with it become part of a person's self-concept. According to Grube and Piliavin (2000), a particular role identity is shaped by the behavioral expectations of others who interact with the person in the context of that role, and the self-attributions that result from the person consistently engaging in behaviors associated with that role (also see Piliavin et al., this issue). Consistent with this theorizing, the present model posits that a person's experiences during the *Initial Volunteerism* will shape his/her *Volunteer Role Identity*. A high and involving level of volunteer activity will likely produce a strong volunteer role identity. And it is a person's *Volunteer Role Identity* that is the direct and proximal cause of *Sustained Volunteerism*, the amount of volunteer activity a person engages in after he or she has been a volunteer for some significant period of time. The link between *Initial Volunteerism* and *Volunteer Role Identity* is directly supported by the work of Grube and Piliavin (2000), and less directly by Penner and Finkelstein (1998). Findings from Piliavin and Callero (1991) and Penner and Finkelstein would appear to support the causal path between *Volunteer Role Identity* and *Sustained Volunteerism*.

Finally, the model proposes that in addition to their mediated relationships with *Sustained Volunteerism* (through their influence on *Initial Volunteerism*) the other variables (e.g., *Prosocial Personality*, *Relationship with the Organization*, etc.) have some direct influence on this sustained prosocial action. However, this influence is less than their influence on *Initial Volunteerism* and, of course, less than the influence of *Volunteer Role Identity* on *Sustained Volunteerism*. (These weaker relationships are also indicated by broken lines.) The primary reason the model proposes that the relationships will be weaker is that as volunteers develop a *Volunteer Role Identity*, dispositional, and organizational variables should become less important causes of *Sustained Volunteerism*. Instead, the most potent direct causes of *Sustained Volunteerism* are people's perceptions of themselves and the roles they occupy (i.e., their *Volunteer Role Identity*).

Theory and Practice

The present approach to sustained volunteerism was predicated on the assumption that it is more likely than other prosocial actions to be influenced by dispositional and organizational variables. The immediate goal of this article was

to identify these variables and present a conceptual model of how they independently and collectively affect sustained volunteerism. The model presented in Figure 1 can be empirically tested and if it is substantially correct, it provides some fairly straightforward suggestions as to how service organizations might attract and retain volunteers. A few of these are considered briefly here.

The findings on the role of motives in the decision to volunteer suggest that service organizations interested in recruiting new volunteers might benefit by identifying the things that would motivate a certain target group to volunteer and then highlight these motives in their recruiting appeals directed at this target group. There already are data that indirectly support this suggestion (see Clary et al., 1998).

Of equal—if not more—importance is what service organizations might do to retain volunteers. That is, it can be argued that if service organizations face a personnel problem, it is not a shortage of people who want to volunteer. Instead, it is attrition among people in the early stages of their tenure with the organization (VolunteerMatch, personal communication, September 15, 2001). In this regard, nonprofit service organizations may be aided by the work of industrial and organizational psychologists who study prosocial behaviors among paid employees. As noted earlier, job attitudes directly affect a worker's proclivity to engage in such behaviors (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Although some portion of the differences in job attitudes may be due to dispositional factors, a more direct and powerful cause of differences is how a person is treated by the organization. It seems reasonable to argue that the same principles would apply in the case of unpaid volunteers. That is, the better they are treated by the service organization, the greater their initial levels of volunteerism will be. Virtue may be its "own reward," but intelligent and progressive management practices would not hurt either (Graham, *in press*; Skarlicki & Latham, 1996). One should not assume that just because a person is motivated by altruistic concerns that his or her initial level of volunteer service would be unaffected by attitudes toward the service organization. Thus, service organizations must do more than simply recruit volunteers; they must work to maximize the volunteers' involvement with the organization. If the initial level of volunteering can be maintained, a volunteer role identity should develop. Once this identity has emerged, the organization has a volunteer who should remain a long-term and active contributor (Lee et al., 1999).

Service organizations may want to also turn to some basic social psychological theories for other ways in which they could foster a volunteer role identity. For example, the research on the justification of effort and cognitive dissonance (e.g., Cooper, 1980) might be of direct value to a service organization looking for ways to keep good volunteers. Greatly simplified, this research indicates that, all other things being equal, working hard for something makes a person like it more (Gerard & Mathewson, 1966). This would suggest that immediately getting a new volunteer involved in reasonable organizational activities should engender more positive attitudes toward the organization. By the same token, dissonance theory

(and common sense) suggest that the worst personnel mistake a charity can make is to have no tasks for a new recruit to do.

These few examples suggest some of the ways in which social psychologists and other behavioral scientists might become valuable resources for service organizations. That is, they could provide theory-based suggestions that might increase sustained volunteerism. This would be of immeasurable benefit to specific organizations and the general public as well. Thus, the study of volunteerism provides us with another chance to prove the wisdom of Kurt Lewin's (1951) claim that nothing is so practical as a good theory.

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