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Title: Where do I belong? Volunteer attachment in a complex organization.

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In: *Administration in Social Work*, 33(2), 202-220

Link to the article:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a909793916~frm=abslink>

To refer to or to cite this work, please use the citation to the published version:

Hustinx, L., & Handy, F. (2009). Where do I belong? Volunteer attachment in a complex organization. *Administration in Social Work*, 33(2), 202-220.

Where Do I Belong?

Volunteer Attachment in a Complex Organization

Abstract

To understand volunteer retention and recruitment in complex organizations, this paper focuses on volunteers' attachment to a multipurpose and multi-branch organization. Using the Red Cross in Flanders (Belgium), a service organization with multiple locations offering a variety of programs, we investigate whether volunteers' attachment is primarily directed toward the organization as a whole, or whether volunteers are more prone to develop localized attachment to the program or branch in which they participate. Our findings suggest that managers recruiting volunteers to large complex organizations should be cautious in using the overarching organizational mission to attract volunteers. Rather, attention should be put on specific programs and activities using volunteers. It is only through longer-term service that volunteers appreciate the organization's mission and principles and find their allegiance to the organization as a whole.

Key words

Volunteer management, organizational complexity, volunteer attachment, volunteer loyalty, Red Cross

Section 1 Introduction

In order to better understand volunteer recruitment and retention in complex organizations, this paper focuses on how volunteers become socialized and where their sense of belonging lies in an organization that has multiple locations offering a variety of volunteer programs. In large multi-service organizations where there are ongoing interplays between central and local forces, it is important to understand where volunteers see themselves belonging. This is valuable information for recruitment and retention purposes. We ask whether volunteers' attachments are directed toward the organization as a whole, or whether volunteers develop localized allegiances to the program or the regional unit in which they participate, or do more complex patterns of interaction emerge?

To answer this question we survey volunteers in one large complex organization, the Red Cross Flanders (RCF), which serves the Dutch-speaking population of Belgium¹, to understand how they identify themselves and whether their attachments are to the organization at large; to the programs in which they are directly engaged; and/or the local chapter where they volunteer.

The RCF offers an exceptional example of organizational complexity. It hosts more than 14,000 volunteers, who serve diverse populations through a multiplicity of programs in areas such as social services, first aid, training and education, youth development, and international and local relief and disaster work. Furthermore, in order to adequately address community needs, RCF operates by means of about 270 local 'chapters' that are spread more or less evenly across the various localities of Flanders. In addition to core humanitarian services, these chapters are involved in supplementary specialized activities that vary depending on local needs, facilities and resources. For instance, 217 of the 270 chapters have a lending counter for crutches and other auxiliary materials (Red Cross Flanders, 2007).

¹ RCF is one of the two independent divisions of the Belgian Red Cross serving Flanders, which is one of the two main regions in Belgium. Flanders is where a majority of the Belgian population lives (about 6,000,000 inhabitants, or 60% of the Belgian population).

Despite the diversity of its programs and chapters, the RCF is united and guided by seven fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. This framework provides a universal standard of reference and ensures that all RCF activities have one central mission: to prevent and alleviate human suffering without discrimination, while protecting human dignity². Thus, although volunteers participate in a myriad of diverse programs and chapters, a single mission aims to unite all volunteers across these differences. We explore how this tension between the unity of mission of the RCF on the one hand and the specificity of locality and diversity of activities on the other impacts the nature of volunteer attachment. The question we ask is whether the RCF, one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the region that enjoys broad and popular support for its overarching mission, has sufficient appeal to garner volunteers' attachment to RCF, or whether the diversity and experiences at the local level dominate, with volunteers' attachments built at the regional or program level.

Our findings have direct implications for the recruitment and retention of volunteers in large multi-service organizations with many branches and different volunteer programs. In order for an organization to remain successful, the types of management efforts required, especially for recruiting and retention, must necessarily vary to reflect the manner in which organizational attachments are made. Although RCF may be a household name, if volunteer attachments to their local experiences are stronger than their broader organizational attachments, a one-size-fits-all method that depends on the reputation of RCF and its overall values and goals must be replaced by a model that focuses more attention on local differences and program characteristics. However, such strategies need to be carefully planned in order to avoid the risk of volunteers losing sight of the broader principles and goals of the organization as a whole and to avoid other dilemmas characteristic of complex organizations.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: We first present, in Section 2, the theoretical background of this study. Section 3 discusses our methods, measures and hypotheses. We present our

² See for details: <http://www.ifrc.org/what/values/index.asp> [Accessed January 18, 2008]

findings from a representative sample of 652 RCF volunteers in Section 4 and examine volunteers' organizational attachments in interaction with a number of measures of organizational complexity. Our conclusions in Section 5 discuss our findings and suggest how these findings can help managers of volunteers in complex organizations to recruit and retain volunteers.

Section 2 Theoretical Background

The phenomenon of volunteerism, it has traditionally been argued, emerges from a sense of belonging among individuals to local communities or other collective frames of reference, such as class and religion (Beck, 1998; Eckstein, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 1998). A tight coupling between formal group memberships and volunteering exists, allowing volunteers to reaffirm their collective identities and facilitating integration into local social networks. The organization is thus an important locus for belonging and for the strengthening of group ties. Being a member of the organization is most important, and thus volunteers strongly identify with the values and goals of the organization, and they show a great sense of responsibility for the organization as a whole rather than purely for the work they undertake (Harris, 1996; Cameron, 1999). The literature on volunteer motivations underscores this fact, reporting that the most important motivation for volunteering is the desire among individuals to see their values and beliefs actualized in what they do (Clary and Snyder, 1991). Thus being a volunteer, and choosing to donate one's time to a particular organization out of many, suggests that the individual likely identifies with and shares the values and goals of the organization. This membership model argues for an overall sense of belonging and identification—which we call 'attachment' for short—to the RCF by its volunteers, rather than to its various activities and local chapters.

In contrast, others have argued that a recent and remarkable shift in the volunteer labor supply has resulted in different patterns of volunteering and a consequent shift in the nature of volunteer identification

with the values of the host organization. For example, there is a trend toward volunteers seeking short-term assignments, with organizations relying more and more on episodic volunteers as opposed to traditional volunteers (Cnaan and Handy, 2005; Handy, Brodeur, and Cnaan, 2006; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Macduff, 2004). Often volunteer activities are organized in order to assist the organization in matching the changing nature of volunteer supply to ongoing demand. The organizational role shifts from being the central focus of volunteer action to acting as a sort of 'enabling structure'; a mediator between particular volunteers and specific projects (Meijs and Hoogstad, 2001).

Under this strategy, volunteers are recruited for specific programs and are therefore less involved with the organization as a whole, which requires less of a 'buy in' among volunteers to organizational goals and values. Volunteers instead concentrate on clearly defined tasks, rather than on achieving the goals of the organization, and concern themselves little with the other organizational activities. As such, program volunteers develop only weak organizational ties and are also more likely to direct their efforts toward different organizations according to their own preferences and needs. Some authors suggest that, viewed through the lens of this 'market model,' volunteers are growing to increasingly resemble 'consumers' or 'clients' (Evers, 1999: 55). If this is the case for RCF volunteers who are recruited by their local chapters for particular programs, we would expect to see less of a sense of attachment by the volunteers to the larger organization (RCF) and more of an attachment to the specific chapter or program in which they are engaged.

These two variant bodies of literature suggest the existence of competing attachments among volunteers in complex organizations. To test how this plays out in a complex organization, this study examines volunteers' competing attitudes and attachments towards the RCF. We first look the relative importance of central versus program- and locally specific organizational features. We secondly introduce three key measures of organizational attachment and hypothesize that if the RCF succeeds in building a sense of belonging to the organization as a whole, we should expect to see no differences in measures of attachment among volunteers to the RCF across its various programs and chapters. If, on the other hand,

attachment is built at the local level, then volunteers' attitudes *should* vary across programs and chapters, with the unique characteristics of specific programs and local chapters building volunteer loyalties.

Section 3 Methods

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The sample of volunteers was selected from central volunteer records on the basis of a multistage sampling procedure. The sample was geographically limited by means of a random selection of 50 (out of 270) local chapters of the RCF (equally spread over the five Flemish provinces). Within these chapters, a random sample of volunteers was subsequently subtracted from the following five key programs³, ensuring a maximum variety of volunteer profiles:

1. **First-Aid (FA):** First-aid posts at sporting events, rock concerts, etc.; assistance and psycho-social support in disasters; transport of the sick; provision of wheelchairs, etc.
2. **Red Cross Youth (RCY):** Teaches first aid to children and youth, and organizes youth projects.
3. **Social Assistance Services (SAS):** Services to patients in hospitals and nursing homes, and to the underprivileged. Accommodation and assistance to asylum seekers.
4. **Training and Education (TE):** Teaches first aid delivery and instruction on how to prevent accidents and injuries at home or during sports activities.
5. **Disaster and Humanitarian Aid (DHA):** Provides emergency relief, development-aid programs, and international legal aid, and traces missing persons, and reunites families.

³ Given the highly disproportionate distribution of volunteers among the selected programs, a simple random or systematic sample of the entire population would include too few members of certain programs for meaningful analysis. In order to enhance the level of precision of estimates for the programs with a much smaller proportion of the sample, a disproportionate sample of volunteers was subsequently subtracted, thus under-representing chapters with large numbers of volunteers, and over-representing chapters with small numbers of volunteers (for a detailed description of programs and discussion of the sampling design, see XXX 2003).

Personal in-home interviews using a standardized face-to-face questionnaire were conducted with 652 volunteers who are a representative sample of the five programs. Dividing the number of completed interviews by the number of potential respondents, a response rate of 79% is obtained (AAPOR 2005, 28). Of the respondents, 50.6% were males and 49.4% were females. The age of the volunteers ranged from 15 to 81 years with a mean of 36.4 years, a median of 35 years, 25% younger than 24 years, and only 10% older than 57 years. Of the sample, 29.3% had an educational level not exceeding lower secondary school and 32.8% had some higher education. The majority were employed full-time (48.4%), 10.1% had a part-time job, 13.9% were not actively employed, and retirees and students represented, respectively, 7.8% and 19.8% of the sample. On average, the responding volunteers had served Red Cross Flanders for 8.3 years. Half of the volunteers had been involved for more than 5 years, and 30.9% of the sample had served 3 years or fewer.

3.2. Measures and Hypotheses

Dependent variables: To gain a more profound understanding of volunteers' competing attachments, we use two different analyses. We first look at the relative importance of different organizational characteristics. We ask whether, in a large organization with many programs and chapters such as the RCF, volunteers see key value in the characteristics of the organization as a whole, or rather in those programs or chapters with which they are directly in contact. This attitude measure should give us some initial insight into the question of whether volunteers are primarily attached to the organization as a whole or to its parts.

Second, we ask respondents to rank, using a Likert-type response format, a series of statements that assess these conflicting attachments in a more detailed way. These statements were subjected to an initial iterated principal factor analysis with squared multiple correlations as prior communality estimates and an

orthogonal (varimax) rotation method. Items that loaded on multiple factors or had factor loadings lower than 0.35 were deleted and a 'simple structure,' in which items have high loadings on one factor only, was obtained (compare Hatcher, 1994; Kim and Mueller, 1994). The factors retained for the purposes of this study reflect volunteers' attitudes, and are grouped into three scales: Loyalty to RCF, Value of the mission of RCF, and Satisfaction with experiences in RCF.

The first two scales measure the attachment of the individual to the organization, while the third scale can be regarded as a measure of attachment to the activity and chapter in which they participate. The **Loyalty** measure (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$) included the following statements: (1) 'As a volunteer, I use every means necessary to ensure the continued existence of the RCF; (2) 'If I see other Red Cross volunteers, I feel strongly related to them'; (3) 'When a RCF volunteer appears in the media, I'm proud of being a RCF volunteer myself'; (4) 'It is important to make clear to other volunteers that they should adhere to what the RCF expects of them'; (5) 'I like other people to know I'm a RCF volunteer'; (6) 'I always try to convince other people to volunteer with the RCF'. The **Value of the mission of RCF** (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$) summated respondents' scores on four different items: (1) 'What I value most is the fundamental mission and principles of the RCF; (2) 'I feel challenged by the type of actions the RCF undertakes'; (3) 'The RCF plays an important role in our society and I wanted to be part of it by volunteering'; (4) 'I value the international collaboration within the Red Cross movement'. The volunteers' **Satisfaction with experience in RCF** (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$) expresses the volunteers' agreement with the statements about (1) 'having very good experiences with this kind of volunteer work'; (2) 'the good atmosphere in the group of volunteers'; (3) 'feeling at home in the RCF'; (4) 'the opportunity to make friends through their volunteering'; (5) 'feeling good about themselves doing the volunteer work'; and (6) 'seeing it as a relaxing way of spending time'. By summing respondents' scores on the retained items per factor, individual scale scores were generated and converted into the original 5-point scale by dividing the summated scores by the number of items.

Independent variables: We analyze whether volunteers' strength of attachment interacts with measures of organizational complexity. These measures are meant to grasp the diversity of local volunteer experiences and tensions arising from the RCF's programmatic and locally diversified approach to its unified mission. We are primarily concerned with the impact of a program-based approach on the types of attachment volunteers develop. Our key measure of organizational complexity therefore corresponds to the five different **programs** in which the volunteers participate.

To assess the impact of local volunteering experiences on the volunteers' attachment we need to separate program-based differences from the effect of a second key indicator of organizational complexity: the local chapter in which the volunteers perform their activities. The chapter is very likely to co-determine the diversity of local volunteer experiences and reflect specificities related to local needs and customs. The chapter also impacts the expectations and roles of volunteers in each program, with local characteristics such as rural or urban, which further determine the local expectations and management styles. Rather than using the 50 distinct RCF chapters as a measure of physical locality, we group them by region into five provinces: Limburg, Antwerp, Flemish Brabant, East Flanders, and West Flanders. We aggregate local chapters not only for the sake of methodological clarity, but because the five regions of Flanders represent distinct geographical, political, and cultural entities, and in order to account for effects of regions that are characteristically rural versus urban.⁴

We control for the fact that volunteer attachments can also vary with the intensity of the volunteers' involvement, measured by means of the length of service and the number of hours of volunteering. In addition, we control for the intervening effects of volunteers' gender, age, and education. The model we are therefore testing is: organizational attachment (loyalty, mission, and satisfaction) is a function of organizational complexity (specific program, geographic locality,) controlling for volunteers' intensity of participation, gender, age, and education.

⁴ See www.flanders.be for a full discussion on the characteristics of these regions.

Hypotheses

The key question to be investigated is whether volunteers have a primary sense of attachment to the RCF at the organizational level or at the point of their involvement. In other words, does RCF build an overall organizational attachment among its volunteers beyond the individuals' particular engagement in this complex organization? The null hypothesis (H_0) to be tested is: **The RCF builds organizational attachment among its volunteers.**

This tension is explored by means of volunteers' ranking of a set of organizational features that refer to either the organization as a whole or to the volunteers' respective program localities. If RCF builds organizational attachment among its volunteers (H_0), this would imply that:

Sub-hypothesis 1: Volunteers attach more value to generic organizational features in comparison with program-specific features.

The next step in the analysis is explanatory in nature and assesses the extent to which measures of organizational complexity have a bearing on the three measures of organizational attachment (as discussed above), controlling for volunteers' intensity of participation and socio-economic background. If we find no differences in the measures of organizational attachment across the measures of organizational complexity, we may conclude that RCF does indeed garner volunteer attachment at the organizational level. On the basis of the main hypothesis (H_0), we thus test the following sub-hypothesis:

Sub-hypothesis 2: No differences in measures of organizational attachment occur across measures of organizational complexity (programs and chapters).

Section 4 Findings

(i). Organizational Features (Sub-hypothesis 1): To examine differences in organizational attachments, we first examine the responses to the question regarding which organizational characteristics were valued most by RCF volunteers. The respondents chose two items from a list of eight organizational features and then ranked them as the first and second most important items. If RCF builds attachment to the organization as a whole among its volunteers, they are likely to attach value to generic organizational characteristics, such as the mission.

Our findings are provided in Table 1. We note that 72.6 percent of the respondents put the service provision of their chapter as the first or second most important organizational characteristic. In addition, 61.4 percent of responses mention the (refresher) courses and high quality standard of the services provided, which relate to the specific programs in which the volunteers participate. In contrast, the mission of the RCF and the opportunity to be part of a large, well-known international organization are notably less valued by the RCF volunteers.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 provides an initial challenge to the main hypothesis. Volunteers clearly chose those items that represent an attachment to their own particular programs: those reflecting what they do, what they receive, and the quality of the activities they participate in. These qualities are followed in importance by the fundamental principles representing what RCF stands for or by the public opinion of the RCF in society. On the basis of the RCF volunteers' rankings, we thus reject the first sub-hypothesis.

(ii). Organizational Attachment: Loyalty, Mission, and Satisfaction (Sub-hypothesis 2): We use linear multivariate regression analysis to assess whether differences in organizational attachment occur across the measures of organizational complexity. To fully account for the effect of participating in a particular program, we run a regression for each program separately. In addition, the models estimate the

impact of regions, and control for the effects of the volunteers' length of service and hours of volunteering, their gender; age and education.

Insert Tables 2 to 4 about here

It should first be noted that the predictive power of the regression model for the value attached to the **mission** of the RCF (Table 2) is very low ($<.06$), whereas the regression models for **loyalty** (Table 3) and **satisfaction** (Table 4) produce acceptably high proportions of explained variance ($>.23$; See Lattin, Carroll and Green, 2003: 53). We may tentatively conclude that volunteer attachment to the mission of the RCF is invariant over local experiences, since differences in background profiles and volunteer experiences only have a weak explanatory power in how volunteers value the mission. Loyalty and satisfaction, on the other hand, seem to be generated through the local volunteer experience.

A closer examination of the net effects of the predictor variables (i.e., the impact of each predictor variable on the dependent variable independently of the impact of the other independent variables in the model) reveals significant results for all three regression models. Most importantly, there is a net effect of the different service programs, our key measure of organizational complexity, on the three measures of attachment. This implies that different attachments to the RCF develop depending on the program in which one volunteers.

Across the three dependent variables, there is only one program, First Aid (FA), in which participation positively contributes to the volunteers' sense of organizational attachment to the RCF, as indicated by the positive signs for loyalty and mission on the one hand, and the insignificant effect on the volunteers' satisfaction with their local volunteer experience on the other. Volunteers in this program place a greater emphasis on the larger organization's mission and also develop stronger loyalties in reference to volunteers in the other programs. This suggests that, for the volunteers in the FA, their sense of identity and belonging is to the RCF and not to the programs or chapters where they volunteer.

The other programs do not promote (and some of them even discourage) building attachment to the RCF at the general level (i.e., have a neutral or negative effect on mission and loyalty), and at the same time are neutral or inhibiting to the volunteers' affinity with the local context (i.e., have a neutral or negative effect on satisfaction). Volunteering in Disaster and Humanitarian Aid (DHA) seems most inhibiting to any feelings of attachment among the volunteers. Although there is no effect on the value attached to the mission of the RCF, there is a negative impact on loyalty and satisfaction. This is not unexpected and may be explained by the highly particular nature of this program. Volunteers gather very infrequently, and only are mobilized in the unlikely event of a calamity or catastrophe. The volunteers are not socialized into the organization as a whole or even into the specific program.

The other three programs, Red Cross Youth (RCY), Social Assistance Services (SAS) and Training and Education (TE), do not impact the strength of organizational attachment at the central level, apart from the negative coefficients of RCY and TE with respect to the value attached to the mission of the RCF. This suggests that volunteers in the RCY and the TE develop weaker attachments to the RCF in comparison to the other programs.

Of potential concern are the RCY findings which suggest that, contrary to its goals, the youth program does not succeed in disseminating the RCF's mission to young people⁵. This may be the result of RCY being focused on collaboration with other youth organizations (i.e., being part of a youth movement), rather than being part of RCF and its mission. These findings could also reflect a change in the point of view of the youth themselves, indicating that young volunteers today relate differently to the organizations in which they serve than did the volunteers of previous generations (See, among others, Davis Smith, 1999; Gaskin, 1998; Hustinx, 2001). There seems to be a general trend among younger volunteers to be increasingly focused on the specific activities they perform (See Hustinx and Lammertyn,

⁵ We only surveyed young volunteers of 15 years and older, so the data does not allow to infer from the results to the children and young people of 14 years and younger.

2003; Wollebaek and Selle, 2003 for examples of this); and it corroborates with the more general trend in volunteering toward more episodic and functionally oriented patterns of volunteering.

In the case of the TE, the negative impact of volunteering on the value volunteers attach to the RCF's mission could also be explained by the specific nature of the activity undertaken. The work of TE volunteers, such as artificial respiration techniques, the simulation of injuries, and the prevention of accidents in domestic and work environments, is of a very individualized nature; volunteers perform the role of teacher in a first aid course, or play the role of an injured person in large-scale simulations of disasters/accidents. As such, TE activities may not be conducive to strong organizational loyalties or to high levels of satisfaction within a local volunteer group.

Finally, volunteers of the SAS are most likely of all RCF volunteers to work in close collaboration with public institutions and nonprofit organizations in the field of social welfare (e.g., hospitals, nursing homes). As such, RCF seems to have no tangible 'grip' on its SAS volunteers, and thus does not appear to impact the strength of loyalty to the RCF or to the program itself in either a positive or negative direction.

Sub-hypotheses 2 further implies that volunteers' sense of attachment is conditional upon where their particular engagement takes place. The findings show clear regional differences occur with regard to volunteers' attitudes toward loyalty and satisfaction, but there is no impact on the value volunteers place on the RCF mission. Interestingly, a sharp regional contrast exists between loyalty levels in the provinces of Limburg and Antwerp. This might be explained by the fact that the province of Antwerp contains the largest and most economically developed urban area in Flanders⁶, whereas Limburg is one of the more rural provinces of Flanders.

The contrast between rural and urban regions becomes even more pronounced when looking at the volunteers' satisfaction. The two most rural provinces, Limburg and West Flanders, have similar levels of

⁶ The Belgian capital, Brussels, was not included in the survey.

satisfaction among their volunteers, while the volunteers in the urban provinces are less satisfied with their volunteer experience. This seems to support the common perception that volunteers in less urbanized areas build stronger ties at the local level, place a higher value on social contacts, feel more at home in the volunteer group, and have a more satisfying volunteer experience than those in more urbanized regions (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Okun and Michel, 2006; Omoto and Snyder, 2002).

In addition to these measures of organizational complexity, differences in volunteer attachments are affected by the intensity of the local volunteer experience. The strong and positive effects of length of service and hours of volunteering point to different socialization experiences at the local level, beyond the specific program and region in which the volunteers perform their activities. The intensity of participation does not affect the importance attached to the mission of the organization, but it does positively impact feelings of loyalty and satisfaction. This seems to indicate that while the importance of the mission is a cognitive measure, loyalty and satisfaction more clearly assess the volunteers' affective sense of belonging to the whole and the parts. This underscores and explains the findings reported in Table 1, which show that the mission of the RCF was not central at all in the volunteers' involvement.

An interesting interplay between the particularity of the programs and regional differences, and the physical locality of the volunteer experiences thus seems to be present. This results in a complex and not necessarily harmonious mixture of central and local attachments among volunteers. Therefore we have rejected the null hypothesis, as differences in measures of organizational attachment occur across measures of organizational complexity (programs and chapters). Whether volunteers are more attracted to RCF than to its chapters or programs depends to some extent on the program in which they participate, but more importantly, on their local volunteer experiences in terms of regional variation, length of service and intensity of involvement.

Finally, the likelihood of success in building a sense of belonging and attachment among volunteers depends not only on the programs and localities of the experiences but on the type of volunteers the RCF recruits and attracts. Education produces a consistently negative effect for the three measures. The higher educated the volunteers are, the weaker their organizational attachments to either RCF or the programs and chapters. This may be a spurious relationship, or it may suggest that more highly educated people tend to be more skeptical of mission statements and more critical of their volunteer experiences. Age also intervenes with the levels of satisfaction of the volunteers: perhaps because of their breadth of life experiences, older volunteers are, like the more educated, more likely to be skeptical and thus less likely to be satisfied with their volunteer experiences.

Section 5 Conclusion and discussion

This paper explored whether volunteers in the RCF, a complex multi-service, multi-chapter organization, have a greater sense of attachment to the organization as a whole, or to the program or chapter with which they are affiliated. Given that there is a central unifying mission and all the chapters and programs of RCF adhere to the same principles, the question addressed was whether the RCF has succeeded in creating a volunteer community beyond the local diversity of its chapters and programs. It was hypothesized that if the RCF is successful in building such volunteer communities, volunteers should first attach more value to generic organizational features in comparison with program-specific features, and second, their attachment to the organization should be identical regardless of the programs for which they volunteer or in which chapter. The latter hypothesis was explored by means of three attitudinal scales, which measured the volunteers' loyalty to the RCF; the value volunteers place on the RCF's mission; and volunteers' satisfaction with their experiences, a measure of local affinity. We recognize and

hence control for the fact that stronger or weaker attachments may result due to the intensity of participation.

The analysis revealed a complex interplay of central and local forces that does not warrant a straightforward confirmation or rejection of the main hypothesis. Rather, multiple mechanisms appear to be at work and to differ across the programs in which the volunteers are involved, the local volunteer setting, and the background profile of the volunteers. A first important observation is that attachments are primarily built at the local level. The analysis indicated that the organizational characteristics valued most by the RCF volunteers were items that represented their own particular programs and experiences; the mission appeared to be perceived as a very generic statement which appealed to volunteers at a low and mainly cognitive level. This conclusion was further corroborated by the fact that the programs and local volunteer experiences had little bearing on the value volunteers attached to the RCF mission. Loyalty and satisfaction, however, were strongly interwoven with the local volunteer experience.

Our findings need to be interpreted with care, in that we have only studied one organization, albeit a large, complex and important organization, in Belgium. Nevertheless, people who volunteer at the RCF in Belgium may not be unlike most other volunteers as they are sufficiently diverse in age, gender and socioeconomic status and hence may be typical of volunteers in other large human and social service agencies. Hence multipurpose and complex organizations that rely on volunteers, and are organized over large geographic regions and through local chapters involved in different activities, may find our results useful in understanding how volunteer attachments are built. As the RCF is a well-known and well-respected organization, findings on attachments and attitudes toward the RCF may not be easily replicated in lesser-known organizations.

Then what advice does this analysis offer to managers of complex organizations wishing to recruit and retain volunteers? As the competition for volunteers has become more acute, volunteer managers

have become increasingly concerned with volunteer recruitment and retention. Retention of volunteers, who are able to exit at any stage of their participation, requires building attachments to the host organization. Distilling our analysis for policy implications, we suggest that managers of volunteer resources in complex organizations take heed of the complex and differential nature of recruiting and retaining volunteers, and avoid applying a one-size-fits-all approach. For example, managers recruiting volunteers should be cautious in using overarching mission statements to attract volunteers. Rather, attention should be put on the attractiveness of programs and local specificities that impact volunteers.

An analysis of the various programs run by organizations would be necessary to help assess the impact of each of these programs on the attachments of volunteers as some activities, because of their specialized or individualistic nature may discourage volunteers from committing themselves at a cognitive and/or affective level to the organization as a whole. In addition, the analysis showed that above all, physical locality mattered and affective attachment of the volunteers is fostered through local volunteer experiences, although organizational attachments are less easily built in urban areas. This may suggest different management approaches in urban versus rural regions.

In summary, mission statements by and large do not generate a sense of attachment and as we found are not of central importance to the volunteers; rather, they seem to function as a generic and inconsequential context against which the volunteers are socialized locally. Instead, volunteers are attracted by their local volunteer experiences when it comes to building loyalties and an affective sense of belonging. The extent of embedding in a relatively closed community of reference (i.e., the urban/rural distinction), and frequent and longer-term involvements in volunteer activities, are the most likely generators of strong organizational attachments. This is not to say that the types of activities undertaken do not influence the building of organizational ties at all. On the contrary, the particular nature of the program could even work to reinforce attachments at the local and central level. Organizations should thus work both on enabling positive local volunteer experiences, and on strengthening integration of the

different activities into the organization as a whole. The case of the RCF shows that organizations must invest in making the programs reach beyond their specific activities.

Table 1. Most important and second most important organizational characteristics to RCF volunteers (N=608)

	Most important	Most important + second most important
The program in which you participate as a volunteer.	54.34	72.58
The high quality standard of the assistance in your program.	10.55	26.32
The courses and refresher courses offered by the Red Cross.	10.29	34.59
The public opinion, the image of the Red Cross held by the public.	6.89	18.20
The good organization and the smooth working of the Red Cross.	6.09	16.52
The Unified Mission of the Red Cross	6.94	14.84
The large number of activities to choose from as a volunteer.	4.79	13.68
The opportunity to be part of an international organization.	0.10	2.73

Table 2: Value of the mission of RCF

	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β
Intercept	14.98 (0.89) .	16.71 (0.99) .	15.35 (0.89) .	15.56 (0.88) .	15.73 (0.88) .
Service programs: (ref=participating)	FA 1.11 (0.32) 0.14**	RCY -1.13 (0.52) -0.10*	SAS -1.05 (0.54) -0.09	TE -0.84 (0.41) -0.09*	DHA 0.63 (0.53) 0.05
Regional variation (ref=Limburg)					
Antwerp	-0.79 (0.44) -0.09	-0.91 (0.45) -0.10*	-0.81 (0.45) -0.09	-0.70 (0.45) -0.08	-0.81 (0.45) -0.09
Flemish Brabant	-0.30 (0.55) -0.02	-0.47 (0.57) -0.04	-0.25 (0.56) -0.02	-0.21 (0.56) -0.02	-0.31 (0.56) -0.02
East Flanders	-0.04 (0.47) -0.004	-0.06 (0.47) -0.01	0.07 (0.47) 0.007	0.16 (0.47) 0.02	0.11 (0.47) 0.01
West Flanders	-0.71 (0.46) -0.07	-0.89 (0.46) -0.09	-0.67 (0.46) -0.07	-0.68 (0.46) -0.07	-0.76 (0.46) -0.08
Length of service (continuous)	0.08 (0.02) 0.18***	0.08 (0.02) 0.17***	0.07 (0.02) 0.15**	0.08 (0.02) 0.18***	0.07 (0.02) 0.16***
Monthly hours of volunteering (continuous)	-0.20 (0.14) -0.06	-0.16 (0.14) -0.05	-0.16 (0.14) -0.05	-0.14 (0.14) -0.04	-0.13 (0.15) -0.04
Sex (ref=male)	-0.04 (0.32) -0.005	-0.15 (0.32) -0.02	-0.04 (0.32) -0.005	-0.22 (0.32) -0.03	-0.19 (0.32) -0.02
Age (continuous)	-0.02 (0.01) -0.09	-0.04 (0.01) -0.14*	-0.01 (0.02) -0.03	-0.02 (0.01) -0.09	-0.02 (0.01) -0.09
Education (continuous)	-0.50 (0.15) -0.15***	-0.64 (0.15) -0.19***	-0.59 (0.15) -0.17***	-0.53 (0.15) -0.15***	-0.63 (0.16) -0.18***
Adj. R^2	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04

Ordinary least squares regression, $n = 619$

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

Table 3: Loyalty to RCF

	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β
Intercept	20.80 (0.98) .	20.66 (1.07) .	21.26 (0.98) .	21.29 (0.96) .	21.32 (0.95) .
Service programs: (ref=participating)	FA 0.86 (0.35) 0.09*	RCY 0.83 (0.57) 0.06	SAS -0.34 (0.58) -0.03	TE -0.49 (0.45) -0.04	DHA -1.98 (0.57) -0.14***
Regional variation (ref=Limburg)					
Antwerp	-1.89 (0.49) -0.17***	-1.75 (0.49) -0.16***	-1.88 (0.49) -0.17***	-1.83 (0.49) -0.16***	-1.68 (0.49) -0.15***
Flemish Brabant	-1.03 (0.61) -0.07	-0.85 (0.62) -0.06	-1.00 (0.61) -0.07	-0.98 (0.61) -0.07	-0.83 (0.60) -0.05
East Flanders	-0.55 (0.51) -0.04	-0.31 (0.52) -0.02	-0.44 (0.51) -0.04	-0.41 (0.51) -0.03	-0.42 (0.51) -0.03
West Flanders	-0.31 (0.49) -0.03	-0.22 (0.50) -0.02	-0.31 (0.50) -0.03	-0.31 (0.49) -0.03	-0.27 (0.49) -0.02
Length of service (continuous)	0.12 (0.02) 0.22***	0.11 (0.02) 0.20***	0.11 (0.02) 0.20***	0.12 (0.02) 0.21***	0.11 (0.02) 0.20***
Monthly hours of volunteering (continuous)	1.13 (0.15) 0.27***	1.15 (0.15) 0.27***	1.15 (0.16) 0.27***	1.16 (0.16) 0.28***	1.02 (0.16) 0.24***
Sex (ref=male)	0.33 (0.35) 0.04	0.22 (0.35) 0.02	0.27 (0.35) 0.03	0.20 (0.35) 0.02	0.33 (0.34) 0.03
Age (continuous)	0.003 (0.01) -0.009	0.01 (0.02) 0.02	0.001 (0.02) 0.003	-0.004 (0.01) -0.01	-0.004 (0.01) -0.01
Education (continuous)	-0.84 (0.16) -0.20***	-0.84 (0.16) -0.21***	-0.89 (0.16) -0.22***	-0.86 (0.16) -0.21***	-0.72 (0.17) -0.17**
Adj. R^2	0.24	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.25

Ordinary least squares regression, $n = 620$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4: Satisfaction with experiences in RCF

	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β	B (SE) β
Intercept	25.69 (0.86) .	25.41 (0.94) .	25.56 (0.87) .	25.91 (0.84) .	25.97 (0.84) .
Service programs: (ref=participating)	FA 0.52 (0.31) 0.06	RCY 0.69 (0.51) 0.06	SAS 0.93 (0.53) 0.08	TE -0.74 (0.39) 0.07	DHA -1.54 (0.51) -0.12**
Regional variation (ref=Limburg)					
Antwerp	-2.62 (0.43) -0.26***	-2.51 (0.44) -0.25***	-2.57 (0.43) -0.25***	-2.56 (0.43) -0.25***	-2.47 (0.43) -0.24***
Flemish Brabant	-2.39 (0.54) -0.18***	-2.24 (0.54) -0.16***	-2.38 (0.54) -0.17***	-2.33 (0.54) -0.17***	-2.23 (0.53) -0.16***
East Flanders	-1.65 (0.45) -0.15***	-1.47 (0.46) -0.13**	-1.54 (0.45) -0.14***	-1.54 (0.45) -0.14***	-1.57 (0.45) -0.14***
West Flanders	-0.57 (0.44) -0.05	-0.49 (0.44) -0.05	-0.63 (0.44) -0.06	-0.54 (0.44) -0.05	-0.53 (0.44) -0.05
Length of service (continuous)	0.06 (0.02) 0.12*	0.05 (0.02) 0.11**	0.06 (0.02) 0.12**	0.07 (0.02) 0.13**	0.05 (0.02) 0.11**
Monthly hours of volunteering (continuous)	1.10 (0.14) 0.29***	1.12 (0.14) 0.29***	1.12 (0.14) 0.29***	1.14 (0.14) 0.30***	1.02 (0.14) 0.27***
Sex (ref=male)	0.93 (0.31) 0.11**	0.85 (0.31) 0.10**	0.66 (0.32) 0.08*	0.82 (0.31) 0.10**	0.94 (0.31) 0.11**
Age (continuous)	-0.04 (0.01) -0.15***	-0.04 (0.01) -0.12	-0.05 (0.02) -0.18***	-0.04 (0.01) -0.15***	-0.04 (0.01) -0.15**
Education (continuous)	-0.90 (0.14) -0.24***	-0.89 (0.15) -0.24***	-1.11 (0.14) -0.29***	-0.89 (0.14) -0.24***	-0.80 (0.15) -0.21***
Adj. R^2	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.27

Ordinary least squares regression, $n = 629$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

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