

Modelling Volunteer Retention in Professional Membership Associations through Targeting
Specific Motivations and Satisfying Certain Aspects of Volunteer Experience

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Abstract

Despite the abundance of the literature on volunteer motivation, satisfaction, retention, and the logical connection between the three concepts, the idea that certain types of motivation and satisfaction can sustain volunteer retention better than others has not been studied much. Furthermore, nonprofit research literature abounds with studies of charitable 501(c)(3) organizations, when far less is known about other kinds of nonprofits such as 501(c)(6) professional membership associations. Applying existing theories in another setting can reveal new patterns of volunteering and expand our understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, focusing on professional membership associations, this study seeks to understand what motivations positively affect sustained volunteerism, and whether satisfaction derived from different types of motivations has any effect on sustained volunteerism? The findings suggest that one type of satisfaction and two types of motivations are more influential in retaining association members as volunteers.

Key Words: Professional membership associations, volunteerism, motivation, satisfaction, retention.

Introduction

One of the distinct features in the nonprofit sector is the extensive use of volunteer labor. Many scholars have asserted the significance of learning volunteer motivations for their successful recruitment and retention within an organization (Chacon, Vecina, & Davila, 2007; Jimenez, Fuertes, & Abad, 2010). Volunteer motivations are known to be multidimensional, with altruism being one of the central elements, where the selfless nature of an individual supersedes other egoistic reasons (Cnaan, & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Bussell, & Forbes, 2001). The central position of altruism does not disregard the presence of other motives in volunteering. However, it suggests, among others, that there are personal or egoistic reasons to volunteer; reasons of tangible gain like a useful experience, etc. Ultimately, it is a combination of motives that drives people to volunteer, with some carrying more weight than others.

The importance of volunteer satisfaction is another thoroughly studied topic in the volunteer management literature. Dissatisfied volunteers are more likely to abandon an organization; therefore, many nonprofits are highly vested in keeping their volunteers satisfied (Galindo-Kuhn, & Guzley, 2001). Among the factors that affect volunteer satisfaction, researchers cite feeling appreciated and valuable, being a member of a distinct group, receiving feedback, and performing activities that meet one's motivations (Chevrier, Steuer, & MacKenzie, 1994).

Volunteer retention is also a focus of volunteer management practice and research (Brudney, & Mejis, 2009). It is tied in a significant way to stability of nonprofit organizations. Evidence like high organizational commitment and involvement, satisfaction with performed activities, sense of personal accomplishment all positively contribute to volunteer retention (Nelson, Pratt, Carpenter, & Walter, 1995).

Despite the abundance of literature on volunteer motivation, satisfaction, retention, and the logical connection between the three, the proposition that different types of both motivation and satisfaction can differently influence volunteer retention has not been studied extensively. And among the research that have investigated the topic, there is no consensus on findings (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). For example, Rubin and Thorelli (1984) contended that egoistic volunteer motives are more transitory compared to altruistic motivations. Egoistically motivated volunteers are more likely to leave organization sooner than those with more altruistic motives. On the contrary, the study of Green (1984) asserted that egoistic and instrumental motives were stronger predictors of higher satisfaction and higher likelihood of continued volunteering. These volunteers were less likely to be discouraged and unsatisfied because they knew exactly what benefits they were looking for (i.e. tangible considerations). And altruistic motivations, as opposed to tangible motivations, are more diffused and vague (i.e. intangible values). Per this logic, it is hard for volunteer management staff to shape altruistic motivations in specific forms of activity in order to meet them.

The topic of professional volunteering is also gaining its momentum both in empirical research literature and in the practical field of volunteer management (Ganesh, & MacAllum, 2012). Nonprofit research literature abounds with studies of charitable organizations, when far less is known about other types of nonprofit organizations. Applying existing theories in another setting can reveal new patterns of volunteering and expand our understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, the nonprofit subsector that encompasses professional membership associations is one of the fastest growing per the Center of Association Leadership (ASAE, 2017). Professional membership associations are preoccupied with the issue of volunteer retention as much as charitable nonprofits. The fact

that their volunteers are also their members makes these organizations appreciate their volunteers even more because their survival is dependent on maintaining their membership.

Therefore, this study proposes the following research question: What sustains membership volunteering in professional associations? Specifically, what motivations positively affect sustained volunteerism, and whether satisfaction derived from different types of motivations has any effect on sustained volunteerism?

Literature Review

Volunteer motivation, satisfaction, and retention

The altruistic motivation of helping others as a primary starting point of volunteering is found to be a common motivation for most people (Bussell, & Forbes, 2001; Marta, & Pozzi 2008; Omoto, Snyder, & Martino, 2000; Zweigenhaft, Armstrong, & Quintis, 1996). In the cross-national study of Handy, et al. (2010) the authors confirmed a negative correlation of egoistic motives and consistency of volunteer work. They found that volunteers motivated by tangible interests such as career pursuits and gaining new skills and experience were more inclined to participate in episodic rather than regular volunteering. Nonetheless, it is not just the altruistic-egoistic duality that defines volunteer motivations. For example, Shye (2010) found that social factors of belonging, new connections, friendship, and personal expression in a community were very influential for general population to volunteer. Handy, et al. (2010) also indicated the presence of a socially-related category of motives akin to the one described in the study of Shye (2010). Moreover, the authors found that when only one of the three dimensions—altruistic, egoistic, and social—is present in the motivation to volunteer, it has a diminished effect on one's retention compared to when all three motivations are present.

It is vital not only to know volunteer motivations, but also to connect it with volunteer satisfaction. Gazley (2012) and other scholars contend that higher levels of satisfaction result

in a more sustained retention of volunteers. Nonprofit organizations should meet motivations of their volunteers to keep them interested and satisfied. Furthermore, it is evident that different motivations affect volunteer satisfaction differently (Nencini, Romaioli, and Meneghini, 2015).

Other studies have sought to understand not only what draws volunteers to an organization, but what keeps them interested in staying (Chacon et al., 2007; Jimenez et al., 2010). Chacon et al. (2007) found that at different stages of service duration motivations to remain as a social worker volunteer varied. In the early stage of volunteering (6 months or less) satisfaction of instrumental needs mattered the most. In the medium duration stage (at least 1 year but less than two) the volunteer's level of organizational commitment affects the decision to stay or leave. In the long-term stage (2 years or more) role identity as a volunteer affected a decision to remain.

Overall, the literature about volunteer motivation, satisfaction, and retention suggests that several factors are essential in volunteering. The primary concern is to satisfy volunteer motivations. Further, satisfaction levels should be sustained to create an attachment of a person to an organization. However, far less is known about what types of motivations and, more importantly, what types of satisfactions contribute the most to volunteer retention.

Volunteering in professional membership associations

An exchange theory proposed by Olson (1971), based on cost-benefit analysis, is conventionally used to explain why people join professional membership associations. To put it simply, an individual will be less likely to join a professional association if the costs of joining outweigh benefits; in the reverse situation, an individual will be more inclined to join. The benefits offered by professional membership associations usually include improvement of professional practices, information sharing, continued education, social activities and

programs, and networking opportunities (Alotaibi, 2007; Mook, Handy, Ginieniewicz, & Quarter, 2007).

Members join professional associations because of “some combination of common interests, personal interest, and sense of professional responsibility” (Svara & Terry, 2009, 1055). They found that goals and values of an association are an important consideration for an individual seeking to join one organization over another. Specific factors that affect retention include association’s policies and procedures, types of other members involved, and functions of the association.

The decision to join an association does not mean that one will automatically serve as a volunteer. Volunteering in charitable organizations is more widespread than it is in professional associations. If previous research can be applied to association volunteers, then professional membership associations can meet both altruistic and egoistic expectations through volunteering activities.

Methodology

The study utilizes secondary data source obtained from a survey designed and implemented by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) with assistance of the Center for Association Leadership. The ASAE represents over 7,400 trade and professional associations across the globe (ASAE, 2017). The survey provides information about community volunteering, membership volunteering in professional associations, reasons for volunteering, type of volunteer work performed, average number of hours volunteered, etc. For the purposes of this study only questions about membership volunteering for professional associations were used.

Associations participated in the survey included health care, occupational and environmental health, education, manufacturing and engineering, accounting, and management fields, as well as a variety of IRS tax-exemptions, such as 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4)

and 501(c)(6) organizations. The survey was initially sent to 185,975 individual members of professional associations with 26,305 surveys returned at the 14 percent response rate.

Although, low response rates are prevalent in internet-based surveys, the ASAE survey compensated for the low response rate by sending out many initial surveys. The focus of the survey, which is not directly related to membership may also have contributed to the low response rate.

Although the survey was conducted in 2007-08, no survey, to date, has looked at volunteering among members of professional associations. This data also provides a comprehensive and diverse outlook on reasons to continue or terminate volunteering, satisfaction with offered volunteer opportunities, and suggestions for better volunteer engagement.

The questions used in this study ask about volunteering for membership associations, including motivations to volunteer, reasons for not volunteering, satisfaction with volunteering experience, and considerations to continue volunteering with professional associations (see Table 1). The survey respondents represent a diverse population; however, it is slightly different from the national representation of volunteers for charitable nonprofits. Most of the respondents were men (57.3%), between the age of 44 and 61 (85%), primarily Caucasian (93.6%), having a graduate school degree (54.9%), and occupying mid-level positions (50.9%).

Table 1

Survey questions used for operationalization of the model constructs

Variable	Question	Answer choices	Measurement
Motivations	How important are each of the following reasons to you in doing volunteer work for your professional membership association?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Volunteering brings me satisfaction or recognition that I do not get at work 2. Volunteering is important to the people I respect 3. I can learn new skills through direct, hands-on experience 4. Volunteering helps me deal with some of my own problems 5. Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things 6. Volunteering makes me feel needed 7. I can explore my own strengths 8. I feel it is important to help others 9. I can do something for a profession or cause that is important to me 10. Volunteering gives a competitive advantage to my business 11. I feel compassion toward people in need 12. I can make new contacts that might help my business or career 13. Volunteering helps me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work 14. Volunteer experience looks good on my resume 15. Volunteering helps me to explore different career options 	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “Not at all important” and 5 is “Very important”
Satisfaction	How satisfied are you with the following aspect of your volunteer experience with your professional membership association?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receiving feedback about your performance 2. Receiving incentives like stipends, transportation, and/or meals 3. Learning new skills 4. Helping you to connect with the mission of the organization 5. Receiving training needed to be effective 6. Having opportunities to meet, work and socialize with others in your field or profession 7. Ability to make choices about what you want to do as a volunteer 8. Feeling respected, appreciated and values 9. Helping you to feel that you are giving back to your profession 10. Opportunity to take a leadership role 11. Working with others toward a common goal 12. Ability to make choices about when you volunteer 13. Using your existing skills 	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “Very dissatisfied” and 5 is “Very satisfied”
Retention	How likely is that you will be a volunteer for your professional membership association within the next 12 months?		Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “Very unlikely” and 5 is “Very likely”

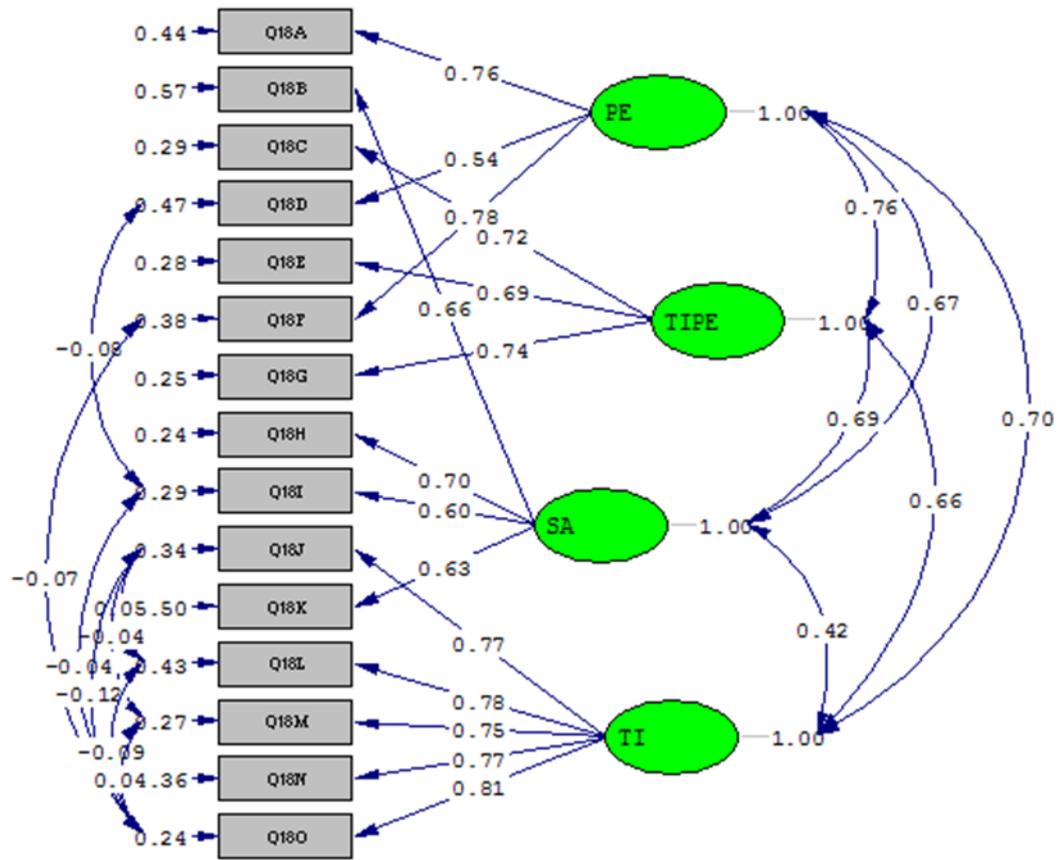
Results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the results of the survey. SEM is used to analyze relationships between measured variables and latent constructs. It utilizes a two-step approach that analyzes two conceptually distinct models: measurement model and structural model. Each model assessment provides support for different types of validity: convergent and discriminant for the measurement model, and predictive for the structural model. Moreover, testing the measurement model should precede the analysis of the structural model to ensure that initially specified model and its constructs are measured with the appropriate indicators (Schumacker, & Lomax, 2010).

Measurement model

Our measurement model depicts the development of our latent variables using observed variables. It specifies the relationship between the latent variable and the observed variables. It takes into consideration the possibility of having some measurement errors in the observed variables. First, we conducted the explanatory factor analysis (EFA) of the latent variables of motivation and satisfaction. Individual survey items were used to create latent constructs for this study. EFA of motivation questions yielded four factors that contribute to professional membership volunteering. We grouped them as following: Social/altruistic (SA) dimension encompasses motivations of social acceptance, altruism, and compassion; personal/egoistic (PE) dimension covers motivations of recognition, need for belonging, and solving personal problems with volunteering; tangible/instrumental (TI) dimension is career-focused, gaining advancements, and resume-building; and exploring/growing (EG) dimension focuses on personal growth and self-improvement (see Figure 1). Five observed variables loaded on social/altruistic latent variable measuring volunteer motivations. Three observed variables measure personal/egoistic latent variable. Five observed variables measure tangible/instrumental volunteer motivations. And three observed variables loaded on exploring/growing latent construct.

Figure 1. LISREL path diagram - standardized model of volunteer motivation



Chi-Square=1036.11, df=36, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.053

Note: Exploring/Growing latent construct is depicted as TIPE.

Three latent constructs shaped the responses of volunteers to the question about how satisfied they are with different aspect of volunteer experience. The three latent variables of satisfaction were constructed using thirteen statements from the survey. Personal satisfaction – addresses self-worth, making choices and leadership opportunities; societal satisfaction – relates to socialization, giving back, and working on common goals, and instrumental satisfaction – meets needs for new skills, incentives, and training (see Figure 2). Instrumental and personal satisfaction variables are loaded with four observed variables each, and societal latent variable is loaded with five observed variables. Reliability scores of all the constructs was estimated using Cronbach’s alpha. All seven constructs reached an acceptable level of reliability (see Table 2).

Figure 2. LISREL path diagram - standardized model of volunteer satisfaction

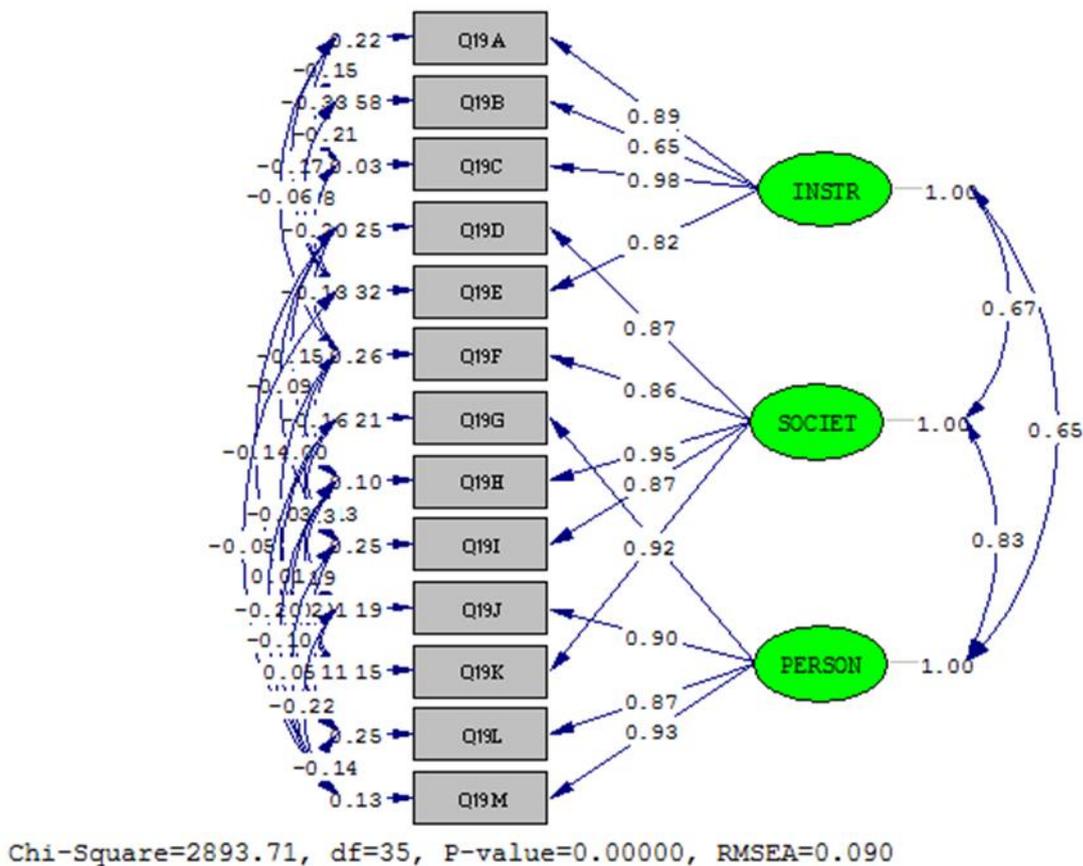


Table 2

Reliability of the latent constructs

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha
<i>Motivation</i>	
Social/altruistic (Items 2, 8-9, 11)	.759
Personal/egoistic (Items 1, 4, 6)	.745
Tangible/instrumental (Items 10, 12-15)	.893
Exploring/growing (Items 3, 5, 7)	.836
<i>Satisfaction</i>	
Instrumental (Items 1-3, 5)	.792
Societal (Items 4, 6, 8-9, 11)	.890
Personal (Items 7, 10, 12-13)	.833

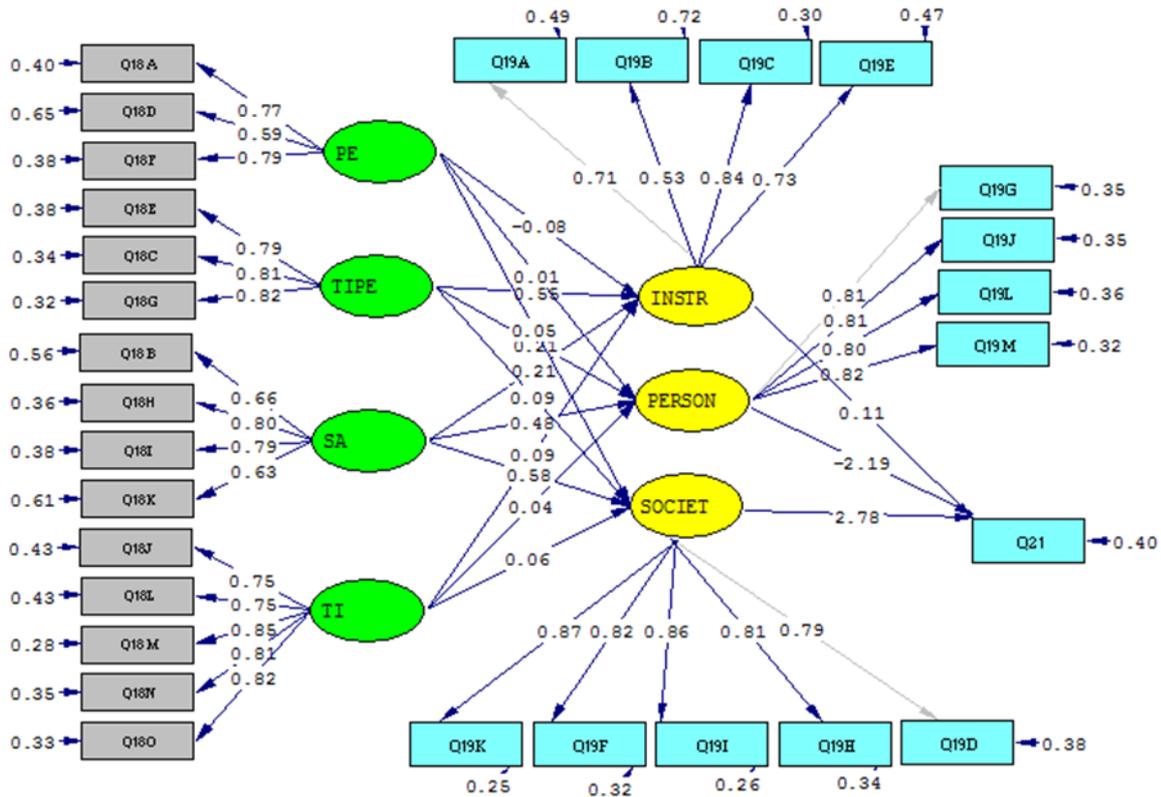
Our dependent variable of interest is an observed variable, measured by a survey question, asking how likely they are to continue volunteering within the next twelve months (see Table 1).

All variables of interest for this study are measured using Likert scale response ranging from 1 to 5, “1” being “Completely Disagree” and “5” corresponding with “Completely Agree.”

Structural model

Structural model specifies how our latent variables are related. We hypothesized that volunteer retention will be explained by levels of satisfaction with volunteer activity, which in turn will be predicted by initial volunteer motivations. Therefore, we have a second-order structural model with seven latent variables: four independent latent variables (SA, PE, TI, EG) and three dependent latent variables (societal, personal, instrumental), and one observed dependent variable of retention. The hypothesized structural equation model is specified in Figure 3. Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square is used for the model estimation instead of a widely-accepted maximum likelihood estimation method, because of the non-normal data distribution.

Figure 3. LISREL Path Diagram - Standardized model of volunteer retention



Note: Exploring/Growing latent construct is depicted as TIPE.

Model specification was assessed by looking at the variance-covariance terms among the latent independent and latent and observed dependent variables, among the prediction errors, and among the measurement errors. Model estimation stage assessed the significance of parameter estimates, which in our case all yielded significant results.

Given the sample size of 26,305 responses the overestimation of the chi-square coefficient was expected, therefore, it was not taken into consideration as a measure of model fit. The other conventional fit indices yielded overall good model fit (see Table 3). In particular, RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), as the measure of model parsimoniousness is reported at the appropriate .035 level. The Goodness-of-fit statistic (GFI) is at the acceptable level of .90. SRMR (standard root mean square residual) index measuring difference between residuals of the sample covariance matrix and hypothesized covariance model also exhibited good level of fit (.051). Finally, comparative fit index (CFI) accounting for the sample size indicated perfect fit (1.0).

Table 3

Parameters and fit indices of the models

Indices	Model
<i>Motivation → Satisfaction</i>	
Personal/egoistic → Instrumental	-.08
Social/altruistic → Instrumental	.21
Tangible/instrumental → Instrumental	.09
Exploring/growing → Instrumental	.55
Personal/egoistic → Personal	.01
Social/altruistic → Personal	.48
Tangible/instrumental → Personal	.04
Exploring/growing → Personal	.21
Personal/egoistic → Societal	.06
Social/altruistic → Societal	.58
Tangible/instrumental → Societal	.06
Exploring/growing → Societal	.09
<i>Satisfaction → Retention</i>	
Instrumental → Retention	.11
Personal → Retention	-2.19
Societal → Retention	2.78
χ^2	3904.46
df	296
GFI	.90
CFI	1.00
RMSEA	.035
SRMR	.051

All coefficients significant at $p < .001$. Modified using Satorra-Bentler method

Social/altruistic motivation of volunteers had a significant positive effect on all types of satisfaction with volunteering – instrumental (.21), personal (.48), societal (.58), suggesting that

altruistically and socially oriented volunteers find more satisfaction in their volunteer activity. Personal/egoistic motivations, however, had significantly lower and in some cases even negative effect on the three levels of satisfaction (-.08; .01; .06 respectively). The same effect was found in the presence of tangible/instrumental motivations – it created a significant positive but incremental change in all types of satisfaction (.09; .04; .06 respectively). Finally, exploring/growing motivations had a higher impact on instrumental (.55) and personal (.21) satisfaction levels, but not on societal satisfaction (.09).

The types of satisfaction yielded close to expected influence on retention. Namely, instrumental type of satisfaction had significantly lower effect on retention (.11) compared to societal type of satisfaction (2.78), whereas personal satisfaction changed the sign of influence to a negative (-2.19).

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we sought to understand and explain possible variations of effect on sustained volunteering for members of professional associations. Many agree that satisfying volunteer motivations has a positive effect on retention, our findings show that this conclusion is more nuanced. Our review of the research recognized that there are problems associated with unraveling the complex concept of volunteerism (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010; Penner, 2002). Although the nonprofit literature is abundant with studies explaining relations between motivation, satisfaction, and retention, there is no study, to our knowledge, that has looked at different types of satisfaction. We found that simply addressing volunteer motivations and keeping them satisfied does not directly translate into sustainable volunteerism.

Our findings indicate that the most sustainable types of motivations are social/altruistic and exploring/growing, indicating that volunteers of professional associations that are motivated by wanting to help others, out of social acceptance, or for personal self-improvement are more likely to be satisfied with their volunteer experience. Even more interesting, only one type of

satisfaction—societal, which reflects satisfaction with giving back, socializing, and working together with others towards common goals and mission—had a strong and positive effect on a volunteer's intention to continue volunteering.

Sustained volunteerism is of paramount importance to the nonprofit sector. This paper contributes to this important topic by unraveling what types of volunteer motivations and what types of satisfaction have the highest likelihood of volunteers staying and continuing to volunteer with their professional associations. Our findings suggest that social/altruistic as well as exploring/growth directions of volunteer motivations result in an increase of all kinds of satisfaction types, but only one type of satisfaction carries over to retention. Therefore, we observed an indirect effect between volunteer motivation and retention mediated by satisfaction. The congruence between the motives for which individuals volunteer their time, the activities that they engage in, and certain kinds of satisfaction all represent conditions that are ripe for a high level of intra-association volunteer capacity.

By addressing questions of volunteer motivation and satisfaction we tapped into a thoroughly studied subject. However, our paper shed a new light on the relations between volunteer motivation, satisfaction, and retention that has not been observed before. Understanding the motives behind the willingness or desire of members in professional associations to volunteer, is critically important for these organizations to thrive. The relevancy of taking 501(c)(6) volunteer resources into consideration is obvious when realizing that volunteers of professional associations are also their members, and they deserve special attention and treatment by these organizations.

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