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Distributive Justice for Volunteers: Extrinsic Outcomes Matter

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Abstract

Volunteer organizations continue to suffer from turnover, evidenced by the lowest volunteer rate since 2002 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Distributive justice, satisfaction, and extrinsic outcome importance were examined as influences of volunteer intention to quit. Survey results from 294 volunteers revealed that those who perceived less than fair distribution of extrinsic outcomes experienced heightened intention to quit compared to those who perceived fair distribution. Overall satisfaction partially mediated this relationship. We explored the potential moderating role of volunteer assessment of the importance of extrinsic outcomes on the overall mediated relationship.

Distributive Justice for Volunteers: Extrinsic Outcomes Matter

Volunteer turnover is an increasing threat for non-profit organizations (Garner and Garner 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the current volunteer rate is the lowest it has been since 2002. Recently, research has given more attention to volunteer's reactions of management practices (e.g., Follman, Cseh, and Brudney, 2016). Echoing Hager and Brudney's (2004) caution, disregarding such volunteer management issues contributes to turnover. Further, such ignorance hinders retention more so than changes in interest or family situations (UPS Foundation 1998). Consequently, continuing to investigate which management practices influence volunteer retention is imperative in decreasing turnover. Drawing on the employee literature, we examine distributive justice perceptions among volunteers as a predictor of their satisfaction and intentions to leave due its strong association with personal outcomes (McFarlin and Sweeney 1992).

More specifically, we examine whether volunteers' perceptions of fairness, specific to extrinsic outcome distribution, predict their intention to quit. Building upon organizational justice theory, we further investigate how volunteers' satisfaction with experiences may influence the perceptions of fairness-intention to quit relationship. Additionally, drawing on Locke's (1969)

value theory, we explored whether the importance volunteers place on extrinsic outcomes affected the perceptions of fairness to satisfaction relationship.

Intention to Quit

Intention to quit is the “conscious and willful deliberateness to leave an organization” (Tett and Meyer 1993, p. 262). Numerous researchers in the volunteer field have provided evidence that peoples’ intentions predict future behavior (e.g., Allen and Mueller 2013). Chacón, Vecina, and Davila (2007), for example, found that volunteer intention to remain best predicted actual time spent as a volunteer and fully mediated the relationship between satisfaction and tenure.

Proposed antecedents of volunteer turnover include non-dispositional factors directly associated with the volunteer task and non-profit organizational practices, exemplified by Hager and Brudney’s (2015) finding that volunteer recognition activities were related to their increased retention. Further exploration of other non-dispositional factors driving volunteer satisfaction and retention are necessary. The employee literature offers a strong foundation for possible organizational factors affecting volunteers (Chacón et al. 2007). However, one cannot assume these factors exert identical influences on volunteers and employees without explicit examination, as marked differences, such as financial motivations, exist between the two populations.

Experiences of Unfairness

Organizational justice refers to the perceived level of fairness in the workplace (Greenberg, 1990) and encompasses distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice. This study focuses exclusively on distributive justice as McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) found this to be a stronger predictor of personal outcomes (e.g., satisfaction) compared to other forms of justice.

Distributive justice is the perceived fairness of decisions regarding outcome allocation (Adams 1965; Homans 1961). Previous research has linked unjust distribution perceptions to increased turnover (Hendrix, Robbins, Miller and Summers 1998) and greater intention to quit (Shih and Susanto 2011). Perceptions of unfairness are a potential cause of dissatisfaction in volunteers (Pantea 2013) due to the exchange relationship that occurs between volunteers and their nonprofit organization. They donate their time and effort and in return expect to receive outcomes such as resources or training necessary for task completion. Thus, the key question is whether the relationship between volunteers' intentions to quit and distributive justice perceptions resembles the well-studied relationship between employees' intentions to quit and distributive justice perceptions.

Hypothesis 1. Volunteers' perceptions of distributive justice are negatively related to their intention to quit.

Volunteer Satisfaction

Perceptions of justice also drive satisfaction (Folger 1977). Omoto and Snyder (1995) propose a volunteer process model to explain why people initially volunteer and why they volunteer over time. Studies based on this model demonstrated that volunteer experience of satisfaction predicted longer tenure. (Omoto and Snyder 1995; Penner and Finkelstein 1998). Therefore, we predict that:

Hypothesis 2. Volunteer satisfaction will mediate the relationship between volunteers' perceptions of justice and their intention to quit.

Potential Role of Outcome Importance

An outcome in this context is anything abstract or concrete that an individual receives, directly or indirectly, from their organization (Foa and Foa 1980). Such outcomes can either be characterized as intrinsic (e.g., satisfaction) or extrinsic (e.g., volunteer assignment). Locke (1969) proposed that the outcomes people value regarding their work situations determines their level of satisfaction. Locke predicts that satisfaction is a function of individuals' have-want discrepancies and the degree of importance they place on those wants. McFarlin and Rice (1992) supported Locke's hypotheses, demonstrating that: (a) individuals are more satisfied when the have-want discrepancy is minimal; and (b) satisfaction is greater when they view the desire as important. Thus, the satisfaction of volunteers placing greater importance on extrinsic outcomes would be more strongly influenced by the fair distribution of those outcomes compared to volunteers more indifferent to extrinsic outcomes. Accordingly, we speculate:

Exploratory Hypothesis 3. The importance volunteers place on extrinsic outcomes will moderate the effect of distributive justice on intentions to quit through satisfaction such that the mediated relationship will be stronger for volunteers who place greater importance on extrinsic outcomes from volunteering compared to those who placed less importance on the outcomes (see Figure 1).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Researchers contacted the volunteer coordinator from seven non-profit organizations in the U.S. The organizations included three mentoring groups (n = 8 , n = 35 , n =61), a hospital (n =136), a wellness society (n =9), an animal welfare group (n =35), and an urban renewal organization (n =10). Of 1,145 volunteers who received the survey email, 444 opened the survey link and 317 continued beyond the first question. Twenty-three participants were excluded because they completed less than 60 percent of the key items in the study (Roth Switzer and Switzer 1999), resulting in a sample size of 294 participants and an overall response rate of 26 percent. Overall, 77 percent were female and 51 percent were between 41 and 60 years of age. In addition, 24 percent had graduated college, and 33 percent were employed. Refer to Table 1 for overall means of volunteer demographic information.

Researchers sent an email to the volunteer coordinators containing an informational letter and an electronic survey link, which coordinators distributed to volunteers. All coordinators used the same informational letter, which communicated: (a) the organization was interested in learning

about the volunteer experiences; (b) participation was not required; (c) a midwestern university research team was conducting the survey; and (d) by clicking on the survey link, they were agreeing to participate in the research study thus providing informed consent. Finally, all volunteer organizations were instructed to share the results of the survey with their volunteers.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, scale items were rated on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 being “strongly disagree” to 5 being “strongly agree”.

Organizational justice. All 15 items measuring organizational justice were adapted from Colquitt (2001). Four items assessed distributive justice or the extent to which volunteers believed that extrinsic outcomes were distributed fairly by their organization. An example item was “My current volunteer assignment is fair given my contribution to the organization.” As the original scale requires insertion of specific outcomes, the items were adapted to include the volunteers’ assignments, training, resources, and schedule flexibility. Items measuring procedural, interpersonal, and information justice were adapted to reflect a volunteer context as opposed to a work context.

Satisfaction. Volunteer satisfaction was assessed with two items adapted from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1983). As the original scale was developed to assess employee job satisfaction, we adjusted the wording to refer to the volunteers’ organization: “In general, I like

working for this volunteer organization,” and “All in all, I am satisfied with my volunteer experience.”

Intention to quit. Volunteer intention to quit, conceptualized as the extent to which volunteers were contemplating leaving the volunteer organization, was measured using three items adapted from Hom and Griffeth (1984) and Jaros (1997). As the original scales assessed employees’ intentions to quit their paid position, we revised the items to reflect the volunteer context.

Participants responded to the following questions: (a) “I often think of ending my volunteer work at this organization;” (b) “I intend to keep volunteering at this organization;” and (c) “I may look for a different organization to volunteer with soon.”

Importance of outcomes. Volunteers indicated the degree to which extrinsic outcomes (e.g., their assignment) were important to them. To identify the outcomes used in the scale, a separate group of volunteers (33 percent male, 67 percent female) from four non-profit organizations received an online survey and were asked to provide information regarding extrinsic outcomes that were of some importance to them. The four most frequently reported outcomes were: (a) volunteer task assignment, (b) flexibility of scheduled hours, (c) resources, and (d) training.

Control variables. We measured gender, age, volunteer tenure, amount of time volunteering per week, hours worked per week, and education as potential control variables. As depicted in Table 1, none of these variables showed significant relationships with our main predictors and outcomes simultaneously. Therefore, no demographic control variables were included in

subsequent analyses (Becker 2005). However, procedural justice, informational justice and interactional justice were included as control variables in effort to isolate the effect of distributive justice on the outcome variables.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Overall descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and correlation coefficients among the key variables are presented in Table 1. Prior to hypothesis testing, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis. The fit indices suggest acceptable fit for the four-factors (See Table 2), thus supporting the construct validity of the measurement model.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1, was supported by evidence of a significant negative relationship, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $\Delta F = 9.55$, $p = .002$. As such, when volunteers experience less than fair outcome distribution they tend to experience greater intentions to quit, $\beta = -.24$, $t(279) = -3.09$, $p = .002$. We used a bootstrap mediation analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2008) to test hypothesis 2. Results revealed a significant indirect relationship with an effect size of $-.21$ (95 percent BCCI $[-.41, -.002]$). Table 3 display the full results of the bootstrap mediation analysis. We also tested the hypotheses independently for each organization and the pattern of results for the individual organizations matched the hypothesized direction.

We utilized an SPSS regression macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to test exploratory hypothesis 3. We found a significant interaction between distributive justice and outcome importance on intention to quit through satisfaction, controlling for procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice. The index of the conditional indirect effect was .07 (95 percent BCCI [.02, .15]). Contrary to our predictions, the relationship between distributive justice and intention to quit through satisfaction was stronger for volunteers who placed lower importance on extrinsic outcomes than for volunteers who placed greater importance on extrinsic outcomes.

Discussion

Due to the declining rate of volunteerism, examination of factors related to volunteer retention was necessary. We found satisfaction was higher and intention to quit was lower when volunteers perceived fair outcome distribution (i.e., mediated model supported). Overall, these findings affirm that distributive justice perceptions indeed shape volunteer experiences. When volunteers perceive lower distributive justice, they report lower satisfaction compared to volunteers who perceive higher distributive justice. Further, this decreased satisfaction results in volunteers deciding to discontinue their service at the organization, thus contributing to an inadequate number of volunteers to meet societal demands.

Our exploration of the moderating role of outcome importance resulted in distributive justice perceptions more strongly influencing satisfaction when volunteers placed lower rather than higher importance on outcomes. A possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that

outcome obtainability rather than outcome importance may play a more critical role in distributive justice perceptions, especially in our study of primarily female volunteers. Sweeney and McFarlin (1997) found that women placed less emphasis than men on distributive justice and argued that women perceived desirable (important) outcomes as being unattainable. Thus, perhaps volunteers perceived outcomes of higher importance as scarcer and therefore less relevant to distribution concerns in contrast to outcomes of lower importance being perceived as more obtainable and resulting in greater dissatisfaction when not received.

Theoretical Implications

This study advances the theory and research on volunteerism, justice theory, and the volunteer process model. Our first theoretical implication applies to the organizational justice construct. Though organizational justice has existed in the employee literature for quite some time (e.g., Colquitt et al. 2013), this study provides another context to which the theory applies. We cannot assume that volunteers behave the same as employees. Notably, inconsistent with employee literature (see Colquitt et al. 2001 for a review), a recent study examining distributive justice in a volunteer sample found that justice perceptions did not predict affective commitment (Lee, Yusof, Geok, and Omar 2014). Although volunteers are individuals who give their time for the service of others, it is fascinating to learn that they do indeed care about decision outcomes and fairness in their volunteer organization.

As a second implication, these findings offer new components of volunteer experiences and consequences that suit the volunteer process model (Omoto and Snyder 1990). Including

distributive justice perceptions in the model's second stage contributes an element of the volunteer experience that we found to have a significant effect of individuals participating in service. Furthermore, volunteer intention to quit serves as an additional consequence of volunteer experiences to be included in the final stage of the volunteer process model. As evidenced in this study, satisfaction has a strong negative relationship with intention to quit. Incorporating these two factors into the model, along with previously examined constructs, potentially enhances the explanatory power of this model.

Practical Implications

Given the importance of extrinsic outcome fairness, organization should refrain from assuming that volunteer satisfaction and retention is solely driven by intrinsic or prosocial motivations as extrinsic outcomes also appear to be important. Accordingly, volunteer orientation and onboarding initiatives should be assessed to ensure extrinsic outcomes are clear and their distribution transparent and fair. Implementing practices that promote a culture of fairness can cultivate volunteers' feelings of satisfaction (Davis et al. 2003) and hence retention.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations regarding potential range restriction and common method bias merit discussion. One potential issue is range restriction on our importance of outcomes variable. Specifically, extrinsic outcome importance scores were uniformly high. The items included: (a) assignment ($M = 4.39$); (b) training ($M = 4.10$); (c) resources ($M = 4.04$); and (d) schedule flexibility ($M = 4.33$). Thus, when doing our moderated analysis with the standard plus or minus 1 standard deviation

slope comparison, we were actually comparing moderately important versus highly important outcomes. Finally, though it is important to consider common method bias as a limitation, current research suggests that it is not of significant issue in this study. The differential effect of extrinsic outcome importance on the relationship between distributive justice and satisfaction mitigates the common method bias problem (Conway and Lance 2010; Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira 2010).

This study represents the first empirical investigation of the role of organizational justice perceptions on intentions to quit within a volunteer sample, demonstrating that extrinsic outcomes and their distribution matters to volunteers. Despite some limitations, this study provides evidence that volunteers care about fairness regarding the distribution of extrinsic outcomes, which, in turn, are sufficiently powerful to influence volunteers' decisions to continue their service with an organization. Such information is potentially valuable to organizations who are working to combat volunteer turnover issues. Additionally, the results offer fruitful avenues for future research. For example, future studies of extrinsic outcomes should explore whether volunteers' intrinsic satisfaction and motivation with their job interact with extrinsic motivation and outcomes to influence volunteer experiences and retention. Further, the influence of other forms of justice on volunteer satisfaction and retention merit attention.

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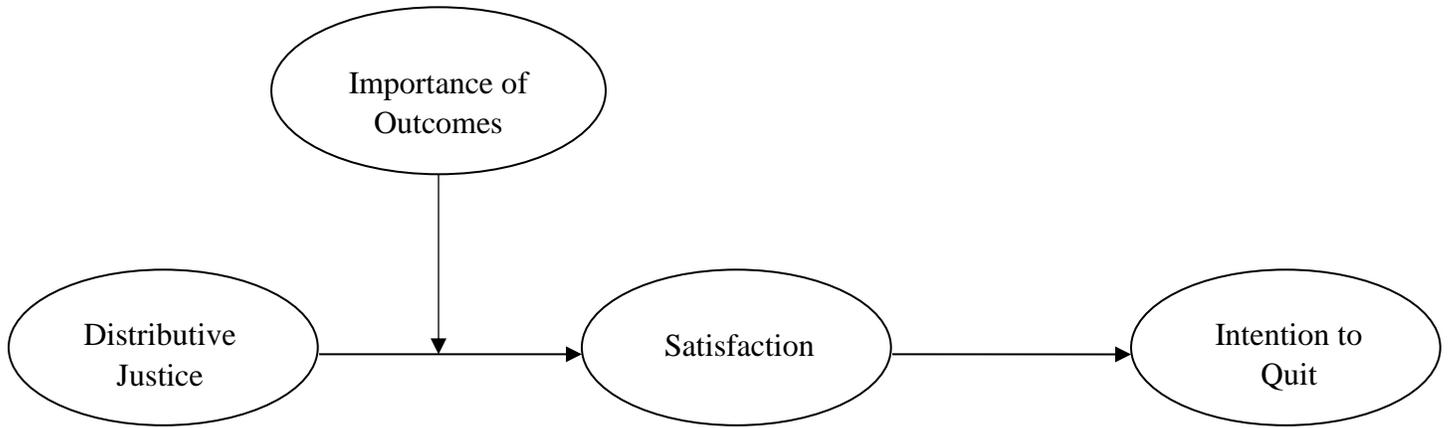


Figure 1. Illustration of the hypothesized relationship among distributive justice on intentions to quit through satisfaction, moderated by importance of outcomes

Table 1

Descriptives, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities for Justice, Importance of Outcomes, Satisfaction, Intention to Quit, and Demographic Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Distributive Justice	4.59	.63	(-.83)											
2. Procedural Justice	3.99	.70	.63**	(.77)										
3. Interpersonal Justice	4.49	.58	.56**	.47**	(.74)									
4. Informational Justice	4.16	.63	.58**	.52**	.59**	(.67)								
5. Importance of Outcomes	4.22	.66	.44**	.32**	.56**	.58**	(-.78)							
6. Satisfaction	4.27	.64	.50**	.34**	.31**	.37**	.41**	(-.88)						
7. Intention to Quit	1.84	.84	-.39**	-.31**	.48**	.46**	-.28**	-.40**	(-.68)					
8. Age	5.05	1.83	.04	-.07	-.34**	-.28**	.04	-.00	-.11	-				
9. Gender	1.77	.42	-.05	-.04	-.09	-.03	.07	-.09	-.01	-.04	-			
10. Employment Hours	2.8	2.14	-.01	.06	-.18**	-.12*	-.02	.07	.01	-.31**	-.22**	-		
11. Education Level	3.67	1.54	-.08	-.03	.13*	-.01	-.12*	.07	-.04	.22**	-.20**	.25**	-	
12. Volunteer Hours	2.51	1.42	.11	-.03	-.11	.04	.13*	.06	-.07	.39*	.02	.03	.07	-

Note. Diagonal values are the Cronbach's alpha for each scale.

Gender was coded as 1 = male 2 = female.

Employment and volunteer hours per month were coded as 1 = 0-5, 2 = 6-10, 3 = 11-15, 4 = 16-20, and 5 = 20+.

N = 294

p* < .05, *p* < .01.

Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Key Variables

	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>
One-Factor	.68	.62	581.68	65	.17
Two-Factor	.76	.71	448.61	64	.15
Three-Factor	.90	.88	218.45	62	.10
Four-Factor	.93	.90	177.01	59	.09

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation. The one-factor model includes all measures. The two-factor model separates intention to quit and overall satisfaction into Factor 1 and distributive justice and outcome importance into Factor 2. The three-factor model separates intention to quit and overall satisfaction into Factor 1, distributive justice into Factor 2, and outcome importance into Factor 3. The four-factor model separates each measure by factor.

N = 294.

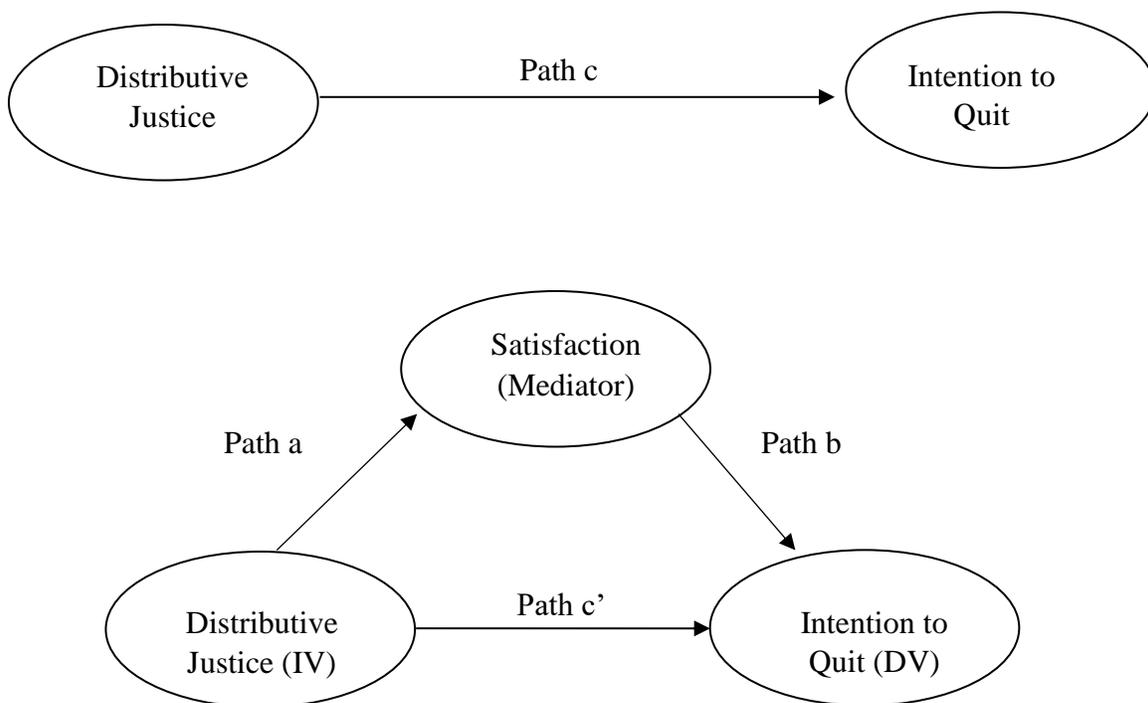


Figure 2. Illustration of the hypothesized relationship among distributive justice, satisfaction, and volunteer intention to quit pathways.

Table 3

Results for Exploratory Analysis Regressing Satisfaction on Distributive Justice, Importance of Outcomes, and their Interaction.

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Mediation Analysis Paths		
Path c (IV to DV)	-.31**	.10
Path a (IV to Med)	.30**	.06
Path b (Med to DV)	-.36**	.09
Path c'	-.21**	.11
Control Variable Paths to DV		
Procedural Justice	-.09	.08
Informational Justice	-.17	.10
Interpersonal Justice	.06	.09
Indirect Effect	Path ab 95% BC CI	
	<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>
	-.20	-.03

Note. $N = 293$. b = unstandardized coefficient, BC CI = bias corrected confidence interval based on 5000 bootstrapped samples.

Covariates included procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice.

** $p < .01$

Table 4

Results of Exploratory Hypothesis Testing the Conditional Effects of Importance of Outcomes on the Mediated Relationship between Distributive Justice and Intentions to Quit through Satisfaction

Value of Importance of			
Outcomes	$(a_1 + a_3W)b_1$	Boot SE	95% BC CI
1 SD below the Mean	-.13*	.05	[-.27, -.04]
Mean	-.01*	.04	[-.18, -.02]
1 SD above the Mean	-.03*	.03	[-.11, .02]
Index of Moderated-			
Mediation	.07*	.04	[.02, .16]

Note. $N = 288$. BC CI = bias corrected confidence interval. SD = standard deviation.

Boot SE = standard error at 5,000 bootstrapped samples

$(a_1 + a_3W)b_1$ is the conditional indirect effect, where a_1 is the path from distributive justice to satisfaction in the mediator model, a_3 is the path from the interaction to satisfaction in the mediator model, W is the value of importance of outcomes, and b_1 is the path from satisfaction to intention to quit in the dependent variable model.

Covariates included procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice.

* $p < .05$.