

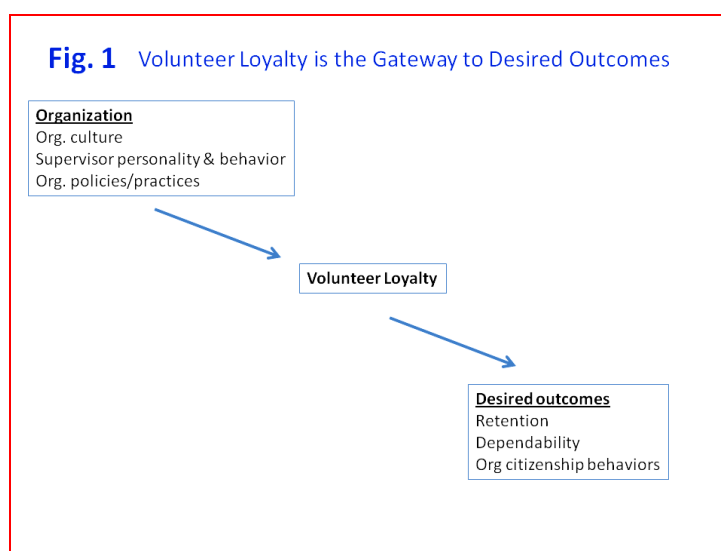
The Conceptualization and Measurement of Volunteer Loyalty

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Nonprofit managers want to retain their volunteers. Nonprofit managers want their volunteers to be dependable, to report for service when scheduled, and to perform their assigned tasks competently. Nonprofit managers want their volunteers to demonstrate good organizational citizenship behaviors (for example, participating effectively in groups, exhibiting a positive attitude, helping others). I will refer to these three variables (that is, retention, dependability, and organization citizenship behaviors) as “desired outcomes.”

Nonprofit managers understand that the organization’s culture has an influence on obtaining the desired outcomes of volunteers. They also understand that the quality of supervision volunteers experience has an influence on whether or not the organization achieves the desired outcomes from its volunteers. While there are influences on volunteers that are external to the organization (for example, volunteers’ families and jobs), my simple model will limit its scope to factors that are internal to the organization because these are factors over which managers have some level of control.

Figure 1 below illustrates the previous discussion, namely that there are organizational influences on obtaining desired outcomes from volunteers. There has been an addition, however. Figure 1 portrays volunteer loyalty as a mediator between organizational influences on volunteers and desired outcomes. Since this brief presentation proposal cannot take the space to effectively make an argument to support volunteer loyalty as a mediator, let us assume this to be true for now. If we can make this assumption, then we can also argue for the following set of propositions:



- P1: If volunteer loyalty increases, so do desired outcomes
- P2: If volunteer loyalty decreases, so do desired outcomes
- P3: Volunteer loyalty occurs prior to desired outcomes
- P4: Volunteer loyalty has a causal effect on desired outcomes

If managers can increase the level of volunteer loyalty in their organizations, a consequence will be an increase in the level of desired outcomes. Because volunteer loyalty is a mediator variable and because volunteer loyalty has a causal effect on desired outcomes, managers need to: (1) understand more clearly what volunteer loyalty is, (2) understand how to measure volunteer loyalty, and (3) understand how to increase volunteer loyalty. The presentation will focus on the first two of these three important managerial needs.

The proposed presentation is based on a two year program of research. First, a conceptualization of volunteer loyalty will be presented. The conceptualization will include what volunteer loyalty is and what it is not, as well as the relationship between volunteer loyalty and related concepts like commitment and retention.

Second, a multi-item measure for volunteer loyalty will be presented. The measure for volunteer loyalty is the result of a three study scale development program that produced a psychometrically sound measure for this construct.

The presentation will conclude with a report from a field study of how loyalty differs from retention and how it predicts some of the desired outcomes discussed earlier.