

Organisational Commitment as a Predictor of Committee Member Turnover among Volunteer Sport Administrators: Results of a Time-Lagged Study

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Many sport organisations that rely on the services of volunteers experience difficulties in the retention of their volunteer labour force. Organisational commitment has been demonstrated to be a significant predictor of task performance, absenteeism and turnover among employees in work organisations. Using a time-lagged research design, the purpose of this study was to examine the temporal influence of organisational commitment and perceived committee functioning in predicting committee member turnover behaviour among volunteers in community sport organisations. Data from a one-year, three-wave longitudinal study of volunteer administrators ($N = 262$) were used in a discriminant function analysis. It was found that organisational commitment and perceptions about committee functioning measured closest to the time that turnover occurred, were significant but not strong predictors of whether a volunteer stayed with or left the committee of their organisation. It was concluded that organisational commitment was a stronger predictor of turnover than perceived committee functioning, particularly when measured at a point closer to when the turnover occurred, and that organisational commitment may moderate the influence of perceived committee functioning on volunteer turnover behaviour.

In order to deliver services successfully, it is axiomatic that voluntary sport organisations recruit and retain volunteers with a sense of commitment to organisational goals and values. As in many parts of the world, volunteer committees

or boards¹ are the backbone of community-based sport organisations. In Australia, volunteer recruitment and retention has been identified as “the greatest single impediment to servicing increased participation [in sport] ... sporting bodies throughout Australia report severe strains in attracting, training and retaining volunteers” (Commonwealth of Australia House of Representatives Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration, 1990, p. 120). Volunteer turnover seems to be a problem for the 56% of sport organisations which experience difficulties in the retention of volunteers (Daly, 1991). Of the many sport organisations managed by volunteer committee members, most experience turnover as current members vacate their positions and others are recruited, elected or appointed to fill these vacancies. Sport organisations with high levels of committee turnover may have to divert resources to recruiting, orientating and training new volunteers rather than furthering organisational goals.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data revealed that 828,000 volunteers contributed 104.6 million hours to sport and recreation organisations in 1995 (ABS Cat. No. 4441.0). Using ABS data to examine volunteering among the Australian population, Lyons and Fabiansson (1998) reported that the percentage of the population who volunteer is declining, but those who are volunteering are doing so for longer hours. A study of volunteering among the Canadian population by Statistics Canada (1998) revealed opposite trends to the Australian data. It found the percentage of the population volunteering is increasing, whereas the hours volunteered are decreasing. Under either set of circumstances decreased rates of volunteer turnover would reduce the total amount of work to be completed by people currently volunteering their services. Where volunteer numbers are declining, slowing the rate of volunteer turnover would enable the total amount of work to be shared across a larger number of volunteers. Where volunteer numbers are stable or increasing, lower rates of volunteer turnover would result in less effort having to be devoted to the orientation, training and supervision of new recruits or the coordination of large numbers of volunteers.

Volunteers leave sport organisations, or their roles within sport organisations, for a wide variety of reasons, many of which are beyond the direct control of organisations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that changes in work or family responsibilities, changing recreation interests and preferences and a feeling of having taken one's turn as a committee member are among the many reasons volunteers give for leaving formal roles within sport organisations. Stepputat (1995) stated that “people cannot anticipate job promotions, illness or other lifestyle changes [and]

¹ In Australian community sport organisations the terms committee, management committee and board are used interchangeably to describe the group of volunteers elected or appointed to direct, supervise and control the affairs of a community sport club or association. In this study, the term committee has been used to represent committees, management committees or boards in community sport.

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