

**Title: The influence of volunteer recruitment practices and expectations on the development of volunteers' psychological contracts.**

**Abstract**

Volunteer recruitment and retention continue to be important issues for Not-For-Profit (NFP) organisations. A theoretical framework that has demonstrated considerable potential to better understand the factors influencing volunteer recruitment and retention is the concept of the Psychological Contract (PC); the set of beliefs individuals hold in relation to how organisations value their contributions as volunteers. To date research has predominantly examined the relationship between volunteer retention and individuals' PC after a volunteer has spent considerable time with an organisation. The research reported in this paper provides evidence that volunteer recruitment practices and volunteer's expectations directly influence the development of volunteers' PCs from the very first interactions they have with an organisation, and before they even commence their voluntary duties. The results indicate that a better understanding of volunteers' PC development processes and the influence of volunteer manager actions during the volunteer recruitment phase can support the formation of realistic expectations amongst potential volunteers and thus enhance volunteer recruitment outcomes.

**Key words:** volunteers, volunteer recruitment, psychological contract, psychological contract development

## **Introduction**

It is generally understood that the unpaid efforts of volunteers play a crucial role in sustaining the social and economic well-being of communities throughout the world (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). This is evident in Australia where the most recent General Social Survey found that over 6 million people, or 36% of the adult population aged 18 years and over, participated in voluntary work in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Sport and physical recreation organisations attracted the largest number of volunteers with 2.3 million people (37% of the volunteer population), followed by religious organisations or groups (1.4 million or 22%) and community and welfare organisations (1.3 million or 21.5%).

Volunteers are a large part of the human resources of NFP organisations in most Western countries and with governments reducing public spending, NFP organisations are facing mounting pressures to implement effective human resource practices for both paid and volunteer staff (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye & Darcy, 2006). More than a decade ago, Barraket (2008) argued that the NFP sector was moving through a period of change as organisations of different sizes and missions cater to the needs of an increasingly diverse volunteer workforce of informal and formal volunteers. Volunteer management and development are necessary components in building organisational capacity that contribute to the sustainability of volunteering (Healy, Lyons-Crew, Michaux & Gal, 2008).

Given the crucial contribution that volunteers make across multiple domains, the ability of an organisation to recruit and retain its volunteer workforce is paramount, especially as recruiting and training replacement volunteers is such a costly exercise

(Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Phillips, Little & Goodine, 2002). A key element in managing volunteers, including during the recruitment phase, is the recognition that volunteers tend to develop a social exchange relationship with their ‘employer’ (Bryen & Madden, 2006). In exchange for volunteering, some of their personal needs are fulfilled. For example, volunteers receive opportunities to learn and develop themselves in new environments and in turn can express and direct their humanitarian concerns through volunteering (Volunteering Australia, 2016). Hegtvedt (1988 p.142) argued that ‘a social exchange relationship exists when two actors exchange various types of resources or behaviours’. Searle (1991) applied social exchange theory in a study of volunteering utilising the following assumptions about volunteer behaviour: (a) individuals enter into a relationship seeking some reward; (b) relationships are sustained if the rewards are valued and evolve over time; (c) individuals will continue in the relationship if the other party reciprocates and provides rewards that are deemed fair in relation to others; (d) the costs of the relationship do not exceed the benefits; (e) the relationship does not place one party in a power-dependent relationship; and, (f) the probability of receiving desired rewards is high.

One theoretical framework focused on the social exchange relationship between volunteers and organisations that has demonstrated potential to better understand the factors influencing volunteer connections to their organisation is Psychological Contract (PC) theory. While there has been some research in a range of settings on the relationship between PC as perceived by volunteers and their subsequent behaviours (e.g., Liao-Troth, 2001; Vantilborgh, Bidee, Pepermans, Willems, Huybrechts & Jegers, 2011), additional work is needed in a broader range of NFP contexts.

The research reported in this paper focusses on a significant element of volunteering in the sport and recreation context; camp volunteers. An American Camping Association survey found that nearly 50 per cent of paid camp directors identified staff/volunteer recruitment and retention as their greatest concern (McCole, Jacobs, Lindley & McAvoy, 2012). Organised camping has been defined as a setting that "...utilises trained leadership...to contribute to each camper's mental, physical, social and spiritual growth" (American Camping Association, 2014, p.3). The outcomes derived from organised camping are a product of carefully orchestrated leadership processes that typically involve large numbers of volunteers. Camp leadership is inextricably linked to the staff responsible for managing and implementing the camp program and as such, camp coordinators and leaders (often volunteers themselves) play a central role in fostering and reinforcing key values and outcomes for camp participants (Slater, 1984). In the Australian NFP camp sector, where there is usually few full-time paid staff supported by larger numbers of volunteers, there is the constant challenge of recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteers to support camp operations (State Government of Victoria (2009)).

It is important that people who manage volunteers understand how working in camp settings impacts on volunteers. Firstly, a better understanding of the perceived benefits of volunteering may help paid staff better interpret the camp experience to potential volunteers during the recruitment process, resulting in the recruitment of more qualified and committed volunteers and possibly lead to heightened intentions to continue volunteering (Hooper, Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly & Appleton, 2012). The ability to attract more and better volunteers addresses a common problem of NFP camps who in Australia mainly use volunteers for their programs. Secondly, a more

comprehensive understanding of the volunteer experience may enable the creation of a better working environment that could enhance job satisfaction and PC for volunteers once they commence their voluntary role.

This exploratory study sought to examine the influence of volunteer recruitment practices and volunteer expectations on the development of volunteers' PCs. The paper is presented in four parts: a review of the literature related to the development of volunteer PCs, the methods used to undertake the study, the results, and finally a discussion of the implications of the findings of this study for theory and practice.

### **Psychological Contract Theory**

PC theory has emerged as a key framework to better understand employee behaviour in both the paid and voluntary sectors (Kim, Trail, Lim & Kim, 2009; Rousseau, 1995; Vantilborgh et al., 2011). PC theory focuses on the set of beliefs a person holds and how organisations value individuals' contributions to an organisation (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986). PC theory further describes how employees perceive the extent to which organisations care about their well-being and help meet their socio-emotional needs. Studies conducted in paid employment settings indicate that PCs develop between employers and employees and that these contracts play an important role in employee recruitment, performance and retention (Robinson, 1996).

PCs may differ on the degree to which they are transactional versus relational in nature (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The transactional component is composed of specific, short-term, monetary obligations that require limited involvement by the

organization and the employee. The relational component involves broad, long-term obligations and may be also based on the exchange of socio-emotional elements (e.g. commitment and trust). Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau (1994) found evidence that employment relationship PCs include both transactional and relational obligations.

In a similar vein, a PC represents the understandings held by volunteers regarding promises made between them and their respective NFP organisations (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). Knowing the nature of these respective understandings is important for both volunteers and managers within NFP organisations because they both use their perception to interpret whether the relationship is good or not (Harman & Doherty, 2014). From the perspective of the NFP, it is likely that the simplest of promises made when a volunteer was recruited will be the only ones considered when evaluating the relationship (Nichols & Ojala, 2009). However, volunteers' understandings are shaped by a variety of factors, including the volunteers' history with their current and previous organisations, knowledge of how others have been treated by the organisation and the social norms of the organisation (Nichols, 2012).

The mental model of a PC and how it is created, and how an individual's PC is formed is a detailed and extended process (Rousseau, 1995). Three sets of factors operate in forming a PC: external messages, social cues, and organisational factors. A summary of a scenario provided by Rousseau (1995) illustrates how a PC is created in the case of a newly hired loans officer. An employee applies for a job with the bank after reading an advertisement and several informational brochures saying, "This is a growth industry". The interviewer, eager to recruit a competent person indicates that the job offers "fast track" advancement to those who commit themselves to the

organisation. An ambitious person, the employee takes the job. The new co-workers talk about the bank's history of promoting from within. The message received by the new employee is that "hard work puts you on the fast track here". The new employee expects to be promoted this year because of their dedication and hard work. Relying on that belief, they are prepared to sacrifice their social life to attain the promised fast track. The employee also begins to anticipate how much they will gain from the next job (challenge, a sense of accomplishment, more income and status), vicariously enjoying the next achievement. The employee relies on the contract both behaviourally and emotionally.

This scenario from Rousseau (1995) contains the elements essential to PC creation: external messages and social cues (offering and interpreting the firm's future intent) and individual cognitions and predispositions (what messages they receive, their interpretations, and their own personal style of processing this information).

The messages organisations and other individuals send provide the basic external contributors to the formation of an individual's PC. External contributors can be work colleagues, work groups, the organisation's processes and documents that are part of the organisation where the individual is employed, or the commitments organisations may convey through events signalling intentions for the future. Whether organisations actually have the intention is arguable (Rousseau, 1995), but clearly their agents (managers, recruiters, and co-workers) do. Events that convey future plans (e.g. to grow the business), proposed actions (e.g. introducing a compensation system), or even references to past company actions or practices, all imply some anticipated future. Events expressing plans for the future signal commitment. Such events often

occur during personal actions (hiring, socialisation, promotion, development activities) or during organisational changes (announcement of restructuring, strategic shifts) (Suazo, 2009).

Organisations express various forms of commitment or intentions in an ongoing and relatively continuous fashion. Behavioural events involving communication of promises include overt statements, observations, or expressions of organisational policy. Overt statements come in the form of messages people ascribe to an organisation's actions and expressed intentions. Observations relate to how others are treated and lead to how individuals may view their own relationship with the organisation (Kickul & Liao-Troth, 2003).

Observations send messages in two ways: proactively, when the organisation initiates some action (e.g. promotion, retrenchments) that individuals must react to and interpret; and, passively, when the actions of the organisation are monitored by individual employees needing further information about their status and relationship in the organisation. How co-workers are treated can shape the beliefs people have about their own entitlements (Gundry & Rousseau, 1994). The expressions of organisational policy including the organisation's documents (e.g. handbooks), compensation systems (e.g. pay levels), titles, and promotional practices can also influence an employee's PC. Although organisational policy, as conveyed in manuals and handbooks, seems in one sense to be objective and fact based, most people do not read such documents until they have a good reason (Stirling, Kilpatrick & Orpin, 2011). Employees tend to seek out such documents when they feel mistreated or have questions regarding the appropriateness of some policy or action. Manuals are not

contract-making but may convey a discrepancy between expectations and experiences (Rousseau, 1995).

The role of organisational documentation may also be an important issue for organisations working with volunteers. Volunteers are often given manuals and other documents to read either prior to commencing their volunteer role or during the recruitment process when they are considering their commitment to commence as a volunteer. Research has found that similar to the actions of paid employees, volunteers often do not read such information in detail but will reference it if they feel mistreated or have a question (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Vantilborgh, et al., 2011; Warburton & Stirling, 2007).

Social cues and organisational factors also operate in the formation of a PC. Social cues are types of information acquired from one's co-workers or work group and others outside of the work environment. They play three roles in the psychological contracting process: providing messages for contract creation; conveying social pressure to conform to the group's understanding of terms; and, shaping how individuals interpret the organisation's actions (Rousseau, 1995).

Information that is important and easily available often provides the most salient messages in PC creation (Kickul & Liao-Troth, 2003). Co-workers provide the most vivid source of organisation-related information in many organisations. They communicate norms and standards, provide impressions about the workplace, and often help each other understand what is going on at work. A co-worker who is upbeat engenders a more positive view of the organisation than one who is negative. As

described by Salancik and Pfeffer (1998), such social cues have a powerful effect on perceptions of the job and the organisation. Overt statements can provide descriptive information (“the job is great,” “management can’t be trusted”), focus attention by making certain aspects of the work setting more or less salient (talking about work conditions makes them more important), and assist members to interpret these cues.

Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994) suggested that recruitment practices determine the nature of the PC that exists between organisations and their employees. They argued that effective recruitment practices and a positive organisational culture are major mechanisms through which employees come to learn and understand the terms and conditions of their employment, and as such, this understanding is as relevant for volunteers as it is for paid staff. While volunteers do not expect financial gain and volunteer organisations may lack the incentives available to organisations with only paid employees (Bozeman & Ellemers, 2008; Pearce, 1993), volunteers do expect certain inducements in return for their effort, implying an exchange relationship between both parties. Hence, people expect certain outcomes related to these motives that ultimately translate into a PC between a volunteer and a NFP organisation (Vantilborgh et al., 2014). This exchange relationship illustrates that the recruitment process may be crucial in shaping the PC a volunteer forms with an organisation.

Proponents of Rousseau’s articulation of PC theory would argue that all the influences on the formation of a PC are dependent on the interactions between a volunteer and the organisation (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Kim et al., 2009). In contrast, others argue that volunteers’ previous experiences with other NFPs or employers will influence the formation of their expectations and thus also ultimately the nature of the PC

developed by volunteers with their organisation (Harman & Doherty, 2014; Vantilborgh et al., 2011). This exploratory study therefore sought to examine the influence of volunteer recruitment practices as well as the influence of volunteers' prior volunteering experiences on the development of volunteers' PCs, particularly as the relationship between volunteer and organisation is generally entered into freely, without the need for paid employment driving the engagement between individuals and organisations.

### **Methodology**

Any research project requires the researcher to be aware of the ontological and epistemological assumptions they bring to the project (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The ontological position adopted by the researchers for this project was that the study of PC amongst volunteers is primarily about the understanding and perceptions held by individual volunteers of the relationship they have formed with their respective organisation. Such a position highlights the value in gathering data directly from the volunteers about their expectations, understanding and perceptions of their PC relative to their organisations. As volunteer managers influence the way in which organisations engage with prospective volunteers during the recruitment phase it is also important to explore the understanding of volunteer managers and their influence in how these PCs are developed.

The inherent social nature of the volunteer experience that involves interactions with other volunteers, program participants and organisational staff also supports the adoption of an interpretive approach to the research design for the current study. Utilising a positivist approach would fail to take into account intangible aspects of this social experience such as feelings or emotions and the role of these in influencing

the formation of an individual volunteers' PC with their respective organisation. An interpretive approach utilised the words and statements of the volunteers, gathering and using data from the perspective of the volunteers themselves.

This study used a qualitative research design rather than the more typical quantitative designs that have been commonly employed in studies investigating social and psychological factors associated with volunteer behaviour (Vantilborgh et al., 2011). A qualitative approach was adopted because it has the potential to provide a deeper insight into the processes underlying the behaviours of volunteers rather than measuring and describing them through a quantitative research design (Merriam, 2014). The complexity of the PC concept as articulated in the literature review and the relatively small number of reported studies that have previously examined PCs amongst volunteers also support the use of a qualitative research approach. Further, a number of researchers have suggested that research on PC and volunteers should move beyond correlation studies and consider other designs, such as qualitative field research or quasi-experimental designs (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Kim et al., 2009; Vantilborgh et al., 2011).

The use of qualitative study methods allowed the investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characterises of real-life events such as individual life cycles, small group behaviour, and organisational and managerial processes, crucial to understanding the experiences of volunteers (Merriam, 2014). Adopting a qualitative method enabled the interactions and relationships between the organisations and the volunteers to be captured and to facilitate the application of PC theory. Organisational expectations were also researched by using a qualitative approach as it allowed an in-

depth investigation into a specific set of circumstances in a particular organisational context (Yin, 2009)

At the time of the study there were 12 camping organisations in the State of Victoria that utilised both paid staff and volunteers to run their programs.. A staff member from the Australian Camping Association was consulted to ensure that the list of organisations conducting camping programs with both paid staff and volunteers was accurate. In order to yield a diverse data set relevant to the research and facilitate cross case analysis, four organisations labelled with the pseudonyms O1, O2, O3 and O4 were chosen. Selected organisations were well-established NFP organisations in Australia, had formal volunteer management policies, and, worked with children and/or youth in the camp, health and sport and recreation area. The range of selected organisations facilitated an opportunity to examine differences that existed in recruitment practices between organisations and the influence of these practices on volunteers.

A summary of the characteristics of the four organisations is presented in Table 1 below. The longevity of the organisations ranged from 23 to 122 years. The number of campers participating in at least one camp per year ranged from 150 to 1560 while the total number of paid staff employed by each organisation in their camp operations area ranged from three to 18. The total number of volunteers involved in the camp operations program for each organisation ranged from 60 to 140.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

In the first stage of the research, documents relating to the volunteer recruitment practices from the four NFP organisations were collected. The data from the document analysis was used to develop a comprehensive understanding of the “formal” volunteer recruitment practices utilised in each organisation. The data was analysed through a constant comparison process whereby the policies, procedures and practices of each organisation in the recruitment of volunteers was identified and compared to each other.

In the second stage, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with two paid staff members (in the roles of camp/program coordinator or volunteer/HRM coordinator/manager) from each of the four organisations. The purpose of the semi-structured, in-depth interviews was to gather qualitative data on the following topic areas as developed and based on Bryen and Maddens’ (2006) research. The interview schedule consisted of a series of general questions with prompts to remind the researchers to probe further on the subsequent topics:

1. Exploring paid staff awareness of PC amongst volunteers and how PC may develop;
2. Examining the awareness of paid staff about possible differences between first time and previous volunteers;
3. Examining what is being done at program level to encourage volunteers to be retained; and,
4. Examining what the larger organisation is doing to encourage volunteers to be retained.

The third stage included semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with eight volunteers from each organisation (four volunteers had camped no less than five times and four volunteers who had camped for the first time). The numbers of interviews conducted at each stage are detailed in Table 2.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The researchers developed the interview questions on the basis of previous studies of PC (Kim et al., 2009; Starnes, 2007) and an analysis of current research instruments (Nichols & Ojala, 2009; Stirling et al., 2011; Vantilborgh et al., 2011) in volunteer management research. The interview questions were designed to gather qualitative data on PCs and in particular, on the creation, development, and maintenance of PCs for the volunteers. Furthermore, a review of research studies (Vantilborgh et al., 2011) with volunteers and paid staff identified they did not express their relationship with organisations using PC terminology until after the concept was explained to them in the form of a definition by the researcher. This method of explaining the definition of PC to volunteers and paid staff at the commencement of the interviews was applied to the current research study.

Based on the work of Kim et al., (2009) and Starnes (2007) on interview questions with volunteers, the questions for this study were developed to:

1. Identify the type of activities in which the volunteer participates;
2. Identify the frequency of volunteering and under what circumstances the volunteering occurs;

3. Ascertain whether a volunteer has a preferences for time specific or task specific volunteering opportunities;
4. Understand what organisational factors contribute to a willingness to return to volunteering for the same organisation;
5. Determine the existence and nature of a PC (i.e. senses of obligations, rewards and benefits);
6. Identify PC differences between volunteers;
7. Identify links between PC and intention to continue volunteering; and
8. Examine if the relationship between PC development and intentions to continue volunteering vary between volunteers

Thus, ten interviews were completed for each of the four organisations in order to develop a comprehensive “picture” of the volunteer recruitment practices within the organisations and the associated experiences of volunteers’ PC development. The interviews for each volunteer were conducted within the first month of commencing as a volunteer (for the volunteers who had participated in a single camp) or within the first 2 years of commencing as a volunteer (for the volunteers who had participated in no less than 5 camps).

Data from each of the semi-structured interviews with paid staff and volunteers were audio recorded and transcribed into separate files for each of the organisations. In total, approximately 230,000 words of data were transcribed from the 40 interviews. The transcriptions were shared with the respective interviewee prior to analysis to verify their accuracy. A number of initial descriptive (a priori) themes were established prior to data collection based on the conceptual framework of the study.

Each transcription was then printed and read by the researchers in order to identify the themes and issues relating to the research question and to develop an overall understanding of the content. The interviews were analysed for the purpose of identifying and categorising themes within the data. Each theme for this study was examined within the context of this research and the descriptions provided by the interviewee. A content analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) by the researchers was performed in order to uncover the sub-themes within the broad themes, for subsequent analysis of the data. For example, respondents were asked the question “How does Organisation 1 support you as a volunteer?” This open ended questioning approach elicited a wide range of responses, and the researchers then gathered a list and description of the different ways the volunteers were supported by Organisation 1 based on their PC and focusing solely on the issue of organisational support.

Following this initial process of reading the transcripts, the data were imported into a NUD\*IST Vivo software program (Nvivo). The Nvivo program was used to code the data from individual transcripts and facilitate a more comprehensive analysis of the interview data. The analysis of qualitative data is often open to interpretation and debate, leading to issues surrounding bias interpretation on behalf of the researcher, thus questioning the validity of the qualitative data collection (Denzin et al., 2011). However, a number of techniques were employed within the study to validate the interpretation and to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected. Firstly, negative cases and alternative explanations were considered to not only focus on identifying cases that support the researcher’s ideas or explanations, but to also to identify and explain cases that contradict (Denzin, et al., 2011). An audit trail was also maintained by way of a leading researcher’s diary. The processes employed to conduct the

research, as well as the key decisions that had informed the research process, were documented. The audit trail included extensive descriptions of the settings and participants, the contexts within which the data were collected, and a clear description of the rationale for any decisions made regarding the data collection or analysis (Denzin, et al., 2011).

A commitment to trustworthiness and the credibility of the claims of the study and the evidence to support such claims are key to sound qualitative research (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). The methods used to ensure credibility in this study were adoption of an established research method, interviewee checking, triangulation and researchers debriefing (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Established methods for collecting and analysing data recognise the importance of incorporating accurate operational measures for the concepts being researched (Lincoln, et al., 2011). As a result, this research has followed previously used data gathering methods employed by McInnis (2012) and coding and memoing processes described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Through a process of interviewee checking, and after being transcribed, the collected data was shared with the interviewee prior to analysis so that they could verify its veracity (Lincoln, et al., 2011). In addition, a process of triangulation was used through the gathering data from multiple sources including organisational documents, staff interviews and volunteer interviews.

## **Results**

Two major themes were developed during the analysis that encapsulated the major influencers of volunteers' PC development: recruitment practices of the organisations, and volunteers' expectations about the recruitment processes used by the organisation.

### *Recruitment Practices*

The researchers compared the volunteer recruitment practices used by each of the organisations. Each of the four organisations used a website to promote volunteer opportunities and to recruit potential volunteers. The promotional material included a showcase of images of volunteers in action, providing photos and stories of volunteer experiences, and listing contact details for prospective volunteers to either apply for positions or to receive further information. The website of each organisation was also used to connect their current pool of volunteers with upcoming events and training opportunities.

O1, O2 and O3 utilised a newsletter for volunteers that they made available for download from their respective websites. The program coordinator from O1 stated that the newsletter provided via the website was a vital source of information that kept the volunteers connected with the activities of the organisation during the periods they were not participating in camps or programs. The newsletter was also important for prospective volunteers to read stories and accounts of the programs that volunteers are part of, which may assist prospective volunteers understand their future role. The content and production of O1s newsletter was the responsibility of volunteers.

Volunteers were responsible for collating news stories, information, designing and distributing the newsletter via the organisations website. O2 had a paper-based newsletter that was distributed twice a year and was for volunteers and also participants, donors and sponsors.

O3 was the only organisation that provided a volunteer recruitment brochure along with the newsletter, including the mission of the organisation, its program and volunteering opportunities, and contacts for the state body. This information enabled potential volunteers to contact the national office or state divisions for further information on volunteering. The program coordinator of O3 felt the brochure was important as it targeted University students at courses that were relevant to the work the volunteer would engage with at O3 (i.e. medical roles, recreation and sport roles and youth development), volunteer resource centres, and health organisations. The O3 brochure was also distributed at relevant conferences for example, the National Medical Conference for Medical Practitioners. The program coordinator of O3 explained that the website was designed for people who were seeking volunteering opportunities, while the brochure was specifically designed to initiate interest in volunteering.

These methods of recruitment for each organisation are the way they convey a message to volunteers. For example, a newsletter story or photos on the website regarding what they might expect to receive if they volunteered may form the basis for the creation of a PC for a volunteer who is planning to join the organisation. This initial contact with the organisation illustrates potentially a critical time for the formation of a PC for a potential volunteer and was mentioned by thirty of the volunteers interviewed.

O1, O3 and O4 had paper based volunteer application forms available that included a request for contact details of the potential volunteer and information about qualifications, interests, and the names of referees. O1 was the only organisation with

a confidentiality agreement for volunteers to sign. O2 did not have a formal application form, and the volunteer coordinator suggested this was the case because those who volunteered for their programs were from the local area and came in for an informal chat to find out about volunteering at the organisation before they began their roles. The volunteer coordinator also indicated that a volunteer brochure and application form was currently being discussed with the board as a way for O2 to possibly extend their volunteer pool further afield. Exploring the development of a brochure and application form is seen as a way for the organisation to access additional recruitment avenues, such as universities, volunteer resource centres, and potential organisations where volunteers may be present. O3 and O4 had a formalised selection processes that were outlined on the volunteer application form. The application form is another tool that may also be a factor in the creation and development of a PC for a volunteer. For a volunteer, the application form can signal the organisation's expectations of volunteers and clarify whether their experience and qualifications match organisational expectations.

These results indicate that the range of written material, both available via websites for prospective volunteers browsing for information or via hard copy information provided directly to volunteers during initial conversations or inquiries, has an important influence in the early phases of a volunteers' PC creation as they help volunteers develop a sense of the nature of volunteer roles as well as if those roles may provide the personal benefits volunteers may be seeking via their voluntary contributions. Further, the interactions and conversations that volunteers have with staff or existing volunteers while they are directly inquiring about volunteer

opportunities or even having informal discussions about the experiences of existing volunteers are also important influences in the development of a volunteers' PC.

All staff expressed the view that to retain quality volunteers, the organisation should determine their own best way to find their volunteers. However, three of the four program managers felt that in many cases they recruited *“volunteers to make [up] the numbers and not always the quality due to the lack of resources and time. We know that having good recruitment strategies in place is important and beneficial but it comes down to time and resources that we don't have”*. This illustrated the lack of resources provided by organisations for the staff to ensure that adequate numbers of appropriate volunteers are recruited. It appeared that rather than focussing on recruiting more capable volunteers that would enhance the quality of their workforce to deliver better camp experiences, resources were provided mainly for what were seen as recruiting volunteers to support or “logistics” roles such as transport, accommodation, catering and programming.

The imposition of regulations and controls designed to protect young campers makes it more difficult to recruit volunteers. A program manager from O3 said that *“volunteers will ring up and insist they want the experience straight away but working with young people, they have to go through all the hoops such as working with children checks, police checks, an interview, the reference checks, all of that and that can take three months sometimes, it can take a really long time and I will lose volunteers in that time”*. The government regulations and processes that have been put into place to safeguard the campers on these programs extend the time taken and increase the cost of waiting for volunteers to be on a program. The waiting time may

hinder the ability for organisations to “strike while the iron is hot” as the coordinator from O3 said. Extended waiting periods suggest that volunteer PCs may be compromised as a consequence of not being able to participate in the program when they are forming their views towards an organisation during the recruitment campaign. This issue was brought up by volunteer John from O3 *“it took a really long time to get through all the paperwork and I was very close to not volunteering with the organisation and started to look elsewhere. Thankfully the other organisation never got back to me”*.

All staff interviewees felt that in the early stages of the recruitment process potential volunteers should be given a realistic overview of what the role entails before being asked to commit their time. Further, staff indicated that it is important to emphasise the benefits for volunteers rather than focus on what the organisation requires. During the interviews staff felt that the potential volunteers’ role was not fully explained because of a lack of time for the staff to do so and for fear of losing potential volunteers. This lack of detailed role information being provided during the initial recruitment phase shaped volunteers’ expectations of their role, something that was also illustrated during interviews with all volunteers. Kathy from O1 summarised it by saying *“when I was at the interview meeting with the volunteer coordinator I felt she just told me what she wanted from me, the tasks, didn’t ask what I wanted, it was lucky that my friend was already a volunteer with [O1] and I asked her what it was really like, it sounded fun and social but I got this from my friend. If I just listened to the volunteer coordinator I may have not volunteered”*.

Overall, staff from all four organisations reported that recruitment was very important in the development and maintenance of the volunteer workforce but time constraints and a lack of resources often limited the ability of the staff to prioritise recruitment in a systematic way to fulfil the long-term needs of their respective programs.

Recruitment was mostly performed on an ‘as needs’ basis and subsequently organisations often recruited volunteers who only participated in one camp and then chose to not continue volunteering with the organisation. As illustrated here by O1 volunteer coordinator “*we don’t have time to do a systematic recruitment campaign for new volunteers we ask our current volunteers if they have any friends, family who could help out and hope for the numbers and they just go on camps with limited screening or training...we often just see them once*”. This short-term approach has meant that the volunteer recruitment process has often failed to adequately inform and screen volunteers for their roles.

### *Volunteers’ Expectations*

Recruitment is the beginning of the relationship between the organisation and the volunteer and provides the first opportunity for an organisation to transmit the expectations to the volunteer and for the volunteer to begin forming their PC. If any promises made to the volunteer during the recruitment process are not fulfilled once they begin their role, then from the perspective of the volunteer, the expectations may be compromised. Recruitment is designed to attract the most appropriate volunteers. When an organisation does not present well to potential volunteers during the recruitment process this failure can lead to the development of unrealistic expectations from the perspective of volunteers. Unrealistic expectations that may not

be met could involve crucial areas such as orientation, training, or safety measures and may impact on the intentions of the volunteer to remain with the organisation.

The study identified a number of signals transmitted by the organisation through their recruitment processes. For example, one organisation's website signalled volunteers' expectations by using the phrase "there is lots of support and training for volunteers". This phrase sends the message that the volunteer will receive support and training to fulfil the role for which they have been recruited. Similarly, volunteer testimonials on an organisation's brochure stating "lots of fun" can send a message of a relaxed and fun environment. Although not all encompassing, these examples illustrate the means by which the recruitment process establishes the conditions and expectations for the early stage of PC creation and development for volunteers.

Expectations of current and future experiences as a volunteer are often shaped by previous volunteer experiences. The PC development literature (Hager and Brudney, 2008; Farmer and Fedor, 1999) indicates that volunteers compare and contrast current and previous volunteer experiences, particularly in the area of supervisor support and the provision of training and development. In this context, volunteers were asked to reflect on their earlier volunteer experiences and to consider how those experiences may have influenced their decision to participate in their current volunteer role. The volunteers were also asked to comment about the positives and negatives of their previous volunteering experiences. The majority of volunteers indicated that crucial positive aspects that had encouraged them to continue to volunteer were empathy for the participants, helping the organisation meet its mission, and the opportunity to further develop their skills. This appetite for volunteering is illustrated by Kathy

(EFTE) from O1 that highlights the power of previous volunteer experiences helping to shape the motives and expectations of volunteers when seeking new voluntary opportunities: *“in the past I have volunteered overseas in Vietnam building a school in an underprivileged community. Having this experience has allowed me to understand how important it is for me to help organisations meet their mission and it has led me to seeking out organisations that allow for this to be done and in turn fulfil my reason for volunteering”*.

In contrast, previous negative experiences raised by volunteers focused on poor management, lack of support from supervisors, and lack of recognition for their voluntary work by the organisation. Jenny (TFOA) from O2 summarised this notion well

*“I used to volunteer for the sake of volunteering, but I previously had a terrible experience with an organisation previously that had poor management and a lack of respect for the volunteers. Now I ensure that during the initial discussion with a prospective new volunteer organisation I ask all the questions to ensure I am getting what I want as a volunteer”*.

This quote illustrates that volunteers who have had a negative volunteer experience may seek to ensure that any new organisation meets their expectations and what the organisation will offer them in return. Jenny further went on to say she would ask a potential volunteer organisation about how much time she would have to devote to volunteering, the orientation/training required or given and the role expectations. This questioning of the organisation and the details of the potential voluntary role from Jenny illustrates how volunteers will seek to volunteer for an organisation that is

likely to meet their expectations and thus possibly lead to a positive PC being established.

Previous volunteering experiences appear to influence the nature of the PC developed in a current volunteering role. A positive prior experience can lead to a volunteer participating in more volunteering experiences and seeking experiences that are consistent with their motives for volunteering. A prior positive experience would also contribute to the creation of a set of expectations about the degree of support they require from their organisation and therefore the extent of the connection they may develop while they are volunteering. In contrast, a prior negative experience can lead a volunteer to compare what was negative about a previous organisation and to seek an organisation that will provide them with an alternate, more positive volunteer experience.

Communication during the recruitment phase, especially between management and volunteers, was another expectation raised by volunteers and staff. The following examples demonstrate how managers perceive they communicate with volunteers in their organisations.

The staff member from O1 said the following regarding volunteers, “*although technology has made things easier for us to send and communicate with our volunteers, we have lost the direct contact, most of the talking is done via email or texting, thinking about it now I think we should be doing more talking by the telephone or in person as we are losing the personal touch and perhaps losing volunteers because of this*”. The volunteer coordinator from O2 noted the following

for their volunteers: *“Communication is very important and we make sure that each time a volunteer comes to [O2] we talk to them about what has gone on at [O2] any changes or new things and we also make sure we ask the volunteer how their life is going, this opens up the communication channel and we find everyone is happy working together”*.

The following quote suggests that communication contributes to volunteers understanding of the expectations of their role (and thus contributing to their PC) must be clear: *“We got thrown slightly in the deep end, when we were interviewed we were asked whether we were comfortable with personal care, I ticked yes on the sheet but didn’t realise that I would be doing it on my first camp without any training/support, it was assumed from the tick I could do it, I took it as I comfortable to do it, but need training and have never done it before”* James (O1).

In relation to communication, all volunteers indicated that much information to do with their role was derived mainly from other volunteers during the recruitment process. This is summarised by the following quote from Ava from O4: *“Information about my role was communicated from the volunteers on the camp, particular volunteers who had camped before, staff didn’t give me accurate information or prepared me for my role, needs or expectations, thank goodness for the other volunteers”*. Also, the program coordinator from O4 indicated that *“we rely on the other volunteers’ especially past volunteers who are camping again to do our job and communicate what needs to happen on the camps, as we are not there. This is not formally done it just happens”*. The communication channel from volunteers to volunteers may lead to a PC violation if not managed well by the organisation. This

finding suggests that communication between the organisation, supervisor and volunteer is crucial in ensuring that the creation and development of the PC for the volunteer is maintained and supported prior to engaging, as well as during their role. The results illustrate that although communication with volunteers may be more challenging than with paid employees who have a regular schedule and a formal employment link to the organisation, it is also important for volunteers to have good communication with their organisation, staff and peers.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The results of this study suggest that volunteers begin to develop a PC with their respective organisation based on the perceived expectations they form with their organisations from the very first stages of being recruited. Communication is an important component of the development of PC for volunteers. Ralston, Downward and Lumsdon (2004) reported volunteers expect adequate management, clear and correct communication, and appreciation and practical support from their organisation. All volunteers in this study felt it was important for staff and the organisation to communicate effectively and clearly about their expectations with volunteers during the recruitment stage. This finding was also evident to the staff interviewed who felt that communication, if it was managed well, resulted in the volunteers developing a more positive attitude amongst volunteers and enhancing the chances of wanting to continue their engagement with the organisation

The findings of this study suggest that their volunteer recruitment practices of NFP organisations influence the development of volunteers' PCs. In this particular NFP context, PC has emerged as an important concept that can provide NFP organisations

with a tool to better understand the impact of their recruitment practices on potential volunteers and behavioural responses emanating from the exchange relationships between organisation and their volunteers. This study also highlights the importance of organisations using quality recruitment practices as prospective volunteers make direct comparisons to their previous volunteer experiences and recruitment interactions, that, in turn, inform their development of a PC with the organisation.

The results of this study provide several implications for managers and researchers of NFP organisations and volunteer recruitment practices. This study found that there was a sense of satisfaction amongst volunteers with the PC developed between volunteers and their NFP organisation. Based on the results of this study, it is important for researchers and practitioners to understand how recruitment practices can influence PC development for volunteers. In particular, from a practical HRM perspective, these findings are important because they can help paid staff better diagnose and apply practices that support positive PC development between the volunteer and the NFP organisation. For example, the organisation needs to provide a clearer picture of its organisations requirements and give detailed descriptions of the volunteer duties when the organisation advertises volunteer opportunities. If the organisation provides accurate information, volunteers are more likely to create realistic expectations which may result in the creation of a more positive PC.

This study further validated the existence of PCs between volunteers and their paid supervisors. Knowing that volunteers develop a PC based on the perceived obligations they have of their paid supervisors suggests the need for clear and open communication channels between volunteers and paid staff especially during the

recruiting phase of the relationship. It is during recruitment that the PC is initially created (DeVos & Meganck, 2009; Rousseau, 2001). However, paid staff are often unaware or misinformed about the individual's perception of the contract (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Setting clear standards and defined roles from the inception of a relationship is a key to avoiding misunderstanding of the expectations between the volunteer and the organisation. Open communication regarding mutual obligations will allow for the formation of a better alignment between the volunteers' perceptions of the organisations intentions and actual behaviours.

As with most studies there were some limitations. Firstly, the volunteers, who participated in this study were not drawn from a random sample. Interviewees could decide freely to participate, meaning self-selection bias might have influenced the results and consequently may limit the generalisability of findings.

Secondly, most of the volunteers and paid staff did not express their relationship with organisations using PC terminology until after the concept was explained to them in the form of a definition offered by the lead researcher. The opportunity to confirm or reject the presence of a PC with their organisation was given to interview participants only after the concept was explained to them. The existence of social desirability bias, the ability level of participants, and the quality of the interview exchanges, indicated that their responses to the interview questions were not compromised or influenced by the definition. In addition, other PC researchers have recommended defining the PC prior to interview because the concept is abstract and not explicitly used in most NFP organisations as was done in this study (Cropley & Millward-Purvis, 2003).

Thirdly, the allocated timeframe for conducting the research, securing participants, and collecting data, meant that potentially there were suitable volunteers who were unable to participate due to reasons such as limited time or being unavailable during the research time frame.

Finally, this research study only interviewed current volunteers with each organisation, future research may benefit from interviewing volunteers who may have applied with an organisation and then during the recruitment phase decided to not commence volunteering or volunteers who applied but didn't meet the recruitment requirements.

This study has extended our understanding of the relationship between volunteer recruitment practices and the development of volunteers' PC which had not been previously reported in the literature (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Harman & Doherty, 2014; Hoye et al., 2008; Nichols, 2012). This study may provide organisations with the opportunity to identify and utilise formal recruitment practices that better support both the development of positive volunteer PCs as well as meeting the expectations of volunteers' PCs. As such, NFP organisations should not only encourage the development of mutual obligations between themselves and their volunteers, but also that volunteer recruitment practices are consistent with these mutual obligations.

Future research should consider developing specific terms and concepts related specifically to volunteers' PCs. This may include for example, elements related to the organisation's mission, core principles and values, as applying terms and concepts developed for the paid staff sector did not fully capture PCs in the volunteer-NFP

relationship. While the concept of PC was found to be useful in exploring expectations for volunteers, the methods to analyse this process used by Liao-Troth (2001) and Taylor et al., (2006) were constrained because the PC categories were derived from the experiences of paid workers and did not fully capture the specific expectations relating to volunteers. It was difficult for volunteers to relate components of employment based PCs directly to their articulations of what is important in their individual PC contract. The specific experiences of volunteers in the NFP camping sector means PCs were more appropriately explored by qualitative methods from a perspective of volunteers and paid managers, as was undertaken in this study. The use of qualitative methods in this study allowed for a more in-depth exploration of PCs for volunteers within a NFP organisation than a quantitative method would have allowed. Therefore, research on the PCs between volunteers and their organisation should continue to be explored using qualitative methods. It would be important for future research to develop a qualitative approach for PC theory by constructing relational elements of the contract to reflect those revealed by the present research, such as social interactions, normative contracts, and volunteer recruitment practices that may influence the creation and development of a volunteer's PC.

The relationship between personality and job fit was not explored in this study but a small number of interviewees alluded to the need for NFP camping organisations to have volunteers with certain skills and personalities in order for them to "fit in" to an organisation. Future research could explore the nature of the relationship between personality and job fit. As predictors of PC development, attitudes, skills, motives, experiences, and abilities should be explored to understand whether certain

personality types are more attracted to volunteering in the camping sector and how this influences the creation and development of a PC for volunteers.

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**Table 1 Attributes of the organisations studied**

Organisations	Years of operation	Total no of participants annually	No of paid (camp) staff	No of (camp) volunteers
O1	23	150	3	140
O2	122	1560	18	120
O3	29	200	4	100
O4	27	1200	5	60

**Table 2 Data collection stages & number of completed interviews**

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	
Organisation	Document Retrieval	Interviews with Paid Staff	Volunteer Interviews	Total Interviews for each organisation
O1	6	2	8	10
O2	4	2	8	10
O3	9	2	8	10
O4	7	2	8	10
Total	26	8	32	40