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Burnout Versus Personality: Predicting Volunteer Retention

Conor Thomas Tuohy
San Jose State University

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BURNOUT VERSUS PERSONALITY:
PREDICTING VOLUNTEER RETENTION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Conor Tuohy

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

BURNOUT VERSUS PERSONALITY:
PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTEER RETENTION

by

Conor Tuohy

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2015

Dr. Howard Tokunaga

Department of Psychology

Dr. Megumi Hosoda

Department of Psychology

Rachel Murray

Department of Anthropology and Social
Change, California Institute of Integral
Studies

ABSTRACT

BURNOUT VERSUS PERSONALITY: PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTEER RETENTION

By Conor Tuohy

Employee turnover is an important issue for any organization, but it is of critical importance for volunteer organizations. Research shows that a strong predictor of volunteer turnover is a volunteer's intention to remain in that organization. This study measured volunteers' intention to remain and compared the known predictor of burnout to the potential predictor of personality (through personality traits) in order to find a better predictor of a volunteer's intention to remain in an organization. Using survey data obtained from 65 participants from a single volunteer organization, this study showed that burnout and personality traits failed to predict a volunteer's intention to remain in an organization. Pearson correlations and a hierarchical regression of the personality traits found that the agreeableness personality trait was a weak predictor of a volunteer's intention to remain in an organization. Future research into agreeableness and factors of lower burnout scores in an organization are discussed.

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Introduction

At any given time, there are about 360 million people worldwide who are part of volunteer organizations (Vantilborgh et al., 2013). In the United States, more than 25% of the adult population are part of volunteer organizations, coming from every age range and every imaginable demographic (Volunteering in America; Volunteering and Civic Life In America, n.d.). Volunteers—those who give their time without payment—and volunteering are a part of everyday life and are a large enough pool of labor to have a significant impact on local and global scales. Retention of volunteers is key for any organization that relies on them, whether local or multinational. Research on volunteer retention has found that emotional fatigue—often referred to as burnout—takes its toll on volunteers and affects the rates of volunteer retention (Allen & Mueller, 2013). Additionally, the personality traits of volunteers have been studied and related to the amount of time a volunteer spends volunteering (Vantilborgh et al., 2013). However, not much is known about personality as it directly relates to retention. The purpose of this study is to examine the five-factor model of personality (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) in volunteers, how personality factors directly relate to volunteer retention, and whether personality factors are better predictors of volunteer retention than burnout.

Volunteers and Volunteer Impact

Over the past few years, there has been an average of about 8 billion hours volunteered annually in the United States, calculated to be about \$173 billion worth of labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a). Over 1 million nonprofit organizations currently operating within the United States report yearly revenues in the hundreds of billions of dollars (Tidwell, 2005). More than 5% of volunteer labor in the United States is devoted to civic and political action, more so during presidential elections (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014b). Although the number of volunteers has shrunk to some extent over the past decade, the general trend for volunteers has grown over time and has done so in the past several decades overall (Volunteering in America; Volunteering and Civic Life In America, n.d.). Volunteers and volunteering are an important influence in the United States and in the world; collectively they have, and will continue to have, an undeniable impact in every sector (business, social services, or otherwise) that they are involved in.

Who are volunteers and where do they come from, and do they come from only certain groups and places? Given that 25.4% of the US population in 2013 were volunteers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a), it follows that volunteers represent a wide variety of demographic characteristics. Some age groups volunteer more than others: 16–24 years had a volunteer rate of 21.8%; 25–34 years, 21.9%; 35–44 years, 30.6%; 45–55 years, 28.2%; 55–65 years, 26.0%; and over 65 years, 24.1% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a). There is a trend that the more education a person has, the more likely he or she will be a volunteer. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014a), in 2013,

Among persons age 25 and over, 39.8 percent of college graduates volunteered, compared with 27.7 percent of persons with some college or an associate's degree, 16.7 percent of high school graduates, and 9.0 percent of those with less than a high school diploma.

Volunteer organizations that recruit volunteers should consider that volunteers are likely to be older (and therefore possibly more experienced) and more educated (and therefore possibly possessing useful skill sets). This suggests that the common practice of volunteer organizations that recruit volunteers among college student populations might not be as effective as those that find volunteers from the older or working populations, who are both more likely to volunteer and also more likely to have useful education or experience. Regardless, volunteers come from all age groups and all backgrounds.

Research on the Predictors of Volunteer Retention

It is a fact of any organization that personnel will come and go, and volunteer organizations are no exception. Retaining volunteers is vital to the organization's continued operation (Hanson, 2002). Knowing that a volunteer labor pool is arguably more diverse than the average for-profit labor pool (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a), an organization may have difficulty in developing a retention strategy that addresses the diverse needs and desires of its volunteers. The ability to predict when volunteers might choose to stay or leave provides valuable information, especially if the volunteer organization can foster it in volunteers' intentions to remain in the organization (Jiménez, Fuertes, & Abad, 2010). Not surprisingly, there is research on the relationship between

the volunteer and the volunteer organization. Boezeman and Ellemers (2014) found that volunteers are more likely to stay in an environment where their leadership works alongside the volunteers and discusses the fruits of their labor. Conversely, volunteers who feel they are not listened to or who do not know exactly what they are supposed to be doing are more likely to stop volunteering (Allen & Mueller, 2013). These environmental factors are based on the facts of and perception of the volunteer organization and are established predictors of volunteer retention; this study instead focuses on the possibility of factors that are related more closely to a volunteer.

Initial research into volunteer retention led to a study by Jiménez et al. (2010) who were interested in finding differences between volunteers who volunteered for a short time and those who remained volunteers for long periods and what predictors indicate being a short-term or long-term volunteer. The researchers considered the evidence that negative factors (changes over time, costs of volunteering, and emotional fatigue) would accrue over time and believed that withstanding these negative factors was because of long-time volunteers embracing their role as volunteers, such that volunteering became part of their identity. Through this identity transformation, volunteers continue to volunteer despite accruing negative factors.

Jiménez et al. (2010) identified several possible predictors of the volunteer behavior of leaving in a short term or remaining for a long term: volunteer satisfaction, organizational commitment, emotional fatigue, volunteer role identity, and intention of remaining in service. Volunteer satisfaction comprised motivational satisfaction, task satisfaction, and management satisfaction. Motivational satisfaction was based on the six

motivations found in the volunteer functions inventory (Clary et al., 1998) with a question to gauge each motivation: values, knowledge, social relations, improving one's curriculum, defense of the self, and improving self-esteem. Task satisfaction aimed to examine the tasks being performed and the volunteers' reaction through questions that asked about how clearly the tasks were defined and how well they felt they were able to perform them. Management satisfaction looked at how the volunteers perceived the management of their organization, the training offered, how problems were solved, and general satisfaction of how they were managed. Organizational commitment gauged the emotional link between volunteers and their organization, including how similar their personal values were with that of the organization and how much they cared about the organization. Volunteer role identity asked questions related to how often they thought about volunteerism, and how important being a volunteer was compared to the tasks they performed as a volunteer.

Similarly, in order to show that the long-term volunteers had adapted to emotional fatigue, Jiménez et al. (2010) included questions on how often they felt emotionally let down by volunteering and whether they thought they spent too much time volunteering. In addition, the researchers looked at the intention of remaining in service by asking the volunteers how likely it was for them to remain in the organization for 6 more months, 1 more year, and 2 more years.

In her study, Jiménez et al. (2010) surveyed a total sample of 851 volunteers from 56 different socio-assistential organizations and then one year later inquired as to who had stopped volunteering and who were still volunteers after 8 years. From this, they

formed two small groups: 110 volunteers who stopped volunteering before completing a full year and 130 volunteers who had been a part of an organization for at least 8 years. The researchers compared the two groups of volunteers on the variables of interest through multivariate analysis of variance and used logistic regression to find the best predictors of being in one of the two volunteer groups. Of the predictors examined, they found that several predictors significantly determined which group a volunteer was likely to end up in. First, the early dropout volunteers were less satisfied with their management and showed lower levels of motivational satisfaction than those who continued volunteering for over 8 years. These results supported the first hypothesis; the researchers did not feel that management satisfaction was a predictor by itself but that task satisfaction was a predictor by itself. Despite this, a closer examination showed that early dropout volunteers were less satisfied with motivation related to values but more satisfied with motivation related to improving skill sets and gaining new knowledge. Regardless, this research demonstrates that the characteristics of volunteers' environment are predictors of their tenure.

Jiménez et al.'s (2010) research also showed that organizational commitment was a predictor for dropping out and remaining behaviors. Volunteers who dropped out in the following year had lower organizational commitment than those who remained for 8 years. Emotional fatigue was substantially lower among the volunteer dropout group than those who remained for more than 8 years, supporting Jiménez et al.'s second hypothesis. Related to this and perhaps predictably, volunteers who dropped out also scored lower on volunteer role identity, indicating that they did not relate to the volunteer

identity as strongly as those who had been volunteers already for 8 years, supporting Jiménez et al.'s third hypothesis. Despite its simplicity, the most accurate predictor of long-term volunteering was the intention of remaining in service. Long-term (8 or more years) volunteers reported a significantly higher mean value than short-term (less than 1 year) volunteers on the likelihood of their remaining in the organization for 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years.

Because of Jiménez et al.'s (2010) finding on intention of remaining in service, this study was primarily concerned with this variable. They used intention of remaining in service as a factor to predict volunteer retention; however, this study (as will be discussed later) intended to utilize other variables as predictors of intention to remain in service. The aim of studying additional predictors was to gain a better understanding of volunteer behavior in regard to remaining a volunteer, through intention to remain.

The predictors of volunteer satisfaction and organizational commitment from Jiménez et al.'s (2010) study looked at different aspects of the workplace environment. They were ineffective as predictors, having mixed results between items within the scales used, because of the daunting task of adequately isolating the environmental variables. For this reason, this study did not look at workplace environment but instead focused on variables that directly pertain to the volunteer.

The Jiménez et al. (2010) study continued to examine emotional fatigue, which is more directly tied to the volunteer and their feelings. They explored the idea of emotional fatigue—the notion of time and emotional investment wearing on a volunteer—but did so by using burnout factors (altered slightly to better fit their study) from other studies

(Chacón, Vecina, Barrón, & De Paúl, 1999; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Allen and Mueller's (2013) volunteer research of burnout is similar to Jiménez et al.'s definition of emotional fatigue in that it includes both tasks and relationships. However, Allen and Mueller wanted to go deeper into burnout and used Maslach and Jackson's (1986) burnout model. The next logical step was to look into other volunteer studies that were focused around the concept of burnout rather than the less frequently studied concept of emotional fatigue.

Research on Burnout

Allen and Mueller (2013) primarily used Maslach and Schaufeli's (1993) work to define burnout as occupational stress resulting from demanding work-related tasks and relationships within the volunteer organization. Maslach and Schaufeli characterize burnout through three factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is stress related to reduced energy and emotional resources. Depersonalization is creating physical and/or mental distance, often through the medium of cynicism and indifference to others. Diminished personal accomplishment is seeing one's own work negatively, assuming one's work is being received negatively by others, and becoming demotivated to continue working (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Allen and Mueller (2013) became interested in discovering what made volunteers stay and go when they considered the positive impact of volunteer organizations in their communities and across the United States. With an understanding of how volunteer turnover could negatively affect an organization by removing more experienced

volunteers and thus lowering the quality of work produced, Allen and Mueller began research that focused on burnout, which they believed would be closely related to the intention to quit. Instead of testing several possible predictors as Jiménez et al. (2010) did, Allen and Mueller's primary focus and main hypothesis were on how burnout was positively related to the intention to quit.

Allen and Mueller (2013) tested their first hypothesis that volunteer's feelings of burnout would be positively related to the volunteer's intention to quit. Their sample comprised 151 volunteers working in the same animal shelter in the western United States. Consistent with their first hypothesis, Allen and Mueller found that burnout was positively correlated to intention to quit. That is, the more burnout that volunteers experienced, the more likely they intended to quit. Looking at the intention to quit scales used by Allen and Muller as well as the scales for intention to remain used by Jiménez et al. (2010), it is clear that the scales are similar in structure: both are composed of three items, both are asked in similar ways, and both directly indicate the volunteer behavior of remaining or quitting. Given these results, this study assumes that Jiménez et al.'s intention to remain and Allen and Muller's intention to quit to be reasonable inversions of each other and are representing a similar idea. Therefore, this study concerned itself with the intention to remain as a representation of both Allen and Muller's and Jiménez et al.'s research studies. Furthermore, this study treated burnout representing both Allen and Mueller's research on burnout as well as Jiménez et al.'s emotional fatigue variable as representing a similar idea of burnout. Given both of these definitions of intention to

remain and burnout as being representative of the aforementioned research, this study assumed burnout to be a predictor of intention to remain.

This study also examined personality factors of volunteers as possible predictors, as personality is related to the volunteer directly (unlike, e.g., environmental factors or organizational practices, which are outside forces acting on the volunteer). Intention to remain and burnout are both related directly to volunteers, and they are both based on self-reported measures. For this reason, this study was interested in other possible predictors that examining volunteers directly that also use self-reported measures. As personality is related to the volunteer directly (as opposed to something like ‘workplace environment’ discussed earlier), the five-factor model of personality was used to examine personality factors in volunteers for this study.

The Five-Factor Model of Personality

The five-factor model of personality and personality traits (sometimes referred to as the big five model) is a widely accepted model of personality traits and characterization of a person at a global level (McCrae & John, 1992). Although not exhaustively descriptive of an individual’s personality, the five areas of personality in the five-factor model have shown to produce consistent, reliable, and quantifiable results. The five personality traits are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

Tsaousis (2002) articulated specific factors that defined these five personality traits. He described openness to experience as having a tendency to be intellectually curious and having a need for variety, with sensitivity toward art and beauty. The factors

associated with openness to experience include fantasy, esthetics, feelings, ideas, and values. Conscientiousness is defined as a tendency to be diligent and thorough with a sense of duty, having a will to achieve, and/or having an active conscience that organizes and directs behavior. Tsaoasis identified the relevant conscientiousness factors as competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation. He defined extraversion as the tendency to experience and express positive emotions combined with sociability; extraversion is associated with the factors of warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement-seeking, and positive emotions. Tsaoasis then added cooperation, trusting, and warmth as the defining qualities of agreeableness, citing trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender mindedness as factors. Finally, he defined neuroticism as the tendency to experience distress and negative emotions. He identified the factors associated with neuroticism as anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability. He made these sub-distinctions in order to better differentiate among the five factors and improve calibration of each factor in testing.

Research on the Five-Factor Model of Personality

This study was concerned with the use of five-factor personality model in regard to volunteers. Penner (2002) showed how both a volunteer's personality and the operations of the volunteer organization were important variables in explaining volunteer behavior, specifically in regard to long-term volunteers. Vantilborgh et al. (2013) moved forward on Penner's findings using the five-factor model of personality. However, Vantilborgh et al.'s research was related to the exertion of effort and time by looking at

the number of hours volunteers donated within a month and comparing those results to personality traits through psychological contracts of volunteers as mediating factors. The three psychological contracts that Vantilborgh et al. studied were the ideological contract, the relational contract, and the transactional contract. The ideological contract involves perceived promises related to the organization acting on their stated mission or values. The relational contract involves the perceived promise of socioemotional inducements (like receiving recognition for the work they have done) and is based on mutual trust. The transactional contract involves the perceived promise of receiving tangible, material reimbursement within a specific time frame. Vantilborgh et al. hypothesized that the ideological psychological contract and the relational psychological contract would be positively correlated with hours donated, that the transactional psychological contract would be negatively associated with hours donated, and that the relationship between personality traits of the five-factor personality model and hours donated would be mediated by these psychological contracts.

Vantilborgh et al. (2013) randomly selected 200 sociocultural groups (artistic organizations, theater companies and troupes, etc.) from a large database of Belgian nonprofit organizations and asked them to distribute an initial online survey to the volunteers in their organizations. A total of 627 e-mail addresses were retrieved, which were used to distribute a second survey 2 weeks later. The final sample was 456 volunteers who completed both the surveys. Vantilborgh then used path analysis to assess the hypothesized relationships between personality factors, psychological contracts, and the number of hours donated.

Results of Vantilborgh et al. (2013) showed a negative relationship between the transactional contract and agreeableness. There was also a statistically significant relationship between the relational contract and extraversion, as well as agreeableness. The ideological contract was the most notable, showing positive relationships between openness to experience, extraversion, and agreeableness and a negative relationship with conscientiousness. An important finding from these results was that agreeableness was found to have a significant positive relationship with the ideological contract and the relational contract, as well as a significant negative relationship with the transactional contract. Because of these results, agreeableness stands out as a more notable predictor of several relationships within multiple mediating psychological contracts and thus volunteer behaviors. This may serve as an indication that agreeableness might predict other volunteer behavior, because of the negative relationship with transactional contracts (related to tangible gains), which is the opposite of the most basic definition of volunteers—those who give their time without payment. It simultaneously aligns with the ideological contract (related to values) and relational contract (related to socioemotional inducements) in a statistically significant way. For these reasons and the findings based on Vantilborgh et al., agreeableness is worthy of additional attention as a potentially powerful predictor, which was investigated in this study further.

Vantilborgh et al. (2013) indicated that personality was related to volunteer behavior by way of psychological contracts. However, they used hours donated to measure the total effort expended by a volunteer in a short period of time. This is very different from the idea of volunteer retention, which is not about the sum total of efforts

but instead a commitment over time. Although seemingly similar as they are both associated with time, they are very different when the nature of personality traits and how they could relate differently are considered. For example, according to Vantilborgh et al.'s findings, although high agreeableness might suggest that a volunteer will give more hours in any given month, it does not necessarily say anything about how many months that volunteer will stay. As such, this study took Vantilborgh et al.'s work as a working example of the five-factor model of personality but aimed to compare personality to the specific volunteer behavior of remaining a volunteer. This study took this approach because of an interest in finding predictors that are more closely related to the broader idea of how personality relates to employee turnover through intention to remain, instead of how personality relates to employee effort expended.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to combine the efforts of previous research by looking at areas that each body of research covered and then furthering the research in a direction that previous research has not yet gone. Jiménez et al. (2010) highlighted intention to remain as a powerful predictor of the behavior of whether a volunteer will remain. Additionally, they introduced the idea of emotional fatigue and related it to burnout. Allen and Mueller (2013) showed that burnout is a predictor of the volunteer behavior of intention to remain (through the inversion of intention to quit). Both intention to remain and burnout are variables that relate to the volunteer, not the volunteer organization, thus the Vantilborgh et al. (2013) research provided the framework for how the five-factor personality model relates to volunteers. This study identified a gap in research of personality as a possible

predictor of intention to remain and aimed to fill that gap with an investigation of personality as a predictor of intention to remain through personality traits of the five-factor model. This study aimed to explore whether the combined predictive factors of the personality scales would be a stronger predictor of intention to remain than an established burnout scale that predicts intention to remain. Additionally, this study aimed to explore which personality trait would be the best single predictor of intention to remain; Vantilborgh et al. indicated that agreeableness will be the most powerful predictor of the personality traits because of the significant positive relationship and negative relationship with psychological contracts.

Hypothesis

This study used the reliable predictor for volunteer retention that Jiménez et al. (2010) found: intention to remain and comparing it to both burnout and the five-factor personality model among a volunteer sample. Therefore, this study attempted to relate burnout directly to intention to remain, relate the five-factor personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) in combination and individually directly to intention to remain.

With this, the following hypotheses were formed:

Hypothesis 1: Personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) will predict intention to remain for volunteers above and beyond burnout.

Hypothesis 2: The personality trait agreeableness will be the strongest predictor of intention to remain of the personality traits examined.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 71 current and active volunteers within a branch of an organization providing scholastic aid for people with disabilities based in the Palo Alto, CA, area. Filters were in place within the online survey as a precaution to prevent anyone under the age of 18 or anyone who was not currently an active volunteer in a volunteer organization from taking the survey. Of the 71 respondents, 5 were removed from analysis because of incomplete data. Additional data cleaning was performed (looking for sets of responses without any variation or sets with other clearly anomalous data), leading to an anomalous respondent being removed. This left a total of 65 participant responses that were used for the analysis.

Table 1

<i>Demographic Information of Participants</i>		
Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Age group		
18–24	2	3.1
25–34	12	18.5
35–44	3	4.6
45–54	9	13.8
55–64	14	21.5
65–74	14	21.5
75+	11	16.9
Months volunteered at organization		
0–6 months	4	6.2
7–12 months	3	4.6
13–24 months (1+ to 2 years)	12	18.5
25–60 months (2+ to 5 years)	21	32.3
61–120 months (5+ to 10 years)	12	18.5
More than 120 months (Over 10 years)	13	20.0

Note. *n* = 65.

Table 1 shows how the sample of volunteers broke down into age categories, as well as categories of time period for which they had been volunteers. Volunteers reported years and months volunteered at their current organization; these age categories were created after data had been collected. An unusually high number of volunteer respondents reported being in higher age categories; 74% of this sample were over the age of 45 and 39% over 65. This helps explain the higher numbers within the months volunteered at organization breakdown, with 71% of the sample having volunteered for over 2 years, 39% for over 5 years, and 20% for over 10 years.

Measures

The primary data collection tool used for this study was an online survey (hosted by SurveyMonkey.com) that consisted of four sections. The completed survey was 41 questions in total, with an estimated 7- to 10-minute completion time. The burnout and five-factor personality question sets had their question given in a randomized order to aid data accuracy.

Demographic information. The first section asked three questions: what age group they were a part of, whether they were currently volunteers, and how long they had been volunteers at the time of data collection. These questions were to ensure all participants were over the age of 18 years, were currently volunteers, and were not answering randomly (allowing a check for responses indicating they had volunteered for a length of time incompatible with their age).

Burnout. The scales for measuring burnout in this study were adapted from Maslach and Jackson's (1981) self-report scales for measuring burnout, using rewording and one item from the more recent scales of Moreno-Jiménez and Villodres (2010). This scale comprised three positively coded items and two negatively coded items, using 7-point Likert scale statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$). Examples of the items include: "I feel emotionally drained from volunteering" (positively coded, higher score indicates a higher level of burnout) or "I have accomplished many worthwhile things through volunteering" (negatively coded, higher score indicates a lower level of burnout).

Personality traits. The scales for measuring the five personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) were primarily from Tsaousis' (2002) measures, using some items from Goldberg's (1992) five personality factors scale. Each personality trait comprised six items, at least four positively coded items with one or two negatively coded items. All items were using 7-point Likert scale statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The scores of the six sub-scale-based items were then averaged to produce an overall trait score for each participant. The possible range for each participant's score was 1–7; the higher the score, the more of that trait the participant exhibited.

Each of the six items in the openness to experience scale comprised one of the openness to experience subscales: fantasy, esthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values. Examples of the items include: "I consider myself a person with a rich, active imagination" (fantasy subscale, positively coded, higher score indicating higher openness

to experience) or “I am not interested in abstractions” (ideas subscale, negatively coded, higher score indicating lower openness to experience) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .37$). Each of the six items in the conscientiousness scale comprised one of the conscientiousness subscales: competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation. Examples of the items include: “When I am dealing with a task, I concentrate on it until I finish it” (self-discipline subscale, positively coded, higher score indicating higher conscientiousness) or “Sometimes I feel completely useless” (competence subscale, negatively coded, higher score indicating lower conscientiousness) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .71$).

Each of the six items in the extraversion scale comprised one of the extraversion subscales: warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, and positive emotions. Examples of the items include: “I consider myself an active and energetic person” (activity subscale, positively coded, higher score indicating higher extraversion) or “I don’t like going to parties” (gregariousness subscale, negatively coded, higher score indicating lower extraversion) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .51$). Each of the six items in the agreeableness scale comprised one of the agreeableness subscales: trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender-mindedness. Examples of the items include: “I prefer not speaking about myself” (modesty subscale, positively coded, higher score indicating higher agreeableness) or “I consider myself a competitive person” (compliance subscale, reverse coded, higher score indicating lower agreeableness) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .55$). Each of the six items in the neuroticism scale comprised one of the neuroticism subscales: anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-

consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability. Examples of the items include: “Quite often I get mad with others” (angry hostility subscale, positively coded, higher score indicating higher neuroticism) or “I believe that I am a person that can control my emotions” (impulsiveness subscale, negatively coded, higher score indicating lower neuroticism) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$).

Intention to remain. Intention to remain was measured with three items to gauge their intention to remain a volunteer (over 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years). The scales for measuring intention to remain were the items used by the Jiménez et al. (2010) study. Participants responded how likely they were to remain a volunteer for the next 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years, using a 7-point Likert scale statements (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely).

Procedures

Participants were contacted through e-mail sent out to approximately 200 volunteers through a volunteer organizer; specifics of these e-mail addresses were never revealed to maintain anonymity of the participants. The e-mail included a basic explanation of the purpose of the survey, assurance of confidentiality, an explanation of rights of participation, contact information, and terms of voluntary consent to participate. Both the e-mail and the introduction of the survey explained that participation was completely voluntary and that all data would be completely anonymous. A link embedded in the e-mail labeled “I Agree” following the agreement to participate led to the online survey described previously; this was the only way to access and take the online survey. Participants clicked the “I Agree” link embedded within the e-mail to

participate, which brought them to the online survey. Participants then continued through the four sections of the survey (described previously), checking for validity of participant participation, and then gauging intention to remain, burnout, and personality factors. Participants were informed when they had completed the survey. The online survey collected data for 2 weeks, at which time the data were downloaded and used for analysis.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Sixty-five responses with valid data were examined along all variables and key items; means and standard deviations of these results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variable	Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Burnout	1–7	1.94	.97
Extraversion	1–7	4.57	.93
Neuroticism	1–7	3.18	1.27
Openness to experience	1–7	5.66	.69
Agreeableness	1–7	4.65	.84
Conscientiousness	1–7	5.09	1.11
Intention to remain for 6 months	1–7	6.49	1.48
Intention to remain for 1 year	1–7	6.22	1.55
Intention to remain for 2 years	1–7	5.75	1.83

Participants reported a low level of burnout ($M = 1.94$, $SD = .97$) based on the scale, indicating a general lack of feelings of burnout present in the volunteer sample.

The descriptive statistics on the personality traits predictors are five mean scores from the five personality traits examined. These scores are best understood when the scales of measurement are considered: the scores relate to a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The extraversion personality trait score ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .93$) exhibited by the volunteer sample shows that there is a slightly above average amount of extraversion within the sample, and the standard deviation indicates a small amount of variation from this. The agreeableness personality trait ($M = 4.65$, $SD = .84$) is similar to the extraversion score in both mean and standard deviation. The neuroticism

personality trait score ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.27$) exhibited by the volunteer sample shows that there is lower neuroticism among the sample; a somewhat large standard deviation indicates that there is some variability in this trait among the participants. The conscientiousness personality trait score ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.11$) indicates that the volunteer sample had a relatively higher conscientiousness score, with a standard deviation indicating that most volunteers had an above average to a very high conscientiousness trait. Openness to experience had the most interesting result in terms of both the mean score and the standard deviation ($M = 5.66$, $SD = .69$), with both the highest mean score and the lowest standard deviation. The mean indicates a notably high openness to experience trait.

Intention to remain on a scale of 1–7 for 6 months ($M = 6.49$, $SD = .97$), 1 year ($M = 6.22$, $SD = 1.48$), and 2 years ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.83$) were all found to be high, indicating that there was a particularly strong intention to remain within this sample. A decline of intention to remain between 6 months and 1 year, and between 1 year and 2 years was seen, as well as an increase in the standard deviation. This indicates that some within the sample dropped their intention to remain more as the time span increased, but the average is still high because of others answering as high as possible with their intention to remain on each question. Additionally, although the decline is not particularly steep with this sample, this and the increasing standard deviation agree with the results from the Jiménez et al. (2010) study, which show a similar decline in means and increase in standard deviations.

Pearson Correlations

Pearson correlations were calculated for each of the key variables: burnout, the five-factor personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism), and the three variables pertaining to intention to remain (intention to remain for 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years). The Pearson correlations of these variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation of the Variables/Predictors (n = 65)

Key variables/predictors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Burnout	—								
2. Extraversion	-.01	—							
3. Neuroticism	.48**	-.19	—						
4. Openness to experience	.22	.25*	.22	—					
5. Agreeableness	-.06	-.08	-.14	.11	—				
6. Conscientiousness	-.46* *	.28*	-.48* *	.00	.10	—			
7. Intention to remain for 6 months	.07	-.07	-.03	-.02	.17	-.04	—		
8. Intention to remain for 1 year	-.09	-.08	-.09	.01	.19	.04	.91**	—	
9. Intention to remain for 2 years	-.22	-.03	-.15	-.03	.26*	.10	.71**	.86**	—

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Allen and Muller's (2013) research indicated that burnout would be a negative predictor of intention to remain. Table 3 shows that burnout did not correlate with any intention to remain variable. However, the strongest burnout and intention to remain correlation was found between burnout and intention to remain for 2 years ($r = -.22$); thus intention to remain for 2 years was used for all further analyses. Although not significant, a weak negative correlation between burnout and intention to remain for 2 years indicates that the more burnout a volunteer experiences, the less likely volunteers intend to remain for 2 years.

The correlation for four of the five individual personality traits: extraversion ($r = -.03$), openness to experience ($r = -.03$), conscientiousness ($r = .10$), and neuroticism ($r = -.15$), and intention to remain were both so low as to be negligible and non-significant. This indicates that these four personality traits had no impact on intention to remain. The personality trait agreeableness ($r = .26, p < .05$) had a weak positive relationship with intention to remain for 2 years. This indicates that the more agreeable volunteers are, the more likely they intend to remain for 2 years.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses

To test Hypothesis 1 that personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) would predict intention to remain for volunteers above and beyond burnout, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed. As previously explained, the dependent variable used was intention to remain for 2 years, as it had the strongest correlation with burnout. To compare the effect, a regression was run for burnout at step 1, and then for step 2, all five personality traits were included in the model. When predicting intention to remain for 2 years, burnout accounted for 5% of the variance, but did not have significant relationship, $F(1, 63) = 3.83, p > .05$. The variables entered in the second step (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) accounted for an additional 6% of the variance, but these variables did not have a significant effect, $F(6, 58) = .84, p > .05$, thus Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Correlations for Personality Traits.

Predictor	Intention to remain for 2 years		
	Beta ^a	sr^2 ^b (ΔR^2)	F for ΔR^2
Step 1: Burnout	-.42	.05	3.183
Step 2: Personality			
Agreeableness	.54		
Neuroticism	-.05		
Conscientiousness	-.06		
Extraversion	-.02		
Openness to experience	-.02		
		.06	.84
R^2 total = .11, $F(6, 58) = 1.23$			

^a Standardized beta weights.^b Squared semi-partial correlation coefficient, indicating unique variance contribution of variable.* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In Table 4, agreeableness has the highest beta value of any of the personality trait variables ($\beta = .54$), suggesting that it is the strongest predictor of intention to remain for 2 years. Given that the beta for agreeableness was not significant, this finding did not provide support for Hypothesis 2.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of personality and personality factors in predicting a volunteer's intention to remain a volunteer. This was done through comparison to burnout, a well-established predictor of intention to remain. Hypothesis 1, that the personality traits openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism would predict intention to remain for volunteers above and beyond burnout, was not supported. Hypothesis 2 that the personality trait agreeableness would be the strongest predictor of volunteers' intention to remain among the personality traits examined was not supported.

The findings of this study are both consistent with and conflict with previous research in a few interesting ways. The five-factor personality traits research from Vantilborgh et al. (2013), in which they compared personality traits' predictive power on the number of volunteer hours donated within a month, led to a number of personality traits, showing no or negligible correlations with neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness to experience. However, Vantilborgh et al. did show some weak correlations with agreeableness and volunteer hours donated within a month. These results are interesting for two reasons. First, the similarity of results with the present study indicates that in Vantilborgh et al. (2013) study, volunteer hours donated may be related to intention to remain and may even be predictors of each other. Second, it provides evidence of agreeableness being a possible personality trait of a "volunteer type;" two different ways of looking at volunteer commitment (intention to remain from

this study and volunteer hours donated) both indicate elevated levels of agreeableness.

Although the effect was not found to be significant within this study's population, the moderate negative relationship between burnout and intention to remain for 2 years corroborates with established results from the Jiménez et al. (2010) research, which shows a negative predictive effect of burnout with a much broader volunteer sample: 851 volunteers from 56 different socio-assistential organizations.

A practical application for the results of this study would be that volunteer organizations recruiting new volunteers take a personality trait test focused on and designed to measure their levels of agreeableness. Results of this test could be used to help determine which new volunteers have a greater likelihood to have a disposition to stay in the organization longer. There are a number of possible uses for this, like assigning specific roles that require a long-term commitment to the organization or choosing to use limited training resources on these volunteers. Although, admittedly, agreeableness was found to be only a weak predictor of intention to remain, using this predictor would still be better than a volunteer organization assigning roles randomly. There is little reason not to gather such information, as it requires a minimum effort and resources of the organization. As five-factor personality tests are self-report tests and do not require special training to gather results from, such a test could also serve as an icebreaker activity for new volunteers.

Strengths of the Study

One of the strengths of this study was that only a single volunteer organization was used, which helped reduce variability due to environmental factors. Allen and Muller (2013) discussed the influence of environmental factors of volunteering: how volunteers and management interact, the desirability of tasks being performed, and many other factors particular to any given volunteer organization. By using one organization, these would remain a constant and there would not be the potential for wide variability between different volunteer organizations; environmental factors would affect volunteer participants more uniformly than if volunteer participants had all come from different organizations. This was an important strength to consider, because the variables of this study were focused on volunteers and their feelings (thus, intention to remain, burnout, and personality traits) and less directly on the volunteer organization, tasks performed, treatment by management, or other environmental factors. While burnout could be affected by organizational characteristics, with all volunteer participants coming from the same organization, these effects would be more equal than the variability between different volunteer organizations would have been. This strength was not planned on, however; the original (and preferred) strength would have been to mitigate the environmental variability by having several different volunteer organizations and an overall much larger pool of volunteer participants.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study was encountered even before data were collected; out of the six possible volunteer organizations that initially expressed interest in helping with the research, only one was able to do so. Two of the six organizations were unable to help because their letters of support arrived 2 and 3 weeks too late for them to participate. Two other organizations were unable to help because of bad luck with timing, as these two organizations were running their own internal surveys around the same time and did not want to send out this study's survey until at least a month later to avoid confusion, which unfortunately did not match with the timeframe for this study. Of the remaining two organizations, one decided against participation 2 days prior to the planned distribution of the survey (despite submitting a letter of support to confirm their involvement) and was concerned that existing dormant burnout in volunteers would be rekindled if they were asked questions about burnout. Only one organization was able to distribute the surveys within the requirements and parameters of the study. The resulting low sample size affects the statistical significance of any findings. Future studies could address this limitation by recruiting more volunteer organizations at the outset and establishing broader windows of time to distribute the survey.

An additional unforeseen limitation was related to the choice of questions within the personality scales. The scales used were composed of questions taken directly from the five personality factors scales of Tsousis (2002) and Goldberg (1992) in order to make the results of this study more comparable with the results of other established research studies. However, the personality traits for extraversion, openness to

experience, and agreeableness all had a Cronbach's α lower than .70, a commonly accepted standard for internal consistency reliability for a variable. This indicates that the scales for extraversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness were found to be less reliable than are generally accepted with the sample used in this study. Thus, findings pertaining to these traits should be interpreted with caution. Future research would need to adapt the scales for those personality traits, potentially by looking at the data from this study, removing a single question from the scale, and re-find the Cronbach's α for the scale. Doing this repeatedly may find a question or two that more significantly affect the Cronbach's α , and that question could be replaced in order to create a more internally consistent scale.

Future Research

An attempt to find relationships between intention to remain, volunteer hours donated, and agreeableness, and an examination of whether combinations of these predictors could predict a "volunteer type" would be one potential path for future research. As mentioned earlier, the Vantilborgh et al. (2013) research on volunteer hours donated and how they related to each of the five-factor personality traits had very similar results to the personality trait results for intention to remain. This is a strong indication that volunteer hours donated and intention to remain may be related or possibly predict each other. Their relationship to each other could be researched further, along with their relationship to agreeableness—to see if it is a predictor for both variables. Results of Vantilborgh et al. and this study already suggest evidence for a practical application of the personality trait agreeableness as perhaps a way to screen potential volunteers so that

volunteer organizations might find individuals with personality traits well suited to volunteering (high agreeableness) and avoid those that do not (low agreeableness). Further research on these items and agreeableness in volunteers could indicate how valid such a practical application would be, compared to other possible predictors.

Another path for future research could look into the causes of the very low burnout scores coupled with very high average tenure as a volunteer within the specific sample used in this study, in order to try and discover the factors that might cause the lower burnout scores. Such a study would involve studying the volunteers who were participants in this study and the environment that produced them. The reason for this interest comes from a few different findings from this study and some of this author's unfinished research from 2008. The first finding was the unintentional finding of the particularly high mean found in the "months volunteered at organization" question (which was originally included for the sake of data validity); the mean score of 83.692 months (almost 7 years) within this volunteer sample shows that most of the volunteers in this sample were long-term volunteers. Furthermore, this volunteer population had an overall very low mean burnout score. These two findings together are in conflict with the general findings of Jiménez et al. (2010), who found that burnout increases the longer someone stays as a volunteer. This does not appear to be true of this study's volunteer sample. Additionally, prior uncompleted research by the author of this study from 2008 was conducted at the same organization featured in this study. The prior research contained interviews about best practices for volunteer organizations and included a question about volunteer retention. One of the managers reported that:

We have a volunteer screening process. We can know if a volunteer will be a good fit before we take them on. We are protective of who we already have – they are experienced, productive, and dedicated – that is worth protecting. So we don't just take anyone who volunteers... Volunteer selection has served us very well – so I recommend it. (M. Ward, personal communication, March 2008)

This sentiment was echoed later again, on an interview question about what advice they would give to another volunteer organization that was just starting out: “Provide a good, positive, and happy environment for volunteers – and everyone – and then protect it” (M. Ward, personal communication, March 2008). The findings of this study and these old interview quotations indicate that there are specific business practices and perhaps cultural factors that make this volunteer sample different from an average sample and may explain inconsistencies with the general findings of Jiménez et al. (2010). It would be of particular interest to see if the culture of this volunteer organization is such that it has unconsciously (or semi-consciously) created an internal self-selection method for those who will experience and/or contribute to lower mean burnout scores. Furthermore, the unusually low scores for this sample is not addressed in prior research. The research studies of Jiménez et al. (2010) and Allen and Muller (2013) do not cover the idea of volunteer populations that can go against the general trend of an increase in burnout over time in a volunteer as they volunteer longer, or whole groups of volunteers that experience very low burnout even after being volunteers for a very long time. Instead, the preliminary research sources address burnout like it were a force of entropy—an eventuality that burnout would build up in any volunteer, given enough time. It is

difficult to know exactly why these results have occurred within this volunteer organization, but it is worth researching. Finding how this volunteer organization has avoided burnout could lead to understanding how it could be replicated elsewhere.

Conclusion

Retention is vital for a volunteer organization. When a large volunteer organization does not want to risk even the possibility of losing a handful of volunteers despite having thousands (as one of the organizations that opted out of this study reported), and when a small volunteer organization like that of the sample used in this study has a procedure in place to actively safeguard their volunteers' environment, it underlines the value of every single volunteer. Despite the large number of volunteers across the world and thus the potential to recruit more, wise volunteer organizations still treasure the volunteers they have. While very large volunteer organizations may look at the total numbers of volunteers that come and go from their organization, branches of those organizations as well as any small volunteer organizations do not think on that macro level. Every loss of a volunteer is the loss of a piece of identity for any given branch. This study sought to find a statistically based method or technique, with the hopes of finding a way to raise the percentage of volunteers retained in a volunteer organization. Such findings might be interesting or useful to the head office of a large organization that sees through the macro view, but less useful on the micro level of individual offices or smaller organizations. The limited findings of this study, however, offer the potential for individuals (like this author) to go out and seek the answers in situ.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65–74
- 75 or older

2. Do you currently volunteer for any organization?

- I do not currently volunteer for any organization.
- I am a volunteer.

3. About how long have you been volunteering for this organization? Please answer this question in regard to your primary volunteer organization.

- Years _____
- Months _____

4. How likely is it for you to remain as a part of your current organization for...

(7-Point Likert scale for each below: very unlikely, neutral, very likely)

...6 more months?

...1 more year?

...2 more years?

5. Please share your personal agreement or disagreement with each statement as honestly as possible.

(Questions were randomized. “-” denotes positively coded items. “*” denotes negatively coded items.)

(7-Point Likert scale for each below: strongly disagree, neutral, strongly agree)

- I feel burned out from volunteering.

* I have accomplished many worthwhile things through volunteering.

- I feel that volunteering is a strain.

- I feel emotionally drained from volunteering.

* I feel I am positively influencing other people’s lives through my volunteering.

6. The following set of questions is the final set of questions. It is about how you feel, personally, and not related to your volunteer work. Please share your personal agreement or disagreement with each statement as honestly as possible.

(Questions were randomized, and personality traits were not labeled. “-” denotes positively coded items. “*” denotes negatively coded items.)

(7-Point Likert scale for each below: strongly disagree, neutral, strongly agree)

Extraversion

- I usually get involved in my friends' problems.
- * I don't like going to parties.
- Very often I take on the responsibility of organizing activities.
- I consider myself an active and energetic person.
- I don't mind being the center of attention.
- I consider myself an optimistic person.

Neuroticism

- I am much more anxious than most people.
- Quite often I get mad with others.
- I think that I feel sad more often than other people do.
- I worry about things.
- * I believe that I am a person who can control their emotions.
- Sometimes I feel so helpless that I want to ask someone else to help me.

Openness to experience

- I consider myself a person with a rich, active imagination.
- I read literature for fun.
- * I am not interested in abstractions.
- I use difficult words.

- I think of myself as open-minded.
- I am quick to understand things.

Agreeableness

- I make people feel at ease.
- * Flattering people is a good way of asking them to do what you want them to.
- When somebody needs me, I always help them.
- * I consider myself to be a competitive person.
- I prefer not speaking about myself.
- I have a soft heart.

Conscientiousness

- * Sometimes I feel completely useless.
- I find a well-organized life-style with pre-scheduled activities fits my personality perfectly.
- * I leave my belongings around.
- I like to set goals in my life and work hard to achieve them.
- When I am dealing with a task, I concentrate on it until I finish.
- I pay attention to details.