The Psychological Contract, Part II: What Motives and Personality To Anticipate in Your College Student Volunteers

Matthew A. Liao-Troth, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA
H. Michael Drumm, DePaul University, Chicago, IL

This is the second paper in a two-part series on the psychological contract of volunteer workers (see the first in the March 2004 issue of *Journal of Volunteer Administration*). We examined the functional motives of volunteer firefighters in our first paper, studying how motives affected their psychological contract with their fire department. In this paper we are going to look at the motives and personality of college students. We are interested in determining how these two factors affect their psychological contracts with their organizations.

The psychological contract is a construct that captures the informal reciprocal agreement of a work environment from the perspective of the individual (Rosseau, 1995). This contract addresses what obligations employees believe they owe the organization and what entitlements they feel the organization owes them. These obligations go beyond those issues in the formal employment contract. Like paid employees, all volunteers have a psychological contract with their organization. Unlike paid employees, this psychological contract is all most volunteers "have to go on," especially in loosely structured organizations with poorly defined volunteer roles. The psychological contract defines both the type of relationship the volunteer has with the organization, and what obligations and entitlements will be exchanged. The fulfillment or breach of a psychological contract has been shown to have many positive and negative effects, respectively, on employee performance (Robinson and Morrison, 2000). Liao-Troth (2001) has shown that these findings for paid employees can be generalized to volunteers in highly structured organizations where volunteers perform job functions similar to paid employees.

We believed that two traits explain (a) the type of psychological contract that volunteers form with their organizations and (b) what those psychological contracts will address. These two traits are the volunteer's motives to volunteer, and the volunteer's personality. We also believe that the volunteer's personality will affect how the volunteer relates personal motives to the psychological contract (i.e., a more complex effect where motives only matter with certain personalities).

Rousseau (1990) placed the psychological contract into two broad categories: *transactional*, where hard work earns high pay and advancement, and *relational*, where job security is given by the organization for loyalty and a minimum stay by the worker. Rousseau (1995) subsequently identified a hybrid of the relational and transactional contracts, the *balanced* contract. She also categorized four different types of entitlements, or contract contents, an organization might specifically give to an individual: (a) benefits, (b) good

Matthew Liao-Troth received his Ph.D. in management from the Eller College of Business and Public Administration at the University of Arizona, and is an assistant professor of management at Western Washington University. Before his academic career he was a division executive with the Boy Scouts of America. His research interests include volunteer management, the psychological contract of workers, and negotiation and conflict management.

H. Michael Drumm received his D.P.A. from the Huizenga Graduate School of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University, and is a visiting assistant professor in the Public Services Graduate Program at DePaul University. He is also a National Fire Academy certified Executive Fire Officer. Before his academic career he was a career fire chief. His research interests include leadership, ethics, and organizational behavior.

faith and fair dealings, (c) working conditions, and (d) intrinsic job characteristics. These promises are specific to each psychological contract and individual employee, rather than being related to a specific category of psychological contracts (balanced, relational, and transactional).

VOLUNTEER WORKERS AND THEIR MOTIVES

There are different ways of conceptualizing motives. Clary, Snyder, and Ridge (1992) argue that every individual's motives are different and caution against grouping workers into "motive" categories. Liao-Troth (1999) empirically supports this argument. Clary, Snyder, and Ridge (1992) also found that assessing and matching an individual's motives to the volunteer job provided the greatest predictive accuracy of job success.

Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) developed the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) based on the "life functions" that volunteering fulfills. The VFI captures six "life functions": (a) career (work experience), (b) social (interpersonal interaction), (c) values (acting on important personal convictions), (d) enhancement (esteem), (f) protective (ego protection), and (g) understanding (skill practice).

We found that three of these six life function motives predicted two aspects of the psychological contract for volunteer firefighters in our previous study (Liao-Troth & Drumm, 2004). We are not sure if this generalizes to all volunteers, or if volunteers outside of a highly structured environment like firefighting have different motives. In our earlier study, we found that the understanding motive was related to good faith and fair dealings entitlements and intrinsic job characteristic entitlements in psychological contracts. The protective motive was also related to good faith and fair dealings entitlements. In our current study, one of three findings is possible: 1) either a concurrence with the previous finding that these two motives were related to these two psychological contracts (indicating that this may be a generalizable finding for all volunteers); 2) there is no relationship between functional motives and psychological contracts (indicating that the previous finding may be methodologically biased); or 3) there is a different set of relationships of functional motives and psychological contracts (indicating that college student volunteers are different from volunteer firefighters in this regard). Thus, our first two hypotheses in this study are similar to the hypotheses in our previous study:

- *Hypothesis One:* Volunteer motives are related to psychological contract content (e.g., benefits, good faith and fair dealings, working conditions, and intrinsic job characteristics).
- *Hypothesis Two:* Volunteer motives are related to the specific type of psychological contract (e.g., balanced, transactional, relational).

PERSONALITY AND WORK BEHAVIOR

The five factor model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1987; Digman, 1990) is the first stable model of personality to have demonstrated consistent effects on workplace behavior. Rather than differentiating people into different "types" of personality the model identifies five different personality factors. It also provides a method of comparing people across these different personality factors. The five factors are: (a) openness to new experience, (b) conscientiousness, (c) extroversion, (d) agreeableness, and (e) emotional stability (sometimes identified by its negative anchor, neuroticism). Some of the workplace findings are: (a) conscientiousness serves as a predictor of the performance of professionals (such as managers; Barrick & Mount, 1991), (b) extroversion is predictive of the performance of sales people (Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997), and (c) a combination of extroversion and agreeableness indicates transformational leadership (Judge & Bono, 2000).

These factors of personality are relatively stable across time and situation; their effect on workplace behavior is situation dependent. *Strong* situations, with established social norms, usually allow for less of a personality effect than *weak* situations, where appropriate behavior is less socially defined (Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1989). Personality should have an effect on the formation of psychological contracts because psychological contracts are

more likely to be salient when there is no contract covering a particular issue (Hypothesis 3). This, in essence, is a weak situation in the worker and organizational relationship, which is when personality should have the greatest effect on behavior (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989). This occurrence should be prevalent both when addressing the content and establishing the type of the psychological contract (Hypothesis 4). Finally, as personality moderates the relationship of motivation and behavior (Weiss & Adler, 1984), there should be an interaction between the two predictors of a psychological contract (meaning that some motives may have an effect for some personalities but not others; Hypothesis Five). To reiterate our third through fifth hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis Three:* Personality factors are related to psychological contract content (e.g. benefits, good faith and fair dealings, working conditions, and intrinsic job characteristics).
- *Hypothesis Four:* Personality factors are related to the specific type of psychological contract (e.g. balanced, transactional, relational).
- *Hypothesis Five:* Personality factors moderate the relationship of motivation and both the content and type of psychological contract.

STUDY

Our study used 105 undergraduate college students enrolled in an organizational behavior class at a private Midwestern (U.S.) university. Demographic data on these subjects can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Demographics of Subjects

Demographic Characteristic	Values
Average Age in Years	21 (1.35 standard deviation)
Gender (category)	48.57% female, 51.43% male
Family Income (category)	"greater than $75k" accounted for 61.2% of the subjects all ranges from "less than $5k" up were represented
Ethnic Identity (category)	64.8% white 20% Asian American 9.5% other 4.8% African American 1% Hispanic No Middle Eastern Americans nor Native Americans were in this sample

Procedures

The subjects filled out a questionnaire assessing all measures except personality. This was done on their own with a time limit as an extra credit assignment for class. Personality was assessed at an earlier point in time as a part of a self-assessment activity in the class. The connection between personality and questionnaire data was at the student's option; students were not excluded from the extra credit if they did not provide the key to link the two sets of data. The study design was a retrospective questionnaire. Data were analyzed with hierarchical regression to control for demographic variables. Predictors were entered in the order of demographic control variables first (to make sure any effect was not demographically based), the motives second, then personality third, and finally, when both motives and personality were present, a variable to represent their mutual interactional effect was entered to see if they had joint effect.

RESULTS

We present a summary of our results in Table 2. Volunteers who established a psychological contract regarding benefits shared five traits that were directly related to volunteer motives: (a) year of birth, (b) the social functional motive of volunteering, and personalities of (c) conscientiousness, (d) extroversion, and (e) emotional stability. There was no joint effect of motives and personality in a benefits-based psychological contract.

There were four driving factors for volunteers who established good faith and fair dealings psychological contracts with their organizations: (a) year of birth, and personalities of (b) openness to new experiences, (c) extrover-

TABLE 2

Significant Predictors of Psychological Contracts

Psychological Contract	Control	Motive	Personality	Motive x Personality
Benefits	Year (+)	Social (+)	Conscientiousness (+) Extroversion (-) Emotional Stability (-)	-
Good Faith	Year (+)	-	Openness (+) Extroversion (+) Emotional Stability (-)	-
Working Conditions	-	-	Conscientiousness (+) Emotional Stability (-)	-
Intrinsic Job Characteristics	-	-	-	
Balanced	-	-	Conscientiousness (+) Emotional Stability (-)	-
Transactional	-	Career (+) Protective (-)	-	
Relational	Year (-)	-	Agreeableness (+) Emotional Stability (-)	-

sion, and (d) emotional stability. Motivation, in itself, was not a factor; because of this the interaction step was not run (Baron & Kenney, 1986).

There were two effects for the working conditions contract: the personality traits of conscientiousness and emotional stability. As with the good faith and fair dealings contract, there were no effects for motives and the interaction step was not run.

There were no significant factors for the intrinsic job characteristics contract. As there was no effect for motives or for personality, the interaction term was not run.

We did discover two effects for the balanced contract: the personality traits of conscientiousness and emotional stability. There were no effects either for a demographic factor or for motives.

The transactional contract was unaffected by demographic control variables, but it was related to the career and protective functional motives.

Year of birth had an effect for volunteers establishing a relational contract. There were also effects for the personality traits of agreeableness and emotional stability.

DISCUSSION

We found partial support for our first two hypotheses, but not complete support. One functional motive (social) was related to one dimension of content of psychological contracts (benefits), and two functional motives (career and protective) were related to one type of psychological contract (transactional), giving partial support to hypotheses one and two. Our findings for the effects of functional motivation psychological contract formation are different from our earlier study on volunteer firefighters. This indicates that the motives that affect psychological contract formation may vary from one type of volunteer position to another. This may be because of the type of people that these different positions attract, or it may be because of how these volunteer jobs are designed and presented to potential volunteers. We have insufficient data to tell why these differences exist, only that they do. Future research should investigate this issue.

For hypothesis three we found partial support with four personality factors (conscientiousness, emotional stability, extroversion, and openness to new experiences) relating to three of the four contents of psychological contracts (benefits, good faith and fair dealings, and working conditions), but only emotional stability was consistent for all three. Likewise, for hypothesis four we found partial support in that three of the personality factors (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability) were related to the three types of psychological contracts (balanced,

relational, and transactional), but there was no consistent personality trait having an effect on all three. Finally, we found no support for hypothesis five.

Implications

A key difference between the subjects in our earlier study of volunteer firefighters and the subjects in this study of student volunteers is the degree of formalization of the volunteer work. Volunteer firefighters are highly trained for the tasks that they do, and have a formalized relationship with their fire departments. Our student subjects, on the other hand, were in highly fluid volunteer situations, where training was minimal, and few had a formal volunteer "contract". In this type of setting especially, our findings make a lot of sense. Without a formalized relationship, people who are low on the personality dimension of emotional stability, will explicitly form these arrangements in their own mind to compensate for the lack of a formal contract. People who are high on emotional stability would not have worries about their relationships with others or the organization that they volunteer for, and would be less likely to form strong expectations about their relationship with their organization (in other words, they would form weak psychological contracts).

So if you, as an administrator of volunteers, want to have student volunteers (who do not have a formalized relationship with your organization) serve over a long period of time and are loyal to your organization (i.e., they form relational psychological contracts), or serve over a long period of time, are loyal, and also expect something in return (i.e., balanced psychological contracts), then you would seek out volunteers who are low on the personality dimension of emotional stability. This type of person would be looking for a social affiliation and social validation for themselves. Likewise, if you are in a position to provide some sort of benefit to your volunteers, or have a culture of good faith and fair dealings with your volunteers, or have safe and supportive working conditions for your volunteers, then selecting student volunteers who are low on emotional stability will give you the volunteers who would appreciate these issues.

It also makes sense that emotional stability does not affect the formation of intrinsic job characteristics and transactional contracts, because as volunteers the intrinsic job characteristics will be explicit (and therefore a strongly held psychological contract may not be necessary). This would also explain the lack of findings for transactional contracts: since these are more explicit than relational contracts, in terms of what is being exchanged, there may be no need to identify what may be formally presented.

Using personality dimensions as a potential selection tool for student volunteers is not limited to the dimension of emotional stability. Looking at Table 2 there are specific personality dimensions tied to each of the content and type of psychological contract. Depending on the type of relationship you want to have with your volunteers (relational, transactional, and balanced) and the content of what you can provide your volunteers (benefits, good faith and fair dealings, intrinsic job characteristics, and working conditions), you would seek student volunteers who were high or low on related personality dimensions.

Please note that selecting people for a volunteer position purely on personality characteristics is not our recommendation. Personality is only one issue in any potential volunteer, and there are other much more important issues (e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities for the task at hand). A prime consideration for every organization is the mutual fit between the mission of the organization and its culture with the values of the volunteer. We did not measure or control for any of these variables, and did not look at performance of the student volunteers. In this study we were only concerned about the psychological contract that they had formed with their organization.

If you do choose to use personality as one of your screening techniques for volunteers, we strongly suggest working with a trained (and in some states licensed) industrial-organizational psychologist, and collecting data on your existing volunteers (both good and

bad performers) for some period of time before actually using personality as a selection tool. A free instrument to collect the Five Factor personality dimensions has been available at outofservice.com, and another has been at personalitytest.net. You can also contact Psychological Assessment Resources, in Lutz, Florida, for the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), which is the most widely used instrument. Also remember that there are legal issues to consider when using any selection tool, even for volunteers, and that you may want to consult a human resources attorney that specializes in employment law as it relates to volunteers.

You can get a better sense of what they see as the "give and take" between themselves and the organization if you talk with your student volunteers about this and ask what they want and expect from the organization.

For managers of student volunteers, our study indicates that if you want to manage the types of psychological contacts your volunteers form with your organization, you should really assess their personality, while looking at their motives to volunteer as only a secondary issue (only social and career motives have an effect here). It is also important to note that research on volunteers in a more structured environment (such as volunteer firefighters) will not generalize to student volunteers. A manager of student volunteers should be advised to only look at research that uses student volunteers as tbe subjects heing investigated.

Finally, as we mentioned in our first paper (Liao-Troth & Drumm, 2004), the psychological contract of volunteers is an important construct to use in understanding your volunteers. You can get a better sense of what they see as the "give and take" between themselves and the organization if you discuss this witb your student volunteers and ask what they want and expect from the organization. You can manage the psychological contracts you form on behalf of the organization with your volunteers if you keep the findings of our study in mind when recruiting student volunteers.

Limitations

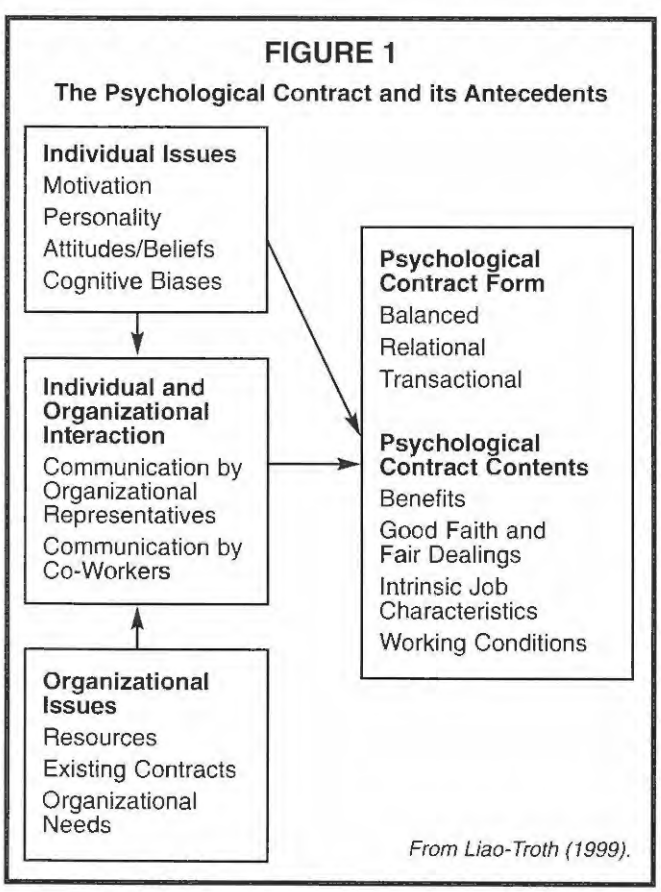
Just as motives vary greatly from volunteer firefighters to student volunteers, we cannot assume these findings on personality would be consistent across different types of volunteers. In addition, this study suffers from common method variance since the motives and the psychological contract types and contents were assessed at the same time. Finally, this data is correlational but not longitudinal, meaning that while we know these relationships exist we cannot know for certain which variable causes what outcome (i.e., a chicken and the egg problem).

Directions for Future Research

As we mentioned in the first article, the interaction between the organization and the individual should be investigated (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

The Psychological Contract and its Antecedents



From Liao-Troth (1999).

In this paper we have been focusing on what the individual volunteer brings to their relationship with the organization, and how their individual issues of personality and motivation affect that relationship. We have not looked at the three other relationships that need to be explored: the effect of individual issues on the interaction between the individual and the organization, how this intereaction affects the formation of the psychological contract of volunteers, and how organizational issues can affect that interaction.

Work also needs to continue on the generalizability of these findings to different types of volunteer situations. We know that findings from volunteer firefighters are not generalizable to student volunteers, but there are many other types of volunteers, in a variety of organizations. It may be that each situation is different enough that we cannot generalize from volunteers in one type of situation to another, but until more work has been completed, we cannot say so with certainty.

REFERENCES

Baron, R.M., & Kenny, D.A. (1986). The Moderator-Mediator Variable Distinction in Social Psychological Research: Conceptual, Strategic, and Statistical Considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51,* 1173-1182.

Barrick, M.R. & Mount, M.K. (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology, 44,* 1-26.

Clary, E.G., Snyder, M. & Ridge, R. (1992). Volunteers' motivations: A functional strategy for the recruitment, placement, and retention of volunteers. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 2,* 333-350.

Clary, E.G., Snyder, M. & Stukas, A.A. (1996). Volunteers' motivations: Findings from a national survey. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 25* (4), 485-505.

Davis-Blake, A., & Pfeffer, J. (1989). Just a mirage: The search for dispositional effects in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review, 14,* 385-400.

Digman, J.M. (1990). Personality structure: Emergence of the five-factor model. In M.R. Rosenzweig and L.W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual Review of Psychology* (Vol. 41, pp. 417-440). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.

Judge, T.A., & Bono, J.E. (2000). Five-factor model of personality and transformational leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85* (5): 751-765.

Judge, T.A., Martocchio, J.J., & Thoresen, C.J. (1997). Five-factor model of personality and employee absence. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 82* (5), 745-755.

Liao-Troth, M.A. (1999). The psychological contract of volunteer workers and its consequences. (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Arizona, 1999). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 60* (3), A0804.

Liao-Troth, M.A. (2001). Job attitudes of paid and unpaid workers: Are volunteers really that different? *Nonprofit Management & Leadership, 11* (4), 423-442.

Liao-Troth, M.A., & Drumm, H.M. (2004). The psychological contract, part I: What motives to anticipate in your volunteer firefighters. *Journal of Volunteer Administration,* forthcoming.

McCrae, R.R. and Costa, P.T. (1987). Validation of the five-factor model of personality across instruments and observers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52* (1), 81-90.

Robinson, S. L. and Morrison, E. W. (2000). The development of psychological breach and violation: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 21,* 525-546.

Rousseau, D.M. (1990). New hire perceptions of their own and their employer's obligations: A study of psychological contracts. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 11,* 389-400.

Rousseau, D.M. (1995). *Psychological contracts in organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weiss, H.M., and Adler, S. (1984). Personality and organizational behavior. In B. Staw and L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 6, pp. 1-50). Greenwich, CT: JAI.