Abstract: This study focused on sustained volunteerism and examined potential dropout predictors because volunteerism is, by definition, a sustained helping behavior and because volunteers’ dropout has organizational and social negative repercussions. Thirteen potential predictors from different theories and models were included in a survival analysis, using a sample of 700 volunteers. Results indicated that, controlling for age and sex, the probability of dropping out is lower among volunteers who have developed a strong volunteer identity, have a greater degree of organizational commitment, and do not have satisfied their career motivation. In parallel, they tend to dedicate more hours per week to volunteering yet spend less time commuting to the organization. In light of these results, some management strategies can be drawn.

Key words: abandonment, unpaid, engagement, pro-social, longitudinal.

What factors explain why some individuals remain consistent over the long-term in their decision to help others, even under imposed, organizational restrictions and despite having no obligation to do so? And why do others, who initially make the same decision, decide to drop out?

Permanence is the concept underlying these questions and it is important for theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, it is the characteristic that serves to define volunteerism and to differentiate it from other helping behaviors (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). In this respect, volunteerism has been defined as a “long-term, planned, pro-social behavior” (Penner, 2002, p. 448), and as a form of “sustained and potentially costly helping without obligation” (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p. 672). On a practical level, permanence is a critical question when taking into account the negative consequences resulting from volunteer dropout: recipients who lose their service overnight; organizations that continuously have to recruit and train new volunteers endangering its stability and cohesion; and disappointed volunteers who are unable to find a suitable channel for their desire to help others.
Although permanence is a desired goal, it must be accepted that volunteers can rightfully drop out for any reason at any time. The voluntary nature of the action is another defining characteristic of this concept. However, in many cases, dropping out is the result of a failure to meet expectations and other avoidable factors. In these cases research may contribute to the development of management strategies adapted to this kind of helping behavior that people do because they want to and not because they have to.

Echoing the importance of this subject, many studies have examined, either directly or indirectly, the factors that explain sustained volunteerism (Clary et al., 1998; Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Lee, Piliavin, & Call, 1999; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Marta, Pozzi, & Marzana, 2010; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). However, very few have conducted long-term tracking studies (Butrica, Johnson, & Zedlewski, 2009; Chacón, Vecina, & Dávila, 2007; Davis, Hall, & Meyer, 2003; Omoto & Snyder, 1995), and never exceeding 2-year periods. Thus, this study aimed to fill this gap and identify the best predictors of the total time devoted to volunteering over a long tracking period of 7 years. To do this a wide set of variables proposed by current theories and models was used, as well as a survival analysis in order to determine to what degree these variables affect the length of volunteerism by either increasing or decreasing the probability of dropping out.

PREDICTORS FROM THE ROLE IDENTITY THEORY

The role identity theory attempts to explain sustained volunteering by referring to the social context in which such behavior occurs (Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Piliavin, Grube, & Callero, 2002). The theory asserts that individuals assume multiple social roles, and that by continually carrying out any of these roles, they become a part of one's personal identity (Stryker, 1980). According to this perspective, social identity is the sum of the social roles one assumes and internalizes. The two primary variables of the theory are perceived expectations (beliefs regarding how significant others feel about the individual's behavior) and role identity, defined as the extent to which a particular role becomes part of the individual's personal identity (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). The former is related to the initial decision and the second is related to the decision to continue. With respect to the latter, the theory suggests that volunteer identity must be developed over the long term and predicts the continuity of the volunteer actions. The mechanism presumably functions as follows: the act of serving as a volunteer over an extensive period of time increases the individual's commitment to the organization; this commitment, in turn, results in an increase in actions favoring the organization; both factors produce changes in the volunteer's self-concept, resulting in the volunteer role becoming part of his/her personal identity. When this happens, volunteer actions are very likely to continue since individuals are motivated to behave in a manner coherent with their identity.

Previous research has shown that the strength of a person's role identity may correlate with voluntary donations of time, money and blood (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Lee et al., 1999; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Other results specifically focused on volunteering support the relationship between volunteer role identity and length of service (Chacón, Vecina, & Dávila, 2005; Finkelstein et al., 2005; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). In light of these studies, volunteers’ role identity was included among the potential predictors.

PREDICTORS FROM THE FUNCTIONAL THEORY OF VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

A proposal has arisen that those diverse functions identified in the original functionalist theory of attitudes (Katz, 1960) have their counterparts in volunteer motivations (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Clary et al., 1998; Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000). This functional approach maintains that individuals can and do perform the same actions in the service of different psychological functions, and addresses the key questions regarding what motivates people to action. Motivations are believed to lead individuals to engage in actions, and the degree to which important motivations are satisfied by the activity performed is believed to lead to consistent behavior. In the primary study supporting these assumptions it was shown that individuals who perceive their initial functional motivations to have been met through their volunteer activity were more likely to continue volunteering at the same location in the immediate future and over the long term (Clary et al., 1998).

Despite the theoretical clarity of these functionalist assumptions, empirical results have failed to confirm them. To a large degree this may be due to the fact that the measures tend to be operationalized in a very distinct manner by different authors, but also, as pointed out by Finkelstein (2008a), due to the possibility that associations
between motive fulfillment and amount of time devoted to volunteering change over time. The resulting panorama has found some positive correlations to exist between self-oriented motivators and length of service (Omoto & Snyder, 1995), while others have found negative correlations (Finkelstein et al., 2005), and others have shown positive correlations between other-oriented motivation (values) and length of service (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). In all of these studies motivations were examined, but not the degree to which they were satisfied. From more of an interactionist perspective, some authors have created an index for calculating a volunteer’s total number of matches across the six motivational categories, and found that this index predicts outcomes better than motives alone and as well as any univariate match index (Stukas, Worth, Clary, & Snyder, 2009). Other authors have found that satisfaction of the motivations measured by the Volunteer Functions Inventory is determinant to distinguish between those who remain in the organization and those who leave after a 12-month tracking period (Vecina Jiménez, Chacón Fuertes, & Sueiro Abad, 2009). Finally, some others have found that satisfaction is not related in any way to permanence (Davis et al., 2003; Finkelstein, 2008b).

Since the degree of satisfaction for each of these motivations tends to be omitted in most studies, or is evaluated through general satisfaction indexes, it is impossible to put the assumptions of the functional theory to test. In the present study, the degree of satisfaction gained from the activities carried out were included for all six motivations (protective, values, career, social, understanding, and enhancement) as potential predictors of sustained volunteerism, as in the original study (Clary et al., 1998).

PREDICTORS FROM THE THREE-STAGE MODEL OF VOLUNTEERS’ DURATION OF SERVICE

In an attempt to integrate the assumptions of the previous explicative theories, the ‘Three-Stage Model of Volunteers’ Duration of Service (Chacón et al., 2007) offers a relationship model for different variables. It is assumed that variables related to intention to continue are dependent upon the particular moment in time in which the volunteers are, with three distinct stages being specified.

In the first stage, motivations and their degree of satisfaction form a part of the variable set that most influences permanence, thus integrating the assumptions of the functional approach. Added to this is the satisfaction obtained from carrying out the tasks, as proposed by other authors (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1980), and from different aspects related to organization management (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Jamison, 2003). Assuming that during this initial phase the individual’s expectations and motivations collide with concrete organizational reality, where costs are made evident in terms of time, obligations, negative personal interactions, etc., the model predicts that most likely, those volunteers who do not achieve a minimum degree of satisfaction will drop out, either because they do not obtain what they expected or because they have incurred costs that are not compensated by other positive outcomes.

In order to continue to the second stage it is necessary for organizational commitment to be generated. Following an affective and emotional focus (Mowday, 1998; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974), commitment assumes a strong emotional identification with a concrete organization, manifested by a belief and acceptance of its goals and values, a willingness to make efforts for this organization, and a desire to continue as a member. This variable is related maximally to permanence, as it would, at least temporarily, permit modest declines in satisfaction. At this point the model appears to allow for various predictive possibilities: that highly satisfied volunteers will continue despite not having developed commitment, that those volunteers who have experienced a slight decrease in satisfaction will drop out if they have not developed this commitment, or continue if they have developed it, and that those volunteers who are highly dissatisfied will drop out in any case.

In the third stage, and as a result of the continued practice of volunteer actions for the organization, a new characteristic is incorporated into self-concept: that of the volunteer role, making volunteer role identity the best explanation of the intention to continue volunteering over the long term. All of these assumptions are generally supported by a previous study which found that commitment and volunteer role identity, rather than satisfaction, were the variables that clearly differentiated two extreme groups of volunteers: those who abandoned their volunteering during the first year and those who remained after 7 years, the latter being the most committed and having the most highly developed volunteer identity (Vecina Jiménez, Chacón Fuertes, & Sueiro Abad, 2010).

Based on this model, the following variables were added to the set of potential predictors: organizational commitment, satisfaction with tasks, and satisfaction with the organization’s management. Although the model establishes that satisfaction with different volunteering aspects is key in the first stage, when neither organizational commitment nor volunteer identity have been developed, in this...
study all these variables were included as potential predictors for two reasons: 1) the sample of volunteers may be in any of the three given stages, and 2) the model does not discount declines in satisfaction which may lead volunteers to drop out at any time.

BEHAVIORAL MEASURES TO PREDICT PERMANENCE

Finally, and from a general cost/benefit perspective (Shye, 2010; Wilson, 2000), two behavioral measures were included among the potential predictors: time dedicated to volunteering and time spent commuting to the organization. Both are related to a decrease in available free time, which has been signaled as one of the most important costs associated with volunteering (Haski-Leventhal, 2009). Both of these, therefore, offer an idea of the time cost incurred by this kind of activity. In some studies, however, they have been negatively related, with volunteers who continue to dedicate more hours to volunteering spending less time in commuting to the organization, as opposed to those who drop out (Vecina Jiménez, Dávila de León, & Chacón Fuertes, 2005). This is understandable since time dedicated to volunteering is spent doing what is actually desired and, therefore, is not a cost, while commuting time is a pre-condition considered a direct and measurable cost. Other authors conceptualize the amount of time spent as a volunteer as a commitment indicator (Penner, 2002). In any case, both are situational and directly observable variables which, together with the psychological variables, may contribute to the explanation of the behavior.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the present study was to identify, from a set of variables from various theories and models, those that empirically best explain the total time of sustained volunteerism. For the first time, this goal is pursued using a large enough sample, consisting of 700 active volunteers; a long enough follow-up period, lasting 7 years, and a survival analysis to estimate the probability of dropping out across the entire period in question. No predictions were made regarding which of these variables would have served as predictors and which would have not, or regarding which would have been better or worse predictors, as all of them have some theoretical or empirical basis. Nor were there any predictions regarding the relationships between the variables, as this would be a second step. In fact, it was assumed that there were important relationships between the variables of the different theoretical models, and that these relationships might have to be reexamined in light of the results obtained in the present study in order to devise an integrated theory with regards to sustained volunteerism. However, in accordance with the abovementioned theories, negative regression weights for all variables were expected, except for the one corresponding to the time spent commuting to the organization. As a cost not related to the activity, it should have been positively related to a greater probability of dropping out.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

All study volunteers were active members of one of the 25 non-profit organizations included in the study. Each one contributed 60.13 volunteers, on average, ranging from five to 130 ($SD = 31.33$). Some organizations had an international scope (five) while others were national (twelve) or local (eight), and most of them worked in the social field. Different inspiration values were represented (religious - non religious; conservative - liberal), and all organizations defined volunteerism as long-term, planned, pro-social behavior that occurs within an organizational setting (Penner, 2002). This was the only inclusion criteria.

The questionnaire was anonymous, although participants were asked for their first name and the last four numbers of their National Identity Document in order to link the answers to the questionnaire and the date of permanence after the 7-year follow-up. Participants who agreed to participate were given a postage-paid envelope with the address to send their answers, and approximately 93% of them responded to the questionnaire. After 7 years, in 2010, we called them by phone, introduced ourselves and directly asked whether they still were volunteers at the same organization. If they had quit, they were asked for the date (month and year). Every number was called up to three times (morning, afternoon and early night), if necessary, before abandoning the case.

The participants who initially complied with the measures of the independent variables totaled 1,207, of which, over the 7 years of tracking, it was possible to contact 700; that is, 42.00% (507) of cases were lost. A variance analysis performed in order to determine whether there were differences in all the variables of the study for the two groups...
Dropout of volunteers revealed significant differences (p < .01) only for the variables of age (F = 13.26, df = 1, p = .00) and previous volunteering time (F = 7.08, df = 1, p = .01). The differences indicated that volunteers participating in the study were 3 years younger and had previously spent 9 months less with the organization. Since the magnitude of the effects of these differences was very limited (less than .02), the results were analyzed with confidence that the independent study variables did not statistically differ between the study group and the volunteers that were not located.

Most participants were Spanish (90.23%), and 62.20% were women while the remaining 37.80% were men. Their average age was 31.88 years, with ages ranging from 18 to 82 (sd = 14.20). With regards to their educational levels, 9.17% had primary studies (isced level: 1), 41.20% had mid-level studies (isced level: 2 to 4) and 49.63% had university-level studies (isced level: 5 and higher; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). The average previous time spent with the organization was 29.12 months, ranging from 1 month to 120 months (sd = 29.91). During the 7-year tracking period 64.43% of all volunteers (451) dropped out, while 35.57% continued to volunteer (249). The average duration of sustained volunteering across the tracking period for the volunteer group who eventually dropped out was 19.41 months (sd = 18.90).

Instruments

Total duration of sustained volunteering. It was the dependent variable of the study and corresponded to the total amount of previous time spent as a volunteer and the duration of sustained volunteering over the 7 years tracked. The previous time spent volunteering was evaluated at the same time as the independent variables by directly asking the volunteers the number of hours per week that they dedicated to volunteering, inquiring as to when they quit (month and year).

Volunteer role identity. The five-item measure of role identity designed by Callero et al. (1987) was used and adapted by Chacón et al. (2005). Sample items, on a 10-point scale (1, absolutely disagree, to 10, absolutely agree), included: “For me, being a volunteer is the most important of the concrete tasks that I perform”, “Volunteering is an important part of who I am”. The reliability of the instrument, evaluated with Cronbach’s α, was .70.

Satisfying each of the motivations. It was evaluated using six items that measure, on a 7-point scale (1, absolutely disagree, to 7, absolutely agree), the extent to which the activities carried out fulfilled the six motivations identified in the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Vecina Jiménez et al., 2009). The items are the following: values, “My volunteering allows me to express my humanitarian values”; understanding, “… it allows me to learn new and interesting things”; career, “… it gives me the necessary training and experience in order to be a better professional”; enhancement, “… it makes me feel good and raises my self-esteem”; protective, “… it helps me to forget my problems”; and social, “… it allows me to develop social relationships with other people”.

Organizational commitment. It was evaluated using an instrument originally designed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) and adapted by Chacón et al. (2007). It contains nine items referring to the emotional link that unites volunteers to their organization (7-point scale; 1, absolutely disagree, to 7, absolutely agree). It includes items of the following type: “I feel that my values and the organization’s values are very similar”, “I tell my friends that this is a great organization to work for as a volunteer” (α = .85).

Task satisfaction. A sub-scale of the task satisfaction measure from the Volunteer Satisfaction Index (Vecina Jiménez et al., 2009) was used, including four items regarding their degree of satisfaction with certain aspects of the tasks (10-point scale; 1, not at all satisfied, to 10, completely satisfied). It included such items as: “I am satisfied because the tasks that I regularly carry out have clearly-defined objectives”, “… because I can find out easily whether I am doing my tasks well as I do my volunteer work” (α = .70).

Satisfaction with the organization’s management. A sub-scale of the management satisfaction measure from the Volunteer Satisfaction Index (Vecina Jiménez et al., 2009) was used, including seven items (7-point measuring scale; 1, completely dissatisfied, to 7, completely satisfied). They refer to distinct aspects of the organization’s management, such as training, ease and frequency of communication between professionals and volunteers, existing mechanisms for solving volunteer problems, volunteer management, etc. (α = .88).

Time dedicated to volunteering. This was evaluated by directly asking the volunteers the number of hours per week that they dedicated to volunteering.

Time spent commuting to the organization. Volunteers were asked how much time (in minutes) they spent commuting to the organization where they participated.
Analyses

In order to predict the probability of dropping out, a survival analysis (Cox proportional hazards regression) was conducted (Cox, 1972; Morita, Lee, & Mowday, 1989), controlling for age and sex, since being young and male can be considered risk factors for permanence according to recent studies (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). This type of analysis assumes the “mortality” of all of the subjects throughout a period, which in the case of volunteering implies that at some point all volunteers will drop out for diverse reasons. Given that in this study the follow-up period was 7 years, it is understood that in part of the sample the time for dropping out will be unknown, concretely, in those cases in which volunteers continue after the tracking period. A Cox regression analysis considers these cases to be censored and assumes that participants who drop out have the same risk of dropping out as those who remain. In addition, it simultaneously estimates the probability of dropping out over the long term and how this probability is related to the diverse predictors that are not normally distributed, as in this case, assuming that the effect of each explicative variable is multiplicative and determined over time.

Because all participants were active volunteers at the time of recruitment into the study, the stock sample excluded those whose period of volunteering ended before the start of the study (left truncated cases). There is no reason to think that volunteers who left the organization before the current study began are different from those that were leaving during the long follow-up period, but in order to minimize this possible bias the survival analysis was repeated using only those volunteers with less than 12 months of previous time, where the likelihood of left truncated cases is minor. This sample was made up of 293 volunteers.

The analyses were carried out with standardized variables in order to prevent the measuring scale from affecting the regression coefficients. Variables were introduced in the model using the forward conditional stepwise method, establishing an entry probability of .05 and an exit probability of .10.

RESULTS

Regarding the volunteer dropout rate for the total sample, it can be observed that this rate was higher during the first year (17.10%) than during the following years (11.04% in the second year, 6.17% in the third, 7.13% in the fourth, 6.06% in the fifth, 9.20% in the sixth, 8.65% in the seventh, 7.05% in the eighth and 27.60% in the remaining 13 years). This decreasing trend is consistent with the assumption that at some point volunteers will drop out due to different circumstances, and also with the idea that the first 2 years are especially critical for permanence, probably due to an interaction between personal and organizational variables.

Table 1 shows the correlations between all the predictors, and Table 2 shows the average scores and the standard deviations of the volunteers who dropped out and who continued. Table 2 also shows the results of the prediction model for dropouts over time as a function of the variables studied. In this respect, both age (hazard ratio \[ HR = 0.65, 95\% CI [0.58, 0.73]\]) and gender (\[ HR = 1.32, 95\% CI [1.10, 1.61]\]) were significant predictors of dropping out. With regards to the first one, it can be observed that an increase in one unit for age decreased the probability of dropping out by 1.54 times (1 / exp[B]). With regards to gender, it can be said that having a gender value of 1 (male) resulted in a 31.22% greater probability of dropping out compared to gender equaling 0 (female).

Controlling for age and gender, rates of dropping out during the 7-year follow-up period were negatively associated with volunteer role identity (\[ HR = 0.81, 95\% CI [0.73, 0.90]\]), organizational commitment (\[ HR = 0.85, 95\% CI [0.77, 0.95]\]), and time dedicated to volunteering (\[ HR = 0.84, 95\% CI [0.75, 0.93]\]). Dropout rates were positively associated with satisfaction with career motivations (\[ HR = 1.16, 95\% CI [1.04, 1.29]\]), and time spent in commuting to the organization (\[ HR = 1.12, 95\% CI [1.03, 1.21]\]). The interquartile relative hazards can be interpreted as indicating that a person in the 75th percentile with regards to volunteer identity, organizational commitment and time dedicated to volunteering was 1.2 times less likely to drop out than a person in the 25th percentile at any given time.

Moreover, the risk of dropping out among those volunteers who spent more minutes commuting to the organization is higher than the risk among those who spent fewer minutes (12.08% for every minute). Similarly, a one-unit increase in career motivation satisfaction translated into a 16.39% increase in the probability of dropping out.

The variables that did not enter into the predictive model and that, therefore, appeared to be insignificant in explaining sustained volunteering were: satisfaction of values, understanding, enhancement, social and protective motivations, satisfaction with the tasks carried out, and satisfaction with the organization’s management.
Table 1. Correlations between the Variables in the Sample of 700 Volunteers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>1. Total time</td>
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<td>2. Age</td>
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<td>3. Volunteer role identity</td>
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<td>4. Protective motivation</td>
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<td>5. Values motivation</td>
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<td>6. Career motivation</td>
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<td>-.19 **</td>
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<td>7. Social motivation</td>
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<td>.21 **</td>
<td>.24 **</td>
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<td>8. Understanding motivation</td>
<td>-.10 **</td>
<td>-.18 **</td>
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<td>.21 **</td>
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<td>.15 **</td>
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<td>13. Commuting time</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>-.12 **</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.11 **</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>14. Time dedicated</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>.13 **</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.12 **</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.16 **</td>
<td>.14 **</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* p = .05, ** p = .01.

Table 2. Descriptive Results for Volunteers Who Continue and Who Drop Out, and Results of the Survival Analysis on the Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Drop out n = 451</th>
<th>Continue n = 249</th>
<th>Cox regression</th>
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<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>sd</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>sd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30.25</td>
<td>11.78</td>
<td>36.14</td>
<td>16.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role identity theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer role identity</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional approach to motivations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protective motivation satisfaction</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values motivation satisfaction</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career motivation satisfaction</td>
<td>1-7</td>
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<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social motivation satisfaction</td>
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<td>5.90</td>
<td>1.17</td>
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<td>Understanding motivation satisfaction</td>
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<td>0.93</td>
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<td>Enhancement motivation satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Three-Stage Model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Organizational commitment</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks satisfaction</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management satisfaction</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting time</td>
<td>min.</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.89</td>
<td>26.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time dedicated to volunteering</td>
<td>h / week</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: Global test for variables in the model: chi-square = 138.92, df = 7, p < .00.

* p = .05, ** p = .01. ns = non-significant.
With regards to the regression weights, positive or negative, all were found to be in accordance with what was expected, except for that affecting satisfaction with career motivation. In this case, the results indicated that the more satisfied volunteers were with this motivation, the more likely they were to drop out. This result contradicted the expected, based on the functional theory of volunteer motivations, which assumes that volunteers who receive functionally relevant benefits will show an increased intention to continue as volunteers.

The survival analysis run with the 293 volunteers with less than 1 year of volunteer time prior to the beginning of the study revealed two significant predictors of dropping out: age ($HR = 0.77, 95\% CI [0.66, 0.90]$), and organizational commitment ($HR = 0.75, 95\% CI [0.66, 0.86]$). This means that at any given time a person in the 75th percentile, in any of these two predictors, was 1.3 times less likely to drop out than one in the 25th percentile.

**DISCUSSION**

This study examines sustained volunteerism because permanence is a key question: (1) to define those that can be called volunteers, and (2) to manage the organizational repercussions of volunteers’ dropping out. In this respect, volunteers were assumed to be those who remained, and not only those who signed up, and nonprofit organizations were supposed to bear significant human and economic costs associated with volunteers that constantly came and went. Although dropping out is the result of heterogeneous circumstantial factors (Shye, 2010), this study only focused on explicative variables which have traditionally been studied from different theoretical perspectives. For the first time in this research area they all were put together using a longitudinal design to predict dropout patterns over a long, 7-year tracking period and for an extensive sample of 700 active volunteers.

Results from the first survival analysis, conducted with a heterogeneous sample regarding the previous time of permanence, revealed that, of the 12 potential predictors, seven were statistically significant, qualifying them for inclusion in a predictive model of sustained volunteerism. Age and gender were significant predictors and, as such, were controlled in the next step. These results support the contention that being young and male can be considered risk factors for permanence (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Volunteer identity was found to be a negative predictor of the probability of dropping out and organizational commitment was also associated with a decreased probability of dropping out. Both variables imply emotional links with regard to volunteering and the organization in which they volunteer.

None of the satisfaction variables were significant predictors, except for career motivation. In this case, the effect seems to occur in an unexpected way: volunteers who were more satisfied in this motivation were more likely to drop out than those less satisfied volunteers. Although the objective of this study was focused on the predictability of each individual variable, and not on the efficacy of each theory to predict sustained volunteerism, this result completely contradict the expected, based on the functional theory of volunteer motivations, which assumes that volunteers who receive functionally relevant benefits should show greater intentions to continue as volunteers (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Clary et al., 1998; Snyder et al., 2000). It is not the first time that this inconsistent result appears in the literature, since negative correlations have been found in other studies before (Finkelstein et al., 2005). It could be plausible that self-oriented motivations, such as one’s need to improve their resume, lead to higher dropout rates once the need is satisfied.

Regarding situational variables, it seems that volunteers do not consider all time dedicated to volunteering as costs. The way in which time was spent seems to be pivotal: although increased commuting time to the organization was related to a greater probability of dropping out, dedicating more hours per week to volunteer activities actually resulted in a lower probability of quitting. Thus, time spent commuting seems to work as a directly observable cost (Haski-Leventhal, 2009), while time spent performing volunteer activities serves as an observable indicator of involvement. A similar conclusion, although resulting from a different methodology, was obtained by other authors (Penner, 2002; Vecina Jiménez et al., 2005).

The second survival analysis was conducted with a homogeneous sample regarding the previous period of permanence ($n = 293$; previous time ≤ 12 months) in order to minimize the number of volunteers who had left before the study started. In this case, only age and organizational commitment significantly predicted dropping out. This would confirm the insignificance of the variables related to satisfaction and indicate that commitment develops relatively soon and preserves a predictive power over time.

All these results are compatible with the idea that age and commitment to the organization are protective factors at any given time, while the other ones would start to be protective factors or risk factors later. In this respect, being
a woman, spending more hours per week volunteering and having incorporated the volunteer role to identity represent protective factors as time passes, while being satisfied with and motivated by one’s career, and spending more minutes commuting to the organization, would be risk factors.

Study Limitations

The first limitation of this study is that all the independent variables were captured at Time 1. If the possibility that they might change over time is assumed (Finkelstein, 2008a), there would be omitted variables over the 7-year period. The fact that predictive power was gotten in spite of that is actually important and support most of the variables used in recent years. Although the satisfaction variables remain controversial, they should not be discarded as management goals, since working under satisfying conditions is undisputed from any perspective. No money and no satisfaction don’t seem to be an option for volunteers’ managers.

Secondly, it is important to highlight the fact that the survival analysis performed does not allow us to determine the relationship between the predictor variables and its interactions with other omitted variables, as the organizational ones. In fact, it is known that some organizational variables can mediate the relationships between motivations, satisfaction and intentions (Nencini, Romaioli, & Meneghini, 2016; Tang, Choi, & Morrow-Howell, 2010). Although they all may be related and conform complex models, it is advisable to know which variables are the best empirical predictors before dealing with such relationships.

Finally, it is worthwhile noting that the predictive relationship between the psychosocial variables analyzed and an increase or decrease in permanence over the years may be affected by uncontrolled factors. Therefore, it is possible that the variables studied do not predict permanence, or have low weights, in cases where volunteers drop out due to illnesses, changes of address, or unexpected family obligations.

Conclusions and Implications

The two survival analyses carried out, first on a sample of 700 social welfare volunteers without any restriction regarding previous time, and second on a sample of 293 volunteers in the organization for less than 1 year, allow us to conclude that the probability of dropping out over the long term is lower when volunteers are older and have a high commitment to the organization. It can also be concluded that the longer they are volunteers, the more important other variables seem to be. In this respect being a woman, spending more hours per week volunteering and having identity as a volunteer seem to be protective factors, while being satisfied with one’s career motivation and spending more minutes commuting to the organization seem to be risk factors.

In order to tailor management strategies in light of these results, first, it can be suggested that managers develop organizational commitment as soon as possible. Although data from this study prevents us from concretely knowing which factors this commitment depend on or how it is developed, it appears to be related to values and emotional links with an organization. It can also be suggested that organizations plan their activities locally in order to minimize time spent commuting to them. Recruiting volunteers from the area where the volunteer activities are to be carried out also constitutes a practical social approach.

REFERENCES


Dropout of volunteers


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