

Ideology and the psychological contract of sport volunteers

Building on the work of O'Donohue & Nelson (2009), we have explored the importance of the ideological component in the psychological contracts of volunteers in Riding for the Disabled Association. Many volunteers in this organisation have been involved for over ten years, so one would expect their ideological commitment to be high and as long-term volunteers they are less likely to be bound to the organisation by transactional rewards.

A pilot questionnaire suggested that the depth of understanding provided by qualitative methods would be more appropriate in this new research context and this was consistent with an earlier application of this theoretical framework. Twenty-three in-depth interviews were conducted with volunteers from the same organisation. These were analysed using nVivo to identify the relative importance of the different components of the contract and instances where the ideological dimension of the contract appeared to prevent a breach which might otherwise have been expected from violation of the transactional and relational components.

Findings suggest that despite a degree of violation in the transactional and relational aspects of the psychological contract, as Starnes (2007) found, volunteers remain bound to the organisation by a strong ideological component.

Understanding the importance of an ideological component in the psychological contract of volunteers has implications for their management. Accurate assessment of the psychological contract will allow volunteer managers to use effective and efficient reward and retention strategies and ensure that volunteers are getting experience in line with their expectations. To the extent to which these findings are generalisable to volunteers they suggest that managers should nurture this ideological commitment to retain volunteers and recruit volunteers who already share the ideology of the organisation.

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