

# STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE FOR MISSION-DRIVEN HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES

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## ABSTRACT

*Non-profit organizations are faced with increasing pressure to make efficient use of their human resources, which if managed well can be a source of competitive advantage. The universalistic approach to strategic human resource management theory has dominated research in non-profit organizations, where a set of best human resource practices is prescribed for superior organizational performance. However, this approach may not fully capture the unique characteristics of strategic human resource practices in non-profit organizations, especially those that depend on non-traditional volunteers, such as episodic, short-term and or event-based volunteers. The current inductive study examined the nature of human resource practices that emerged in a non-profit organization using interviews and surveys collected from 133 episodic and short-term volunteers. We introduced the concept of mission-driven HR practices to classify the human resource practices that emerged and to underscore the importance of a values approach to strategic HR management in non-profit organizations. We found that an inclusive environment mediated the relationship between mission-driven HR practices and volunteer retention and recruitment.*

## INTRODUCTION

Increasing competition, globalization, and rapid changes in technology have all provided the impetus for organizations to reconsider the approaches they use to manage their diverse resources and capabilities, in order to achieve a competitive advantage (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006). Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are no exception. Faced with increasing pressure to transform themselves into ‘professional’ and ‘business-like’ entities that make efficient use of their resources, NPOs must implement strategies to differentiate them from competitors so as to create value for their various stakeholders (Anheier & Seibel 2001; Ridder, Pening, & Baluch, 2011; Salamon 2002). Volunteers are critical resources for most NPOs to achieve their organization’s goals (Akingbola, 2013). It is therefore imperative for academics and practitioners alike to understand the factors that motivate individuals to provide “unobligated” and “sustained” volunteer services to organizations (Kim, Trail, Lim, & Kim, 2009).

Not surprising, interest in volunteerism research is increasing with studies focusing on volunteer satisfaction (e.g., Finkelstein, 2008; Mazi, 2015), volunteer outcomes, such as patient satisfaction (e.g., Rogers, Jiang, Rogers, & Intindola, 2016; Hotchkiss, Unruh, & Fottler, 2014), and in particular, volunteer motivations (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Rehberg, 2005). For example, several studies have shown that the strength of individuals' personal motives for engaging in volunteer work affected their personal satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn influenced their willingness to continue volunteering (Davis, Hall & Meyer, 2003; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; van Vianen, Nijstad & Voskuil, 2008). While these are, and will remain, important contributions to the volunteerism literature, few of these studies address the role of the organization (see van Vianen et al., 2008 for exception). Volunteers, however, operate in a broader organizational context and the characteristics of an organization's context could also affect volunteer satisfaction, commitment and retention (van Vianen et al., 2008). In particular, burgeoning research in the field of strategic human resource management (SHRM) suggests that management practices can increase employee satisfaction and commitment, and reduce turnover intentions (Jiranek, Kals, Humm, Strubel, & Wehner, 2013). Applying SHRM to NPOs offers a potentially useful tool for better understanding volunteer recruitment and retention.

The SHRM literature often relies on the resource-based view of the firm to explain the role of HR practices in firm performance (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Colbert, 2004; Messersmith, Lepak, Patel, & Williams, 2011). Fundamental to the resource-based arguments within the SHRM literature, is the idea that the idiosyncratic combination of resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable namely, employees' skills, knowledge, and behavior, combined with high performance work systems (HPWS), are difficult to imitate, and as such may be sources of sustained competitive advantage (Akingbola, 2013; Colbert, 2004). In turn, these competitive advantages should produce positive returns (Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu & Kochhar, 2001). Indeed, SHRM researchers have found a positive relationship between HPWS and organizational outcomes such as productivity, sales growth, profitability and turnover (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Zacharatos, Barling, & Iverson, 2005).

The context of NPOs however, presents a set of unique and distinct resources and capabilities for strategy formulation and implementation (Akingbola, 2013). Of particular relevance to HRM is the participation of volunteers in the human resource (HR) pool, creating a cost advantage, and hence a competitive advantage to NPOs that are able to effectively manage these resources (Akingbola, 2013; Hartenian 2007). Despite the pivotal role volunteers play in NPOs, it is surprising that existing research on SHRM has almost exclusively focused on for-profit organizations, with only cursory attention given to NPOs and organizations that are volunteer-dependent (Akingbola, 2013; Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016; Colbert, 2004; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hager, & Brudney, 2015). Yet, to assume that HR practices for managing paid employees can be directly applied to the volunteer workforce may be overly simplistic (Laczo and Hanisch,

1999, Newton, Becker, & Bell, 2014). For instance, as Newton and colleagues (2014) noted, “levers for retention of paid employees such as remuneration, bonuses and job security cannot be applied in a volunteer context” (p515). This begs the question of the relevance of some of these HR practices in the unique contexts of NPOs.

In light of these gaps in the literature, the current study was conducted to explore how SHRM unfolds in an NPO context using an inductive approach. In exploring the process, we introduce the concept of *mission-driven human resource practices* – defined as internally consistent HR practices designed to attract, develop and retain volunteers, and motivate their commitment to the organization’s mission. Further, we theorize that *mission-driven human resource practices* nurture an inclusive climate, which in turn promote volunteer retention outcomes.

This study contributes to the existing literature in several important ways. First, by investigating HR practices in an NPO context, we answer calls to extend SHRM research to a broader context (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Jackson, Schuler & Jiang, 2014; Wright & McMahan, 1992). Research in SHRM suggests that organizational context is a critical aspect in determining effective HRM practices (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Jackson et al., 2014). This study provides evidence of how SHRM unfolds in a mission-driven context. Second, by elucidating the process through which HR practices influence organizational performance, we contribute to the emerging debate on integrating diversity into the SHRM literature (Shen, Tang, & D’Netto, 2014). The study examines how the mission-driven HR practices foster an inclusive environment for a range of diverse volunteers and how this in turn influences volunteer outcomes. Finally, in this study, we examined the volunteer’s actual experience with the HR practices contributing to the existing SHRM literature. Few studies have examined HPWS experienced by individual employees, which is an oversight, since both theoretical and empirical evidence point to the fact that different individuals may be treated differently or may have different perceptions or experiences of the work practices (Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009). This is even more critical in NPOs where the volunteer experience is integral to the ability of organizations to recruit and retain volunteers (Hager & Brudney, 2008).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Strategic Human Resource Management in NPOs

SHRM is premised on the notion that HR is critical to an organization’s strategy and goals (Akingbola, 2013; Wright & McMahan, 1992). The majority of SHRM research focuses on the use of HPWS or systems of HR practices designed to enhance employees’ competencies, motivation and performance, as a fundamental source of competitive advantage for organizations (Liao et al., 2009). Although the concept of HPWS has not been consistently and precisely defined in the literature, it has generally been used to describe a system of HR practices that are aligned with other HR practices

and with the organizational strategy, such as recruitment, training, performance management and flexible job assignments (Messersmith et al., 2011).

One of the major theoretical perspectives that has been emphasized in SHRM research is the importance of organizational context as a contingency for HR practices (Batt 2000). In nonprofits, the social mission and the institutional characteristics of nonprofits are fundamental to the essence of SHRM in such contexts (Akingbola, 2013). Specifically, the unique nature of volunteers that comprise a significant proportion of the human resource pool of many NPOs raises questions about the relevance of certain HR practices (Akingbola, 2013; Newton et al., 2014). According to Laczko and Hanicsch (1999), a volunteer is an individual that 'donates his or her time, skills or services to an agency or organization without obligation, and without receiving direct financial compensation for his or her work' (p 456). These attributes of volunteers add to the complexity of NPOs and distinguish them from for-profit organizations in several important ways. First, because volunteers are unpaid, on the one hand they represent a particularly valuable resource for NPOs that often have limited financial resources, and have to rely on volunteers to provide the majority of their labor. On the other hand, precisely because volunteers are unpaid, renders certain traditional high performance HR practices, such as pay for performance, that have been found to be effective for motivating traditional employees, redundant or ineffective for volunteers.

Second, volunteers often act as community ambassadors for the organization, which can contribute to recruitment of other volunteers as well as generate financial donations for the organization, both of which are critical to the success of NPOs (Cuskelly et al., 2006). Hence, HR practices in NPOs must focus on how to elicit volunteers' commitment to the organization's cause. Finally, related to the previous point, research suggests that volunteers generally have a high level of commitment to the mission of their organization. For example, Light (2002) found that employees of NPOs had a higher connection with their organization's mission, than employees of business and public organizations. In a similar vein, we expect volunteers to be equally highly committed to the mission of the organization they serve. The challenge for NPOs therefore is how to leverage and sustain this already high level of commitment to the organization's mission to gain competitive advantage (Akingbola, 2013).

Similar to for-profit organizations, researchers contend that recruitment and retention of human resources represent some of the most pressing challenges for NPOs (Salamon & Geller, 2007; Rogers, Rogers, & Boyd, 2013), yet empirical evidence on volunteer retention is limited. A few studies have found a link between HR practices and volunteer retention. For example, Cuskelly and colleagues (2006) found that planning, orientation, training and support practices were associated with lower turnover amongst volunteers. Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) found that organizational support, positive job characteristics, and training contributed positively to volunteers' intentions to continue volunteering in that organization. Finally, Skoglund (2006) found that providing volunteers with social support, training and professional development reduced turnover and influenced their decision to remain with the organization. Given the centrality of

volunteers, it is essential that NPOs understand how SHRM can be applied to volunteers. In the following section, we discuss the dominant approaches to SHRM research and their implications for volunteer management.

### **Universalistic, Contingent and Configural Adoption in NPOs**

Traditionally, strategic HR researchers have adopted three different perspectives to explain the relationship between HR systems and organizational performance (Delery & Doty, 1996). One particularly influential perspective is the universalistic approach, which prescribes a set of “best practices” that should be applied uniformly to all organizations for high performance (Delery & Doty, 1996; Hager & Brudney, 2015; Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005). These practices include incentive pay (Pfeffer, 1994), certain methods of recruitment and selection (Terpstra & Rozell, 1993), comprehensive training (Russell, Terborg, Powers, 1985) and performance appraisal (Borman, 1991).

Another major theoretical perspective that has been emphasized in SHRM research is the contingency approach, where theorists contend that the relationship between the HR system and organizational performance is contingent on a third variable, such as organizational context (Batt 2000; Lengenick-Hall & Lengenick-Hall, 1988; Schuler & Jackson, 1987). As such, this perspective denies the existence of “best human resource practices” that are expected to lead to superior performance under any circumstances. For example, many contingency theorists propose that the fit between HR practices and business strategy is critical for superior organizational performance (Delery & Doty, 1996).

The third perspective, the configural approach, conceptualizes HR systems as a set of multidimensional elements that can be combined in different ways to enable an organization to achieve its goals (Delery & Doty, 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2015). Several configural theorists have attempted to develop *a priori* typologies that represent different ideal possibilities for managing human resources (Delery & Doty, 1996; Lepak et al., 2006; Martin-Alcazar et al., 2005). Arthur (1992) suggested that the closer an organization’s HR practices resemble the correct prototypical system for its business strategy, the greater the performance gains. Again, this approach rejects the “best practice” paradigm and advocates for HR systems that are tailored to specific organizational contexts.

The universalistic approach dominates volunteer management in NPOs, where a variety of models have been advanced, all of which prescribe a core set of “best practices” including recruitment, selection, placement, orientation, training, supervision, recognition, and evaluation (Hager & Brudney, 2015). Moreover, these practices are sanctioned by various external agencies (e.g., Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement and the United Kingdom Accreditation Standards), and researchers (e.g., Hager & Brudney, 2008). However, several scholars (e.g., Hager & Brudney, 2015; Rehnberg, 2005; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013) have criticized the assumptions underlying these

widely endorsed “best practices”, arguing that they may or may not apply to all organizations, and as such may not translate into strategic outcomes for all organizations (Chadwick-Coule, 2011; Hager & Brudney, 2015).

Specifically, Macduff, Netting and O’Connor (2009) argue that different social missions generate different organizational contexts that require different HR systems (Hager & Brudney, 2015). They contend that while “best practices” can be fruitfully applied to ‘traditional volunteer programs’, which are based on a business-type human resource model, this environment only represents a subset of a range of possible NPO contexts. Of particular significance to our study, Macduff et al., (2009) noted the growing trend in episodic, short-term, and event-based volunteerism, which might require fundamentally different HR systems and practices from those advocated as “best practices”. As such, these “best practices” may have little or no meaning in these contexts. For instance, the authors pointed out that in social change volunteer programs, volunteers are conceived more as “activists”. Therefore, while their recruitment may resemble more of ‘traditional volunteers’, selection practices that involve “interviewing” for “positions” do not fit the social change program model. Thus as a “best practice”, interviewing may be redundant or irrelevant for this kind of volunteer program. Indeed, based on the same reasoning, McCurley and Ellis (2003) questioned the validity of current SHRM models used in the field. The above arguments served as an impetus for the current exploratory study, where we examined the nature of HR practices that emerged from an NPO context that relies heavily on volunteers that are episodic and short-term.

### **Mission-Driven Strategic Human Resource Management and the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity Framework**

We draw on the ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) framework (Bailey, 1993) as the theoretical underpinning for our model and for classifying the HR practices that emerged from our study, Figure 1. According to the AMO framework, to maximize employee performance, HR systems should be designed to enhance individuals’ ability, motivation and opportunity to contribute (e.g., Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). Drawing on this framework, Lepak and colleagues (2006) outlined a typology to categorize HR practices into three dimensions - skill-enhancing HR practices (e.g., ‘comprehensive’ recruitment, ‘rigorous’ selection, and ‘extensive’ training); motivation-enhancing HR practices (e.g., performance management, competitive compensation, incentives and rewards, extensive benefits, promotion, career development and job security) and opportunity-enhancing HR practices (e.g., flexible work design, work teams, employee involvement and information sharing) (Lepak et al., 2006; Jiang et al., 2012).

Building on Lepak and colleagues’ (2006) suggested typology; we develop a more nuanced framework to reflect the centrality of the organization’s mission to HR practices for volunteers. We define *mission-driven* HR-enhancing practices as HR

practices that are anchored to the organization's mission and especially relevant for volunteers. For example, with regards to skills-enhancing practices, while 'comprehensive' recruitment might be relevant to NPOs, the type of recruitment strategies that would be effective in for-profit organizations may be less effective or practical for recruiting volunteers. Similarly, 'rigorous' selection practices may be different or even irrelevant for the selection of some types (e.g., episodic and or short-term) of volunteers. Finally, training that centers on the organization's mission may be more important in NPOs rather than a focus on 'extensive' training.

Using an inductive approach for this study enabled us to explore the types and nature of HR practices that emerged in the nonprofit context we studied. Focusing on volunteers as ambassadors for the organization coupled with the fact that HPWS may be implemented and perceived differently by different employees, also underscores the importance of paying particular attention to volunteers' actual experience of the HR practices. Accordingly we examined the mission-driven HR practices from the volunteers' perspective.

*RQ1 What kinds of HR work practices unfold in NPOs and how do they influence volunteers' experience?*

### **Diversity Climate as a Mediator between SHRM and Volunteer Outcomes**

The extant literature in SHRM has made considerable progress in linking HPWS and HR systems to firm performance (Jiang et al., 2012). However, despite this progress, research on the processes linking these HR practices to organizational outcomes has received less attention and still remains a black box. Drawing from the organizational climate literature, researchers have suggested that HR practices can foster individuals' shared perceptions of the organization, and that this in turn can influence employee performance. For instance, a recent study by Chuang and Liao (2010) found that HPWS fostered two strategically important climates: concern for customers and concern for employees. These climates were linked to three organizational outcomes: service performance, helping behavior and marketing performance.

In this study, we also draw from the organizational climate literature and propose a mediation, based on the idea that *mission-driven* HR practices can play a key role in nurturing the diversity and inclusion climate of the organization, thereby fostering volunteer retention outcomes. We elected to examine the diversity and inclusion climate because of its particular relevance to volunteers' recruitment and retention. According to a recent article by Cooper (2012) projections from the 2010 Census results indicate an increasingly diverse US population. This trend, coupled with increasing globalization, foreshadows a more competitive marketplace where the attraction and retention of an adequate pool of volunteers will necessitate organizations to incorporate diversity into SHRM systems (Martín-Alcázar et al., 2011). Understanding how HR systems can promote diversity and inclusion in an NPO is the focus of our second research question:

*RQ2 How do mission-driven work practices nurture an inclusive environment and how does this contribute to retention and recruitment?*

## METHOD

The context for our case study was a Christian nonprofit organization, pseudo-name ABC, based in the U.S., committed to ameliorating hunger around the world. ABC purchases raw food ingredients from donations it receives, and it relies on volunteers to pack these into nutritiously fortified meals, which are then shipped to different countries around the world where a need has been identified. ABC has several permanent locations in three different states in the U.S. and in addition, it organizes various events around the country throughout the year, where institutions can host to pack the meals on their sites. Employees of ABC will set up and dismantle the packing stations. ABC has been in operation for over twenty years and during that time it has seen the number of meals packed grow exponentially. Meals packed at the permanent and non-permanent sites surpassed one billion in 2015, and ABC is considered one of America's fastest-growing charities.

While ABC employs a handful of permanent staff, volunteers are the mainstay of this organization. ABC volunteers can be classified as episodic (volunteering sporadically as they have time) and short-term (volunteering for 1.5-2.0 hour sessions). At a time when many nonprofit organizations are experiencing a decrease in the number of volunteers (Rogers et al., 2013), ABC saw a rise of over 400% in the annual volunteer rate in a twenty-year period. These characteristics of ABC positioned it as an ideal organization to study the influence of mission-driven HR practices on volunteer recruitment and retention. Volunteers need to first sign up on the website for an open slot at any of their permanent or non-permanent sites. Each packing session begins with training/orientation before volunteers are allowed to pack the meals. The packing site is comprised of several packing stations where volunteers work as members of a team to pack the meal. Volunteers work in teams either with people they came with or with those they met there. Each session lasts between one and a half to two hours. At the end of packing, the volunteers help to clean up and are invited to attend a debriefing session where they get to hear where their meals are going, how many meals they packed and how many people this can feed for a year.

We used a mixed method approach to gain both breadth and depth in the data collection. First we gathered qualitative data, including publications, e-mails to volunteers, website, onsite observations and 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews. This qualitative approach is ideal for gaining insights about exploratory questions such as our research questions (Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Case studies can be used for exploratory, explanatory and descriptive purposes, and are particularly useful for answering "what" and "how" questions that are exploratory in nature (Yin, 2003). Construct validity was satisfied through data triangulation from the multiple data sources.

Following a purposeful sampling approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), interviews served as our primary source of data in the current analysis. We interviewed 12

volunteers, selected to represent different identity groups (e.g., age, race, religion, and sex). We asked each participant questions about their perceptions of the various HR practices, the work atmosphere and their likelihood to return and or invite others to volunteer. The semi-structured design allowed for comparisons across interviews while follow-up questions allowed us to capture unique perspectives offered by specific individuals that shed light on their volunteering experience. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Our data analysis process involved coding interview transcripts and other qualitative data. We followed template analysis procedures outlined by King (1998).

In addition to the qualitative data, to enhance our methodology, we also administered an online survey to 150 volunteers. Volunteers were purposely selected to participate in the study to obtain a diverse sample by age, sex, religion and race. Seventy-one percent were females, 72% Whites, 9% Blacks, 3% Hispanics, and 3% Asians. Regarding religion, 76% were Christians, about 4% were non Christians (Muslims, atheists, Jewish) and about 20% did not respond to this question. There was a range of different ages that participated in the survey. The breakdown is as follows: Wireless (14-15) 5%; Millennials (16 – 25), 40%; Gen Y (26 – 50) 28%; Baby Boomers (51- 70), 17%.

Of the 150 volunteers invited to participate, 137 agreed to participate, and 133 of these surveys were usable, giving us a response rate of 88%. Participants that agreed to participate in the study were given a link to a SurveyMonkey © via their e-mail which included a list of questions informed by our interviews and the literature including 13 items related to recruitment, training/ orientation, performance management and reward/recognition, from Cuskelly et al. (2006). Participants were also asked questions related to job design, recruitment of other volunteers and retention. Demographic data for each participant were captured by asking them questions related to their age, sex, (dis)ability, religion and race. Frequency data analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted using SPSS.

## RESULTS

The surveys indicated that several of the HR practices associated with HPWS were also present in the nonprofit organization. ANOVA of the means for the different groups revealed that there were no significant differences between volunteers' perceptions of various HPWS at ABC as a function of age, sex, religion and race (see Table 1 for means by identity group and ANOVA results). In addition, our analysis also showed that there were no differences in volunteers' outcomes based on identity group membership. Volunteers' commitment, intention to remain, intention to recruit others to volunteer at ABC, and satisfaction with their volunteering experience, were similar for all volunteers irrespective of the identity group to which they belonged (see Table 2). Table 3 shows the prevalence of different HR practices in ABC as perceived by the volunteers participating in the study. Over three-quarters of the volunteers that participated in the study agreed that these HR practices were present in ABC except for recruitment where

only 44% of the participants agreed that comprehensive recruitment practices were present.

Our qualitative analysis of the interviews, observation notes, website statements and emails from the organization revealed that not only were these HPWS present, but that they were infused with the organization's mission, which contributed positively to the volunteers' experience and their willingness to return and recruit others to volunteer. In Table 4, we provide an overview of the data structure parsed from the interview notes and examples of quotes that illustrate the different types of HR practices. Below, we discuss both the quantitative and qualitative results in greater detail as they relate to our two research questions.

### **Mission-Driven Skill-Enhancing HR Practices**

According to Lepak et al. (2006), 'comprehensive' recruitment, 'rigorous' selection practices and 'extensive' training are important skill-enhancing HR practices to ensure that an organization can attract, select and develop employees so that they possess the appropriate ability – valuable and rare – to give the organization a competitive advantage. As mentioned above, survey responses showed that out of all the HR practices measured, less than half the volunteers (44%) believed ABC used a comprehensive recruitment process. A closer look at the results reveal that 'word of mouth' was by far the most common recruitment source for volunteers at ABC (71%) compared to the second most common (match between skills, interests, experience, and role) where only 45% of the respondents agreed with the statement.

For NPOs that rely heavily on volunteers, sustained advantage can be gained by their ability to leverage institutional and community connections in order to recruit potential volunteers for their organization (Laczo & Hanisch, 1999). ABC was particularly successful in partnering with institutions and getting members of the community involved with the mission, which provided them with access to a large pool of potential volunteers:

*"I have gone a lot of times, I have gone with my girls scout group, I have gone with church, gone with confirmation, ....I've gone many times because my church is very involved. And also the high school is very involved, everyone is very involved."*

*[White, GenX, Female, Christian]*

In addition, NPOs can also use a 'values' approach to differentiate themselves from others and thereby gain competitive advantage (Akingbola, 2013). Irrespective of how volunteers learned about the organization, ABC's mission was instrumental to their recruitment as illustrated by the following quotes:

*“It was a requirement that I volunteered as part of the football team..... It was very community-driven so you felt compelled to participate and to offer your services for a cause that was obviously very noble and genuine.”*

*[Black, Millennial, Male, non-religious]*

*“Our pastor had heard about their mission before they had come to Illinois.... so we all drove up to Zion – there were hundreds of us. They had set it up. It was a really exciting thing to do. ....Our pastor was very passionate about it and he still is. It sounded really cool, so I brought my kids and we all went up.”*

*[White, GenX, Female, Christian]*

*“I actually heard about it from one of my friends .... She just told me that they would give the food to under-privilege countries. .... I realized how good of an organization it actually was and that it was benefitting people.”*

*[Black, Wireless, Female, Christian]*

While for-profit organizations emphasize ‘rigorous’ selection practices to ensure that the right type of people with the right knowledge, skills and abilities are selected for the organization, ABC had less stringent selection practices. Information provided on their website illustrates these lenient requirements and contributed to their ability to recruit a diverse range of people. In fact, besides the “minimum age for volunteering [of] 5 years old,” the website states that “All a volunteer needs to do is to sign up”. The website is very explicit about the organization’s willingness to accommodate a diverse group of people to serve and this is at the core of their mission as illustrated by some of the statements culled from their website below:

*“We reserve one of our most important tasks for sit-down volunteers.”*

*“Each site is accessible and has a job for everyone!”*

*“We welcome people of every faith to participate in our life-giving mission.”*

The following statement by one of the volunteers interviewed sums it up:

*“For me it is about diversity. Everyone could help no matter how old, or how young. ....no matter their religious background, LGBT or not. In some organizations, there is .... some kind of culture and you may feel that you don’t belong. At ABC, they did not care who you were, or what your background was - you felt that you were just there to make a difference.”*

*[Male, Millennial, Christian, White]*

The orientation and training at ABC provided volunteers with enough information so that they felt competent to carry out their tasks efficiently. Ninety three percent of the

participants surveyed agreed that the training/orientation session adequately prepared them to carry out their tasks at ABC. In addition, the survey revealed that volunteers believed that they received adequate support and resources to carry out their tasks. Unlike the recommendations for ‘extensive’ training for for-profit organizations, the training at ABC was concise and comprehensive, which was valued by the volunteers. Not only were the training and orientation comprehensive and concise, volunteers also found them to be motivating as the following quotes illustrate:

*“I think the orientation is short enough and I think they are enthusiastic, which is really good. I think it is a good part.”*

*[White, Gen X, Female, Christian]*

*“...and because everything was so very well explained we could grab items that were needed, all very easy to do and even the clean up was no problem at all. It was all very well done, well organized.”*

*[White, Baby Boomer, Female, Atheist]*

In addition to providing clear directions and information on the task ahead, the orientation/training session also showed videos about the organization’s mission and some of the beneficiaries of the meals. Many volunteers found this to be a very meaningful part of their volunteering experience, inspiring them to work hard at their assigned tasks and contributing to their willingness to return (retention) as illustrated:

*“During their preview they went over how they packed food for people in other countries ... really motivates me to go back there time and time again.”*

*[Black, Male, Wireless, Christian]*

*“I think it is really important... the orientation, I think it is important that people hear about where the food is going and what a difference it can make.....I have enjoyed it.”*

*[White, Female, Gen X, Christian]*

### **Mission-Driven Motivation-Enhancing HR Practices**

Motivational tools such as reward systems, career opportunities and job security would be ineffective for motivating non-paid volunteers that are not permanent members of an organization (Laczo & Hanisch, 1999). NPOs therefore need to consider alternative tools that would be effective in their context. Cuskelly and colleagues (2006), suggest using performance management and recognition for motivating volunteers, however, there was no evidence that these predicted volunteer retention. At ABC, performance management was implemented to some extent as evidenced by the results of our survey, where 75% of the participants agreed with the statements. Specifically, it appeared that

ABC staff were effective at monitoring their performance (83% agreed) and providing feedback (75% agreed) but they were less effective in addressing performance problems. Analysis of the interview notes, suggests that the staff at ABC provided enough support, so that volunteers felt that they could ask for help if needed, but not too much, so that they did not feel micromanaged. This supports findings in the empowerment literature, where both feedback and autonomy are important tools in motivating individuals (Speitzer, 2005)

*“I liked that they were in the room with us, even though they were not micromanaging or supervising the individual groups, they were visible and they were so just in case there were questions such as what do I do now, oh I have forgotten this and that – so that was good, that was a good experience. They did not micromanage the thing but they were available and helpful if we needed them.”*

*[White, Baby Boomer, Female, Atheist]*

Regarding recognition the results were mixed. Based on the survey results, over three-quarters (78%) of the respondents agreed that the organization recognized their efforts. However, while the majority (93%) agreed that the staff thanked them, only 62% felt that the organization publicly recognized their efforts. Most of the volunteers interviewed did not recall staff giving them any recognition for their efforts. However, many were not expecting it especially if they were new to the organization: *“Staff did not do anything to recognize me but I was not expecting it. I was just there once for two hours, I did not put in significant hours.”* Long-term volunteers, however, felt that the organization could do more: *“Don’t do anything to recognize [us] – nothing. Could just send an e-mail or put it on Facebook that you volunteered”.* Despite the lack of recognition, it did not seem to impact the volunteer’s experience negatively. As one volunteer put it: *“[Recognition to me was] seeing how much food we actually packed during a short time period. I felt that we actually made a big contribution.”* One volunteer however, shared an e-mail she received from ABC that illustrates their recognition efforts:

*“Happy Leap Day! We wanted to take this extra day of the year to say THANK YOU for all you do to feed kids! Thanks for making saving lives a priority. We really appreciate you!”*  
*[e-mail sent to volunteer on Feb 29, 2016]*

### **Mission-driven Opportunity-enhancing HR practices**

Work design, work teams, employee involvement and information sharing are a few examples of the opportunity-enhancing HR practices that have been found to be effective in for-profit organizations. Many of these were also present at ABC. Specifically, ABC was able to integrate a flexible work design into a lively and

comfortable work environment which provided opportunities for volunteers not only to interact with others but also to participate in a meaningful endeavor. As we can see from Table 1, Over 80% of the participants agreed that ABC provided these practices. Our interviews revealed that the meaningfulness of the tasks that volunteers were performing, which was linked to the organization's mission, was by far the most motivating aspect of the volunteers' experience and their willingness to return and be ambassadors of the organization as illustrated by the following quotes.

*“It re-conceptualizes the way that I personally view philanthropy in that that organization is the only one that I know or that I have participated in the past that I know exactly what I am doing to impact a very concise and defined cause and so in the future, I feel as though my volunteering efforts will be focused in on causes that I am having a direct impact on and I can measure the impact of my input. It has given me a shining model of what a true charitable organization should be..”*

*[Black, Millennial, Male, non-religious]*

*“They emphasize how big of an impact they have on children around the world. .... I felt that my actions were actually making a difference around the world.”*

*[White, Baby boomer, Female, Atheist]*

*“Often times we do not think about the fact that we have food and that we live in a privileged area and are able to get food so easily. I think we often forget that .....makes you more aware and grateful for what you have and just kinda put things into perspective like it is not just America, there are other countries. We have to think about those countries too and help those people in need.”*

*[Black, Wireless, Female, Christian]*

There were also various elements of the job design and work environment that influenced volunteers' experience and motivated them to return and recruit others. Besides several volunteers noting that the work environment was very “fun” and “energetic”, the following quotes illustrate how the job design contributed positively to their work experience.

Working in teams: *“I definitely like going with groups of people. I don't think I would just show up. I don't know you could do that . definitely it is a great... like a church or swim team, it is a good way to meet people or get to know them better.”*

Energetic environment: *“I always like when they play music, .... I think having people cheering for all the boxes....keeps the energy up.”*

Flexible design: *“I like how it is arranged, it allows for people to do different things.”*

Efficient and functional: *“It was clean, it was very well set up, all the stations everything was there... It was all very well done, well organized.”*

Experiential: *“I do like that the hands-on making food to send as opposed to just raising money to send.....it is fun.”*

### **Mission-driven HR practices and an inclusive climate**

At the core of ABC’s mission is their commitment to diversity as illustrated by this statement, one of several found on their website (see quotes above): *“Our food is given to the neediest children, regardless of their faith or whether a Christian message is delivered. All of God’s children deserve to be fed.”* Not surprising, ABC volunteers range in age, from as young as five years-old to as old as seventy-six, religious background, sex, race, abilities etc. The mission-driven HR practices implemented by ABC are fundamental to nurturing an inclusive climate as volunteers remarked:

*“Sometimes I am leery about doing things where they just serve Christians. I don’t want it to be that you have to profess Christianity to benefit from the services or to volunteer there.”*

*[Recruitment]*

*“I know whenever I’ve gone especially if there are new people and they are really concerned.... oh I can’t stand and when they [the staff] come out and say that you can put labels on and sit there ... And there are always guys you know they want to carry the boxes. I do like that they explain ahead of time that there are different roles for people and I like that they have different roles depending on what you want to do.”*

*[Orientation/Training ]*

*“Every time that I have done it I’ve always done it with kids – it is nice because there are jobs where everyone can do. And also the kids always end up swapping out. It is important, because after you have measured for a while, then you can weigh, I think it is good, ..... I have been there with people whose kids had learning difficulties and they seem to be able to work fine... they found different jobs for them.”*

*[Job Design]*

Interestingly, the inclusive environment also accommodated different personality types as illustrated by these two volunteers:

*“I am not an easy socializer ..I mean if I get a task, I wanna do a good job and I don’t want to stand around chatting... I wanna get it done and I am kinda getting competitive – I want to be the one who gets the most boxes done. So I am not there to talk .... It was not the social aspect for me because I did not know anybody else.... it was easy to do and it was a very welcoming environment.”*

*[White, Baby boomer, Female, Atheist]*

*“Fun to work with my family and other people. Nice way to know other people. It is a nice way to build community.”*

*[White, GenX, Female, Christian]*

Lastly, the positive experience of volunteers at ABC directly impacted their willingness to volunteer again and to become ambassadors for the organization as noted by this volunteer:

*“My role is to spread the message, make the food be part of the event and also to raise money”.*

Another volunteer echo’s this sentiment:

*“Part of my mission is to also raise awareness of the conditions of these children and so just by bringing in everyday volunteers that could have different backgrounds, different ages, could really help to bring awareness to their mission and to the situation around the world.”*

The interviews results were also supported by our survey findings which revealed a high volunteer satisfaction rate (95%). Ninety-four percent of those surveyed intended to return and refer someone to volunteer at ABC.

## CONCLUSION

Our goal in this study was to use strategic human resource management theory to investigate the nature of HR practices that volunteers perceive in a non-profit organization. Our findings provided support for the model proposed further illuminating the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance. Specifically, our study makes several important theoretical and practical contributions. We also discuss these as well as some of the strengths, limitations and suggestions for future studies.

Theoretically, this study makes several important contributions. First, we contribute to the SHRM literature by extending the external validity of SHRM research to a nonprofit context. Specifically, the A-M-O framework outlined by Lepak and colleagues (2006), one of the major models used in SHRM research (Jiang et al., 2012), received support in our study. Results from both our quantitative and qualitative analysis suggests that the HR practices that volunteers perceived could be classified into three domains – ability, motivation and opportunity. However, not all the HR practices that are associated with HPWS were present in our organization. Besides the more common HR practices that have been found in previous studies involving volunteers, such as pay for performance, others such as selection were also absent. This finding supports the sentiments of some researchers on the futility of a universalistic approach that prescribes a set of best HR practices for all organizations, an approach that has dominated SHRM research in NPOs (Hager & Brudner, 2015; McCurley & Ellis, 2003). Our findings underscore the importance of aligning HR to each unique organizational context and business strategy. The qualitative analysis of our data provided us with insights on the nature of these HR practices. Volunteers responses suggests that many of the HR practices that were present were not only high performance practices that are present in other for profit organizations (e.g., flexible work design), but they were also mission-driven. The value of the volunteer work was an important ingredient in the volunteers' experience and their subsequent willingness to return and recruit others to volunteer.

Our study also makes important contributions to the diversity literature by answering calls to integrate it with SHRM literature (Shen et al., 2014). The results of our qualitative analysis suggests that HPWS, especially when they are mission-driven can foster an inclusive environment where individuals, irrespective of sex, age, race, religion and (dis)ability, believe they can contribute to the organizations' goals. As organizations in general become increasingly diverse, creating and maintaining an inclusive environment will become even more important. Organizations that can craft HR systems that promote inclusiveness are likely to have higher retention rates and highly committed employees.

Practically, the results of this study underscore the importance of HR practices for managing volunteers and increasing volunteer motivation and retention. Our results suggest that there is value in NPOs investing in HR practices and strategically aligning it with their mission and objectives. For example, while ABC did not advertise much, which is a costly practice especially for NPOs with limited funds, they tried to create a fun and meaningful experience for their volunteers, which was instrumental in them returning and recruiting other volunteers. Organizations need to be able to leverage their strengths and be aware of their weaknesses as they design their HR systems. Also, our results can be useful to organizations, both for-profit and NPOs, that are trying to create an inclusive environment for their employees or volunteers.

One of the major strengths of this research is the mixed method design of the study. It allowed for a broad and deep approach that allowed the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data. Most studies on volunteer recruitment and retention

have used mainly qualitative methods limiting their generalizability. This study addressed this shortcoming by including quantitative data. Also, unlike most SHRM studies that focus on the organization's perspective of HR practices provided, in the current study we investigated the HR practices from the volunteers' perspective. This answers calls in the literature (Liao et al., 2009) for more SHRM studies from the individuals' perspective since volunteers' perceptions and experiences may differ.

The study also has several limitations. This was a cross-section study, which does not allow us to establish causality between HR practices and volunteers intention to return and recruit. Also, our data was based on self-reports, which increases the possibility for common method bias to influence our results. However, the risk of this was greatly reduced by obtaining data from several sources as we mentioned above. Also, since the volunteers were purposefully sampled, it is possible that they do not represent the prototypical volunteer. However, since data obtained from non-volunteer sources corroborated our findings from the interviews, we believe this effect is marginal. Finally, data was only collected from an organization with episodic and short-term volunteers and therefore the results may not be generalizable to other types of NPOs.

Our suggestions for future studies relate to many of the limitations identified above. First, we suggest that future studies should examine the phenomenon using a longitudinal approach to address the issue of causality. Secondly, we suggest collecting data from other sources besides volunteers such as the permanent employees, external agencies the NPO partners with, and beneficiaries of the service(s) provided. Third, data should be collected from other NPOs especially those with different types of volunteers to see what patterns emerge and to increase the generalizability of our findings. In particular, it would be worthwhile to compare several organizations using data from individuals that volunteer at different NPOs.

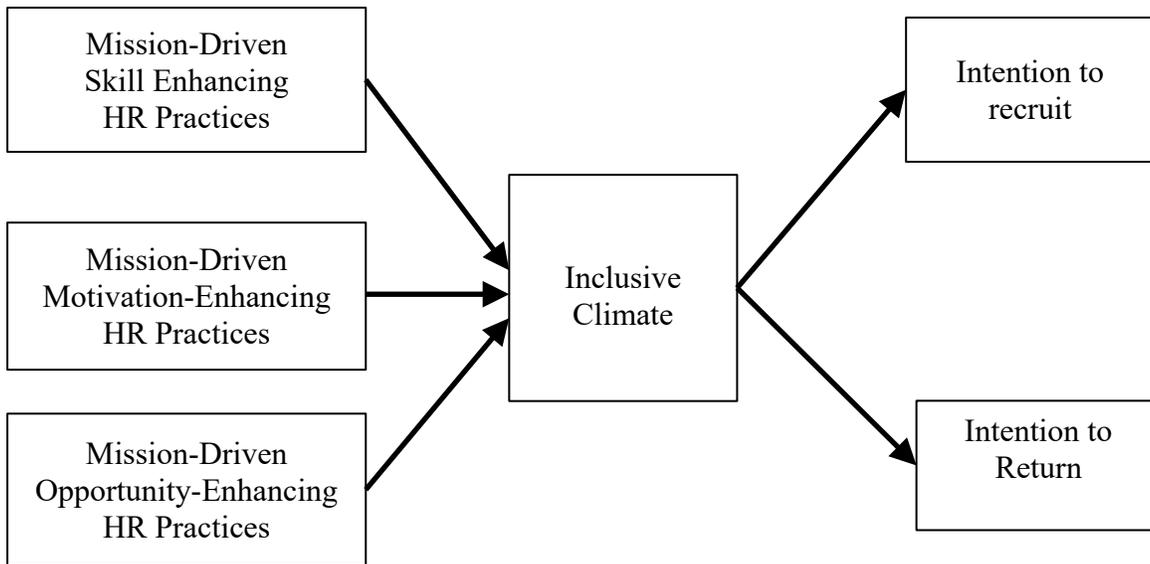
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**Figure 1: Proposed Model of the relationship between mission-driven HR practices, inclusive climate and retention outcomes – intention to recruit and intention to return.**

Table 1: Means for each HR practice by Identity Group and ANOVA Results (F-Values and Significance)									
Identity Group	Skills Enhancing HR Practices		Motivation-Enhancing HR Practices		Opportunity-Enhancing HR Practices				
	Recruitment	Training/Support	Performance Management	Recognition	Task Significance	Work Evt. (lively)	Work Evt. (comfortable)	Work Design	Team Work
<b>Sex</b>									
Male	4.81	6.38	5.52	5.81	6.33	5.89	5.82	6.01	6.07
Female	5.21	6.25	5.57	5.72	6.22	6.04	5.80	6.00	5.83
<i>F-Value</i>	1.36 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.40 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.68 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.17 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.24 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.47 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.01 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.01 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.31 ( <i>n.s.</i> )
<b>Religion</b>									
Christian	4.27	6.31	5.53	5.72	6.29	6.06	5.81	6.06	6.43
Non-Christian	3.65	6.11	5.36	5.70	6.11	5.64	5.56	5.67	6.00
<i>F-Value</i>	.13 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.24 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.75 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.32 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.89 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.99 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.32 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.14 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.14 ( <i>n.s.</i> )
<b>Race</b>									
White	4.20	4.28	5.72	5.84	5.96	5.87	5.94	5.33	6.10
Black	4.06	4.18	4.90	5.00	5.86	5.27	5.18	4.45	5.34
Hispanic/Latino	3.18	3.50	4.75	6.50	6.25	5.75	4.50	4.25	6.17
Asian	4.56	4.50	5.33	6.25	5.25	5.75	5.50	5.50	5.67
<i>F-Value</i>	.82 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.32 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.67 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.64 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.94 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.49 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.78 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.72 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.37 ( <i>n.s.</i> )
<b>Age</b>									
Wireless	3.75	6.83	5.16	4.00	6.50	6.16	5.87	6.15	6.17
Millennials	4.03	5.98	5.81	5.68	6.22	5.67	5.57	5.86	5.90
Gen Y	4.25	6.39	5.76	5.77	6.21	6.22	6.05	6.14	6.15
Baby Boomers	4.18	6.46	5.68	5.53	6.20	6.08	5.76	5.98	5.91
<i>F-Value</i>	.28 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.13 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.33 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.33 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	0.04 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	2.23 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.26 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.78 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.54 ( <i>n.s.</i> )

<b>Table 2: Means for each outcome by Identity Group and ANOVA Results (F-Values and Significance)</b>				
<b>Identity Group</b>	<b>Volunteer Outcomes</b>			
	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Intention to return</b>	<b>Intention to refer someone to volunteer</b>	<b>Volunteer Satisfaction</b>
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	6.19	5.96	6.00	6.16
Female	6.34	6.14	6.17	6.33
<i>F-Value</i>	1.04 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.87 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.52 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.65 ( <i>n.s.</i> )
<b>Religion</b>				
Christian	6.24	6.44	6.37	6.42
Non-Christian	5.58	6.00	5.92	6.00
<i>F-Value</i>	2.52 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	2.59 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.76 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.84 ( <i>n.s.</i> )
<b>Race</b>				
White	6.40	6.39	6.44	6.00
Black	5.84	6.43	6.46	6.51
Hispanic/Latino	6.30	6.06	6.03	6.34
Asian	6.12	6.33	6.51	6.32
<i>F-Value</i>	.64 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.82 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.26 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	1.96 ( <i>n.s.</i> )
<b>Age</b>				
Wireless Millennials	5.99	7.00	7.00	6.50
Gen Y	6.00	6.29	6.29	6.07
Baby Boomers	6.15	6.38	6.44	6.23
	6.13	6.34	6.37	6.03
<i>F-Value</i>	1.26 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.78 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.45 ( <i>n.s.</i> )	.33 ( <i>n.s.</i> )

<b>Table 3: Summary Statistics of Survey Results (N=133)</b>	
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequencies</b> % of participants that agreed with statement
<b>Skills-Enhancing HR Practices</b>	
<i>Recruitment</i>	44
Word of mouth	71
Advertisement	19
Match between skills, interests, experience, and role	45
<i>Training/Orientation/Support</i>	93
Provided adequate training/orientation to carry out tasks	93
Provided adequate support	92
Provided adequate resources	95
<b>Motivation-Enhancing HR Practices</b>	
<i>Performance Management</i>	75
Monitored performance	83
Provided feedback on performance	75
Addressed performance problems	68
<i>Recognition</i>	78
Thanked volunteers	93
Publicly recognized volunteers	62
<b>Opportunity-Enhancing HR Practices</b>	
<i>Task significance</i>	88
<i>Work environment (lively atmosphere)</i>	87
<i>Work environment (comfortable)</i>	89
<i>Flexible work design</i>	89
<i>Working in teams</i>	88
Opportunity to work with friends, family, colleagues etc.	93
Opportunity to get to know friends, family, colleagues better	84
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<b>Outcomes</b>	
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<b>Table 4: Overview of Interview Data Structure with Illustrative Quotes</b>	
<b>Mission-driven HR Practices</b>	<b>Illustrative Quotes</b>
<b>Skills-enhancing</b>	<p><i>Recruitment</i></p> <p>“Everyone could help no matter how old, or how young. No matter their religious background, LGBT. In some organizations, there is a some kind of culture and you may feel that you don’t belong. At ABC, they did not care who you were, or what your background was - you felt that you were there to make a difference.”</p> <p><i>Training/Orientation/Support</i></p> <p>“The training session was short and very clear. They used images and videos which made it very easy even for the young kids to follow.”</p>
<b>Motivation-enhancing</b>	<p><i>Performance Management</i></p> <p>“There were people around so you could ask questions without stopping production.”</p> <p><i>Recognition</i></p> <p>“The staff recognizes my volunteer efforts by saying they are glad I helped. That is good enough for me.</p>
<b>Opportunity-enhancing</b>	<p><i>Task Significance</i></p> <p>“The work is all done without pay. ...goal is compelling. It reinforces that we have so much..... That we can share what we have with others. Working here shows compassion, we have food, being without food would be scary, makes you think and count [your] blessings.“</p> <p><i>Work environment (lively atmosphere)</i></p> <p>“I went with my brother very early in the morning and I admit, we were kind of sleepy when they were doing the orientation. But once the packing started, the music and the energy was so great it motivated us to work hard”.</p> <p><i>Flexible work design</i></p> <p>“It is so flexible, you can always fit it into your schedule. So if you work until 5:00 p.m. then you can go for the 7:00 session. It is not difficult and everyone can help.”</p> <p><i>Working in teams</i></p> <p>“I liked meeting new people and being able to help. “</p>