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To inspiring colleagues, be they my coeditors, coauthors, students, coworkers, or friends, who have stretched my thinking about the EOR. Without such challenges, we can't hope to enhance the world of work for all of us currently engaged and those who will follow.

— Lois E. Tetrick
Assumptions in Employee–Organization Relationship Research: A Critical Perspective From the Study of Volunteers

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A FEW THINGS VOLUNTEERS CAN TEACH US ABOUT EMPLOYEE–ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

If you are paid, you probably don’t question it, you assume you are doing it for a living. Volunteers don’t know why they are working; they don’t know the answer. I guess they assume they do it because they want to do good. These assumptions lead to different ways of doing things. Not that paid people aren’t cheerful; it’s just that it’s not needed.

—Volunteer in a nonsectarian food distribution program, Pearce, 1993, p. 3

Employees are not the only people who work for and have relationships with organizations. Volunteers, like contract workers, governing board members, and employees, labor for organizations. Yet, we know little about the relationships between such people and their organizations. There is growing research on contract or contingent workers (temporary or part-time) and their organizations (see Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2007; Gallagher & Connelly, Chapter 10, this volume), and our understanding of the organizational behavior of members of governance boards is in its
infancy (for an example, see Westphal & Stern, 2006). This chapter will address what we can infer from the available research about relationships between volunteers and their organizations and what this may mean for our understanding of employee–organization relationship (EOR) theory and research.

Research on volunteers’ relationships with their organizations spans the past several decades, although this work has rarely been framed as volunteer–organization relationships. Yet, much of it does reflect on EOR theorizing, reflections that are introduced here. This chapter seeks to contribute to future research on EORs in two ways. First, research on EORs makes a series of implicit assumptions—assumptions that are clearer when framed in the context of the relationships between volunteers and their organizations. The EOR assumptions addressed here include: EORs are clear to the participants, the relationships are primarily driven by how the organization treats the participants, participants are dependent on their organizations, the organizations are not understaffed, and the participants perceive their organizational involvement in inducement–contribution terms. For each of these five assumptions, I will describe how volunteers’ relationships with their organizations violate these assumptions in ways that surface these assumptions in EOR theorizing—assumptions that do not apply to many employees in their organizational relationships. Second, EORs are said to be characterized by both economic and social exchange, yet the social component of EOR research has not been as well developed as have the economic or utilitarian inducements. I will suggest that one reason for this imbalance has been the neglect of the complexity of social exchange reflected in the differing theories of what social exchange is and does in participant–organization relationships. An examination of volunteer–organization relationships helps clarify the differing facets and meanings of social exchange in participant–organization relationships. This chapter concludes with a discussion of what violations of these five assumptions mean for future research on EORs. Before exploring these ideas, participant–organization relationships will be briefly defined, and then what is meant by an organizational volunteer is clarified.

Dictionaries define relationships as the ways two parties are connected, or states of being connected, or ways the parties behave or regard one another. The EOR has been defined quite broadly in the organizational behavior literature. It includes employee perceptions of the organization's policies and actions and the employers' formal policies toward employees (Shore et al., 2004). Further, the EOR has been framed as a blend of both an economic and social exchange (Shore et al., 2004; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Hite, 1995). It is an economic exchange because the relationship is expected to be a quid pro quo inducements–contributions relationship (March & Simon, 1958). That is, employees evaluate the relationship by whether the inducements they receive from the organization are commensurate with the contributions they provide. However, many have argued that EORs are not purely economic ones, but they include features of a more open-ended social relationship (e.g., Shore et al., 2004). In social exchanges, the exchange is valued for the relationship it symbolizes (Blau, 1964) or the community the exchanges support (Ekeh, 1974), not what is exchanged in itself. In social relationships, the exchange is not expected to be completed with each transaction; instead, the exchange is expected to be ongoing, and the relationship is kept in balance over time rather than with each exchange.

**VOLUNTEER–ORGANIZATION RELATIONSHIPS**

Volunteers contribute their labor at no charge to nonprofit and, occasionally, for-profit and governmental organizations. Volunteer labor is a major component of the U.S. economy and workforce. In 2010, 63.4 million Americans (27% of adult Americans) volunteered labor worth $169 billion (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2010). Although North America is traditionally known for high levels of volunteering, volunteering is international; volunteers contributing valuable services are present in all but the most autocratic and centralized states. Yet the term “volunteers” is inherently ambiguous (Pearce, 1993); many workers receiving low pay are called “volunteers,” as in the U.S. Government's Peace Corp Volunteers. Similarly, some who receive no pay for their work, like members of nonprofit boards of directors, are rarely called volunteers. In addition, to further complicate matters, some volunteers receive token payments for their services, and some student volunteers are required to work a certain number of volunteer hours as a school or course requirement. The volunteers who are the focus of this chapter are those who receive no pay for organizational work in jobs under the supervision of an
organizational agent. That is, they do work within a hierarchy of authority subject to dismissal if they do not carry out their assignments in ways the organizational agents deem to be acceptable.

Volunteers are a very heterogeneous category of organizational participants. They may work for small collectives delivering food to the needy, write for their university’s student newspaper, fight fires in their township, lead tours of museums, renovate homes for the poor, and stack the shelves of their local library, among many other services they perform. Volunteers range from those providing highly skilled and licensed services, as physicians do for free clinics, to teenagers standing around a soup kitchen waiting for someone to tell them what to do. Volunteers also are more demographically heterogeneous than employees, including young teenagers too young to legally work for pay and the elderly long since retired from their paid employment. All of this heterogeneity contributes great ambiguity in how volunteers should be viewed (are they gifting their services or workers?) and why they work, among many other uncertainties, with important implications for their organizational relationships, as will be detailed below.

Volunteers share some features with employees but also differ from employees (Pearce, 1993). Volunteers are unlike employees because they are not paid wages or salaries for their organizational work, but some volunteers may be like employees in that they expect to receive some inducement for their work (e.g., experience to build a resume or the opportunity to meet people who may become clients of their investment businesses). Volunteers are like employees because they work for a formal organization, under its authorities’ supervision, providing a service or product to outside clients or customers; however, volunteers’ work is usually structured differently than employees’ work: Volunteering is a leisure activity, and so this means that volunteers usually work part time, sometimes working only a few hours a year. This implies that either the organization will accomplish less work or the organization must have many more individual volunteers to do the same work as full-time employees. Usually, volunteers require comparatively more management than employees because their tasks need to be divided into smaller part-time pieces, done by those who may have less experience and skills than employees can develop over time. Finally, because volunteers are all unpaid there is no need to create fine occupational distinctions or status hierarchies among them, except as might be required by governmental licensing requirements (e.g., only licensed registered nurses can provide certain patient services). So, although it may take more managerial time to coordinate and monitor volunteers’ work, it takes less managerial time to manage the emotions and resentments that can be engaged by the unfavorable comparisons inherent in employees’ differential pay and titles. In any case, there are enough similarities between employees and volunteers to justify exploring what insights volunteer–organization relationships may provide about these volunteers in their own right, as well as EORs.

ASSUMPTION 1: THE EOR IS CLEAR TO EMPLOYEES

To date, scholars of EORs have assumed that employees have a clear idea of their relationships with their organizations. However, research on volunteer–organization relationships casts doubt on this assumption for volunteers and probably for many employees as well. The inducements–contributions schema is so powerful in North America that the research on the organizational behavior of volunteers has been centered on one question: Why do they do it? Volunteers appear to present a mystery—all of us feel they must be getting something out of the relationship. The pioneer in this work is Sills (1957), who studied the large nationwide U.S. nonprofit organization that raised money for research and provided services for those suffering from polio and their families. His basic findings about what induces volunteers to work have not been fundamentally contradicted in the ensuing decades. Volunteers volunteer for several primary reasons. In his study, Sills (1957) found that 10% volunteered on their own, 52% of the volunteers were brought to their volunteer job by a friend, 20% were introduced to the organization by a member of the community, and 18% came because a colleague from their paid job suggested it. Although the mix of reasons for joining will vary somewhat with the size and mission of the organization, subsequent research confirms that only a minority of volunteers come to their organizations on their own initiative or through a mass media advertisement (e.g., Gallup Organization, 1978; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Yeung, 2004). As the volunteer quoted at the beginning of this chapter reports, most volunteers do not really know why they do it, because the vast majority of volunteers are persuaded, charmed, or dragged into their volunteer jobs by someone they know. This
means that a surprisingly large proportion of volunteers do not volunteer for any inducement the organization provides, but to get someone they know off their backs.

In earlier work, I argued that this meant that many volunteers were faced with a problem of insufficient justification for their organizational work. Staw (1976) and others (de Charms, 1968; Deci, 1975) argue that when both extrinsic and intrinsic organizational rewards are abundant, participants can experience overjustification for their participation and so will devalue the less tangible intrinsic inducements they receive from their organizational relationships. By the same logic, when participants have few inducements for their work, they will tend to believe that the less tangible intrinsic rewards of the work are more important to them than they would be if the tangible extrinsic rewards are plainly sufficient.

In a large empirical study of matched pairs of volunteer-staffed and employee-staffed organizations doing the same work, I found that volunteers doing the same community service work as employees (e.g., fire fighting, child care, orchestra musician) reported significantly more intangible inducements of social and service motivation compared to employees (Pearce, 1983). This was the case despite volunteers and employees working in jobs providing the same community services and with the same socializing opportunities in their workplaces. Interestingly, volunteers did not report that their work was more intrinsically motivating than did the employees, the original intangible inducement for which the sufficiency of justification hypothesis was developed and tested by Deci (1975). That is, employees doing valuable work for others working with congenial colleagues did not report these as inducements for their organizational relationship as often as did volunteers. This suggests the employees had oversufficient justification and so did not attend to these more abstract attractions, whereas the volunteers' insufficient justification leads them to attend to these inducements for their organizational relationships.

This has implications for our understanding of participant–organization relationships. Organizational participants do not necessarily focus their attention on the inducements the organization offers but will selectively attend to some, but not all, of the organization's possible inducements. For volunteers, we can easily determine how they arrived at their workplaces (as Sills, 1957, first documented), but it is more difficult to say with certainty what their inducements for remaining with the organization are. Earlier (Pearce, 1993), I called this the inherent ambiguity of volunteers' organizational behavior. Yet, because society expects volunteers to have a reason for what they do, they justify what they do by the socially appropriate reasons of "make a contribution" or "working with a fun group of people." The volunteer–organization relationship is simply not clear to many volunteers.

Clarity in volunteers' and employees' reports of organizational relationships may be exaggerated because they are put on the spot by being asked to justify their workplace involvement. Employees appear to have a less problematic public rationale for remaining with their organizations: "I need to support myself and my family." However, the fact that their organizational relationship is potentially overjustified (they may also be making a contribution and working with fun coworkers) doesn't necessarily mean that the financial inducement of a salary is at the core of their relationships with their organizations.

This has implications for EOR scholarship. Employees may not be as clear about their inducements as we tend to assume. Like volunteers, some employees may stumble into jobs and then retroactively seek to rationalize what their inducements are because that is what society expects. Work by Shore et al. (2004) introduces the idea of dynamism in EORs but still assumes that it is a change in an understood relationship over time, rather than that the relationship itself may be inherently unclear and unstable. Current empirical approaches to assessing employees' perceptions of their EORs (asking them) may have inadvertently led to perceptions of greater employee clarity about their organizational relationships than employees really have. Asking people a question creates demands for an answer. Future research might make fewer assumptions about the clarity of employees' perceptions of their relationships with their organizations, perhaps by introducing participant observation assessment approaches, ones that center on seeking to understand employees' own ways of understanding their EORs.

ASSUMPTION 2: THE EOR IS DRIVEN BY HOW THE ORGANIZATION TREATS PARTICIPANTS

If EORs are more ambiguous to employees than we have assumed, how do employees determine what their relationships with their
organizations are? Much of the focus of EOR research has been on how different organizational human resources management practices signal different organization-expected EORs to employees (examples from this volume include Chapter 9 by Kossek and Ruderman and Chapter 17 by Lepak and Boswell). Most notably, Tsui et al. (1995) queried human resources executives about the organizations' investments in employees via such practices as training and providing job security. They found that employees had better supervisor-rated job performance and were more committed when their organizations invested more in the EOR by, for example, providing training and job security. So how organizations treat their employees seems to matter, but is it the most important factor in employees' perceptions of their relationships with their organizations? Organizations' investments in employees tend to apply to all employees in the organization or job, and it is not clear that all participants value the same things.

EOR scholars recently have begun to address the strength of the relationships between organizational inducements and employees' perceptions of their organizational relationships with studies of the impact of employees' immediate social environments on their understanding of their relationships with their organizations. Generalizing from Salancik and Pfeffer's (1978) claim that employees understand their jobs and form job attitudes largely based on how their peers understand these jobs and attitudes (see also Felps et al., 2009; Vardaman, Hancock, Allen, & Shore, 2009), we might suppose that employees' understanding of their EOR is highly influenced by the views and opinions of others in their social environments. Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) proposed that when employees answer questions about their needs or attitudes they, at least partially, report a shared definition of their workplaces. Yet EOR researchers have not found social effects on employees' perceptions of their EORs. In contrast to Salancik and Pfeffer's (1978) argument, Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998) find little evidence of within-work unit agreement on employees' reports of their own EORs. If employees' perceptions of their relationships with their organizations were socially derived perceptions, we would expect some degree of consensus among those who interact the most at work.

One key to this puzzle comes from understanding volunteers' relationships with their organizations. First, volunteers come to work for many different reasons (cf. Clary et al., 1998; Pearce, 1993). For example, if some hospital volunteers come to the job seeking to make a meaningful contribution while volunteer coworkers are interested in building job skills, supervisor and client contact can represent differential inducements to these different volunteers. More client contact may make for a more meaningful volunteer–organization relationship for the former volunteers who want concrete evidence that they are making a difference. In contrast, more contact with supervisors that provide training and career advice can make the organizational relationship more meaningful for the career-oriented volunteers. If volunteers want different things from their organization, they will evaluate what the organization provides differently. That volunteers come to their jobs for different reasons is widely assumed among those who work with them, but seems not to have merited much attention by those studying EORs. Certainly, going as far back as the Hawthorne Studies (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939), we have known that employees are not homogeneous in what they seek from their organizations. That is, a lack of within-workplace consensus on the nature of the EOR does not imply that there is no social influence on participants' EORs, but it can reflect the fact that different people develop relationships with organizations for different reasons.

If volunteers and employees want different things from their organizations, company- or job-wide human resources management practices would not necessarily be the most important influence on employee perceptions of their organizational relationships. If employees work in jobs for which training is irrelevant, we would not expect the provision of training to make them more committed to the relationship. More attention to matching what employees want from their organizational relationships with the inducements they personally value might help us to better understand the most powerful drivers of employee perceptions of their EORs.

ASSUMPTION 3: PARTICIPANTS ARE DEPENDENT ON THEIR ORGANIZATION

An implicit assumption in virtually all research on EORs is that employees are dependent enough on their organizations to make leaving difficult. (In this volume, Chapter 15 by Hom on employee turnover nicely represents this assumption of dependence on the organization.) If there is not at
least some dependence on the organization, there would not be much variance in EORs because those with unsatisfactory relationships with their organizations would just leave. We cannot make this assumption about volunteers.

Most volunteers are much less dependent on their organizations than are the employees assumed by EOR theorizing. Volunteers do not depend on their organizations for their livelihoods, and leaving is very easy for most of them. Even those who work for social contact and care a great deal about their social standing among others in the organization can easily find an acceptable excuse to leave. These volunteers discover they have become too busy or find that family demands have escalated. It would be unusual for a particular organization to provide the only possible setting for volunteers to make a contribution, socialize, or gain relevant work experience. Dissatisfied volunteers are rare in organizations because there is virtually no lag between becoming dissatisfied and leaving the organization (Pearce, 1993).

The weak volunteer dependence on their organizations draws attention to the possibility that some employees also may have very limited dependence on their organizations. This may be because these employees have skills in great demand by other organizations, because the employees are wealthy, because temporary or contract workers may have other clients, or because of any number of other reasons. With participant dependence on the organization no longer assumed to be high and constant, this raises a host of questions about the relationship between relative participant dependence and the EOR.

For example, participant dependence on the organization may have an inverse curvilinear relationship with whether the participant sees the relationships with his or her organization as positive or negative. It is possible that those employees, like volunteers, who are not dependent on their organizations would view the relationship favorably (otherwise they would leave). As their dependence increases, those employees who do not view the relationship positively might find they are forced to remain with the organization. This means that participants with moderate dependence would be expected to have a range of different relationships with their organizations, from very positive to very negative. However, the theory of sufficiency of justification suggests that those who are very dependent, the ones who have no alternative organizational options, might be better able to tolerate their situations if they viewed the organization more favorably. To justify their participation, they may look more favorably on intangible inducements such as interaction with their coworkers or a favorable location. In other words, employees who are very dependent or not at all dependent on their organizations would have little variance in their EOR perceptions. A mix of positive and negative EORs may occur only at moderate levels of employee dependence on the organization. Variance in employee dependence on the organization may be an important driver of the perception of the EOR, making the influence of relative employee dependence worth exploring.

**ASSUMPTION 4: THE ORGANIZATION IS NOT UNDERSTAFFED**

One of the great challenges faced by organizations that rely on volunteer staffing is the constant risk of understaffing, or insufficient numbers of people willing and able to do the tasks the work demands. Because volunteers are not paid, organizations must work hard to find sufficient inducements to attract enough volunteers to meet their goals. This is because volunteering is a leisure activity, and because volunteers are not dependent on their organizations, it is easy for them to quit, leaving the organization understaffed. For example, a food distribution program was chronically understaffed and ran a regular recruitment program in local churches and service groups to maintain staffing levels (Pearce, 1993).

Decades ago, Barker and Gump (Barker, 1968; Barker & Gump, 1964) proposed that the relative under- or overstaffing (what they called under- or overmanning) of social settings has important implications for how these settings functioned. They argued that all settings, such as workplaces, have an optimal number of occupants to fulfill their demands. When there are fewer participants than the setting demands, the setting is understaffed. An understaffed setting has the following characteristics: (a) there is more pressure on everyone to fully participate rather than lurk as spectators; (b) standards of performance are lowered to reduce barriers to joining; and (c) the participants are more interested in overall setting performance than are participants in optimally or overstaffed settings. In Barker and Gump's (1964) classic study of large and small high schools, they found that the overstaffed large high schools had highly contested
elections for student government and varsity athletic positions, and many students were indifferent to school achievements. By contrast, in the understaffed small schools, students had to be begged to serve in student government or on school teams, and most cared a great deal about their schools' successes.

Pearce (1993) found that the volunteer-staffed organizations in her study were understaffed settings. For example, the friends and family members of volunteers were frequently pressed into service—the roommate of the sports page editor in the college student newspaper was asked to cover certain games, and husbands and siblings were asked to deliver for the food distribution program when too few regular volunteers were scheduled at high-demand times. Certainly, the entrance requirements for the volunteer fire department and orchestra were without a doubt lower than for their employee-staffed counterparts. And in all these organizations, volunteers experienced lower performance pressure than did their employee counterparts. Volunteers kept their jobs as long as their performance did not cause direct harm, and absenteeism was tolerated in all of the volunteer-staffed organizations. Overstaffed settings would face the opposite set of these pressures; in overstuffed settings, performance standards are set very high (because more are clamoring for desirable positions), and participants report being less invested in the organization's performance and goals (because the crowded setting is more alienating and allows more lurking rather than demanding active participation).

Although most volunteers find themselves working in understaffed organizations, employees could expect to find themselves in a wide range of settings, ranging from understaffed nonprofits without the money to hire needed workers, to optimally staffed and even overstuffed settings (where money is no object). For example, attractive organizations (because they are glamorous and well-funded), such as Hollywood production studios, tend to be overstuffed. This is reflected in performance standards that demand long internships for participations, such as highly educated employees working without wages as interns doing menial tasks like fetching the refreshments for members of performers' entourages. It would seem that the EOR would be affected by relative staffing levels. For example, in understaffed settings, the selection and performance standards may be so low that some participants have no psychological sense of a relationship with the organization at all. They are working because they support the organization's goals, and the organization, as such, may not be salient to them. By contrast, in overstuffed organizations, the organization, and its agents, may be extremely important to participants. Research on how desirable the jobs are, and thus how under- or overstuffed the organization may be, promises to be influential for employees' relationships with their organizations.

ASSUMPTION 5: PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTAND THEIR PARTICIPATION AS AN INDUCEMENT–CONTRIBUTION EXCHANGE

Rarely do volunteers see their participation in quid pro quo inducement–contribution exchange terms. Volunteer–organization relationships more often are dominated by social exchange normative expectations, helping to illuminate the relative lack of attention to the social exchange aspects of EORs. EOR scholarship, despite formally including both economic and social exchange, has focused largely on inducements and contributions to understand these relationships. Only recently have scholars begun to address social exchange, usually within the context of research reporting that Chinese employees have a longer term orientation in exchange (a feature of some definitions of social exchange) than cultures such as the Dutch, who focus more on whether immediate exchanges have been reciprocated (see Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen, & Tetrick, 2009, for a review). This increasing attention to social exchange is a positive trend, one that can be furthered by attention to the ways differing definitions of social exchange have been limiting its study in EOR research. Clarifying the definitional distinctions in social exchange and drawing on examples of volunteers' varying types of social exchange relationships with their organizations can help bring social exchange more completely into EOR scholarship.

Pearce and Peters (1985) proposed that normative expectations for EORs were characterized by contradictory normative expectations: profit maximization, equity (in which participants receive inducements commensurate with their contributions), equality (all participants receive the same inducements regardless of their contributions), and need (in which participants receive the inducements they need, regardless of
their contributions). What EOR scholars call economic exchange would encompass profit maximization and equity normative expectations. Pearce and Peters (1985) proposed that despite the overwhelming scholarly framing of EORs as economic or equity exchanges in the organizational behavior literature, many employee–organization exchanges also had characteristics of equality and need-based exchanges. For example, health care benefits are usually offered equally to all employees and not based on equity (their relative contributions) or need (those who have more health problems receive more generous coverage). In the transition from communism, many companies took care in these countries not to lay off both a husband and wife, which was a decision based on employees’ needs, not on their relative contributions or on an equality normative expectation like seniority (Pearce, 2001). In summary, social exchange in organizations can include equity, equality, and need normative expectations.

Blau (1964) is the most widely referenced social exchange theorist in EOR research, but his definition of social exchange has been criticized as overly narrow by other exchange scholars. Blau assumed that social exchanges are governed by equity-based expectations, an assumption that has continued to dominate EOR research. He built on what Malinowski (1922) called a gift exchange; in gift exchanges, the exchange objects symbolize the nature of the relationship, a relationship that can be damaged if one partner treats the exchange as a quid pro quo or economic exchange. In Blau’s famous example, when one couple rushes too quickly to reciprocate a dinner invitation, the too-quick couple signals that they want to discharge the obligation in order to avoid an open-ended social relationship with the other couple. Placing an emphasis on the dinner as an economic exchange that must be reciprocated in kind signals that the reciprocating couple sees the relationship as an economic one, not a relationship valued in its own right.

Certainly, many volunteers have relationships closer to Blau’s (1964) pure social exchange than to the pure inducements–contributions exchange that dominates EOR research. Yet it is not just that volunteers may be more concerned with the exchange of symbols, but that the normative expectations governing the exchanges are broader than simple profit maximization or equity exchange. Volunteers often recoil from framing their relationships to their organizations as economic arrangements. They were most likely to join because of a prior social relationship and often see their work in terms of those relationships or the community services they provide. That does not mean that there are never any inducements; Starnes and Iyer (2009) found that volunteers do see their relationships with their organizations as having economic exchange features. Volunteers who perceived that their organizations had breached their psychological contracts or were inequitable reduced the hours they worked for the organizations in subsequent months. It is not that volunteers are unconcerned with equity (and in some cases, with economic gain) but that these features present too narrow a picture of their exchange relationship with their organizations.

Goffman (1961) characterizes social exchanges somewhat differently than does Blau (1964), by emphasizing need-based exchange rather than equity. His notion of social exchange is one where what is offered in exchange is what the other party needs (Goffman, 1961, pp. 275–276). Certainly, volunteers who work because they believe the organization needs them to achieve its goals seem to fit more with Goffman’s conception of social exchange than Blau’s equity-based version. In fact, Pearce (1993) reported that a volunteer-staffed organization that collapsed during data collection (the college student newspaper) did so because volunteers felt that no one even noticed whether or not they showed up for work. The organization did not appear to need them, and that, not any lack of inducements, ill treatment, or betrayal, was what led these volunteers to quit the organization en masse.

Finally, Ekeh (1974) argued that the social exchange of Homans (1961) and Blau (1964) was too individualistic, focusing on the relationship between the two exchange parties alone. Ekeh proposed that Malinowski’s (1922) insight was that exchange could support a larger set of community relationships, rather than the particular two parties to the exchange. That is, exchange can take place not solely in the interests of the individual parties directly involved in the exchange, but as between representatives of communities, with the exchanges intended to symbolize and support the relationship between the communities and not the individuals themselves.

Ekeh’s (1974) conceptualization of social exchange is reflected in what Sills (1957) terms “joiners,” who are volunteers active in many community activities. They saw themselves in a relationship with their communities, not responding to any inducement offered by a particular organization. There are many examples of volunteers who contribute their labor to organizations not because of personal inducements or even to meet a need, but
as representatives of a community. For example, many religious groups send members to nonprofits to help with contributions such as soup kitchens or building houses for the poor. These volunteers do not see their relationships as with the organization supervising their work, but instead see themselves as representatives of their religious group and its support for the community. In this case, their religious identity overshadows their organizational one.

In many circumstances, the organization and the inducements the organization provides for volunteers' relationships with it are not in the foreground of volunteers' participation. The organization may be a means to an end, it may be a gathering place for people with whom the volunteers want to socialize, or it can be a vehicle for demonstrating something important about the volunteers' relationships with other organizations or their communities. A surprisingly large number of volunteers think very little of their organizations as entities with which they have relationships. For example, many of the volunteers interviewed for the Pearce (1993) study described earlier could not give the correct name of the organization, but thought of it as an extension of work they did for another group (e.g., their church or school), or could identify it only by the name of the organization's leader. This is consistent with the argument of Ashforth and Rogers (Chapter 2, this volume) that employees may see themselves more in relation to the "tribes" to which they belong, tribes that may be within or across organizational boundaries.

Peters and Pearce (1985) argued that framing EORs as either an economic or equity exchange can be dysfunctional. The ambiguity of many of the contributions required of employees and uncertainty about what might be required in the future make the rigid use of economic and equity exchanges between organizations and their employees difficult. I would propose that, following Goffman (1961) and Ekeh (1974), viewing EORs as primarily inducement-contribution relationships, with an emphasis on what inducements the organization needs to provide, is dysfunctional for both these relationships and our understanding of them. Each of their perspectives on social exchange illuminates some aspect of volunteers' relationships with their organizations, relationships that may well characterize many EORs. Social exchange appears to be more complex than economic exchange, and reducing social exchange to its individualistic quid pro quo components risks misunderstanding this important component of many EORs.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief discussion of volunteer-organization relationships is intended to draw attention to and, I hope, to make more problematic five assumptions implicit in much of the EOR literature. First, many volunteers are often unclear about their relationships with their organizations. Very few volunteers have actively sought out and chosen their particular organizations; most are brought in by family members or friends. As the volunteer quoted in the beginning of this chapter noted, volunteers do not know why they volunteer, so they make assumptions that may be artificially reified by direct questions about their relationships with their organizations. This at least raises the question of how clear employees may be about their relationships with their organizations; those studying early EORs may be assuming rationality that may not be there. The long history of research on Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) has demonstrated that employees are rarely hyperrational calculating machines, and a good number of employees, like volunteers, may simply not have thought much about their organizational relationships until a researcher asks them a question that requires a socially acceptable response. Research in EOR might benefit from seeking to understand to what extent employees do perceive that they have an EOR, rather than assuming it.

Second, volunteers arrive at their organizations for many different reasons, and so even coworkers doing the same work will evaluate what the organization provides in quite different ways. Much EOR research has studied the average responses of large groups of employees, linking these average responses to job or organizational policies and practices. The extreme heterogeneity of volunteers' reasons for working reminds us that employees also have different reasons for working. We may all assume that they are doing it because they have to make a living, but their motives and expectations may be more variable and inchoate than that. It simply is not clear how important the organization and its policies and practices are to all employees' participation. Research in EOR might benefit from a more careful examination of what matters most to employees.

Third, volunteers are rarely very dependent on their organizations and so may have very little psychological relationship with it. Many employees, too, may be only lightly dependent on their organization, and this has implications for their relationships with their organizations. Many EOR
scholars assume that employees are the weaker, dependent party and must tolerate the situation (or undertake a costly job search) if they do not like what the organization provides. Looking at volunteer-organization relationships reminds us that employees also vary in their relative dependence on their organizations, and this can have important EOR implications that have not yet been explored.

Fourth, volunteer-staffed workplaces usually are understaffed, resulting in low barriers to entry and weak performance demands. For some volunteers, this can result in organizational participation so slight and undemanding that the organization virtually disappears as an entity with which they have a psychological relationship. While understaffing is stark in volunteer-staffed organizations, under- and overstaffing does occur in employee-staffed workplaces. Here I proposed that relative staffing levels can have significant effects on volunteer-organization relationships, something that may well generalize to EORs.

Finally, EOR research is dominated by an inducements-contributions framing of the relationship. A purely economic exchange is starkly inappropriate for volunteers, and so the various normative expectations at play in their relationships help to illustrate the value of a more complete understanding of social exchange. Many volunteers see their relationships as primarily with their coworkers, their communities, or the mission they work to support. Very few volunteers sought out their organizations and are much more likely to be working there because of preexisting social relationships. Many employees also take jobs without rationally weighing the inducements and contributions and then remain because it is not intolerable or their attention is focused elsewhere. A better understanding of the nonutilitarian aspects of their relationships with their organizations would seem to be a promising area of research.

It is clear that most of the data on which this argument has been based is from North America, but it is unclear how much of it extends to other cultures. Much of the work on volunteers' organizational relationships has occurred in the individualistic cultures of Northern Europe, and certainly the meaning of volunteer work can vary a great deal in different cultures. For example, recruitment via friends and family, which is so dominant in North America, may be less common elsewhere. This argument's emphasis on differences in dependence, and equality and need-based normative expectations, may be particularly welcome in more collectivistic cultures. For example, Chinese guanxi has been described as a complex relationship with both utilitarian and social relationship features (Xin & Pearce, 1996), making the conventional individualistic inducements-contributions framework particularly inappropriate there.

Although this chapter has addressed EOR scholars, it has notable practical implications. For example, much of EOR attention has focused on organization-wide inducements like training or benefits. Yet, the differing motives and more complex organizational relationships of volunteers suggest that an important feature of the EOR for employees may be out of the organization's control. For example, supervisors will have more detailed knowledge of what their subordinates value in their employment relationships and can try to make those differing inducements available to their employees. Similarly, supervisors usually are acutely aware of those situations when key subordinates are not dependent on the organization and often get very frustrated trying to allocate compensation or opportunities in ways that centralized human resources staff members would prefer be allocated in more egalitarian ways. In general, this examination of volunteers' relationships with their organizations suggests a less centralized, more particularized approach to employees.

In conclusion, an examination of volunteer-organization relationships suggests several important moderators that have not been considered in EOR research. The degree to which employees actually perceive and attend to their relationships with their organizations as something meaningful in their workplaces, their dependence on the organization, and the relative staffing levels of the workplace all show promise in helping us to better understand EORs. In addition, the relative emphasis on the economic aspects of the employee-organization exchange to the neglect of the social aspects can be redressed with a clearer understanding of the differing perspectives on social exchange. Volunteers do a lot of organizational work, and attention to their organizational relationships is valuable in its own right, as well as for how it helps us see EORs from a new perspective.

REFERENCES