

Bridging Volunteer Competence and Retention Within the Malaysian National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA): A Conceptual Framework Integrating SCT and OST

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, volunteer involvement is a key pillar for the sustainability of community-based social initiatives particularly within the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) ecosystem. Volunteers in this specific setting have a wide range of responsibilities that include drug prevention, recovery support and social reintegration at the grassroots level. Although current literature confirms that specialized knowledge and situational adaptability drive short term performance, these characteristics alone rarely guarantee long-term volunteer retention. To bridge this gap, this conceptual study combines Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Organizational Socialization Theory (OST) to propose a theoretical framework by positioning communication as the key connecting pathway that translates basic volunteer competencies into ongoing psychological and behavioural commitments. Specifically, SCT explains how individuals improve their abilities through observational learning and self-efficacy, whereas OST explains how structured socialization processes reduce role uncertainty to accelerate cultural adaptation. By linking these two paradigms, the proposed framework clearly links volunteer competencies, communication and retention. This study details how feedback mechanisms, peer support networks and role clarity act as key drivers for strong organizational communication. Finally, this conceptual model provides a solid theoretical foundation for future empirical qualitative investigations while offering practical guidance for more optimal strategic alignment of volunteer program and retention management.

Keywords: communication, engagement, organization, social, volunteer

1. Introduction

Globally, the sustainability of community-based programs is highly dependent on the level of actual involvement of volunteers (Brudney & Meijs, 2014). This involvement is a deep integration between passion for the organization's mission and consistent behavioural commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). In the context of community work in Malaysia, volunteers of the NADA are the backbone that drives the agency's mission. They serve as a very valuable social capital especially for initiatives that require a deep humanitarian approach. Their role as strategic partners strengthens NADA's vision through contributions to drug rehabilitation programs, outreach activities and client recovery support. This field of work is very challenging because it requires a

balance between peer support, strategic planning and high emotional intelligence to handle sensitive cases.

A volunteer's long-term success and commitment is usually determined by their level of individual competence (Benevene et al., 2024). This includes mastery of knowledge, practical competency and possession of the right mindset. When volunteers have a combination of knowledge and resilience, they tend to remain active and more efficient in carrying out their responsibilities (Clary et al., 1998). The application of appropriate competency helps volunteers understand the objectives of the program and are able to cope with the unpredictable nature of fieldwork. However, there is a frequently overlooked gap such as the presence of talent alone does not guarantee long-term volunteer retention. Even the most capable volunteers risk feeling lost and ultimately withdrawing from the organization without a systematic knowledge sharing mechanism or clear role expectations in program management (Stukas et al., 2016).

In this interaction, communication emerges as the most important relationship. Communication serves as the main pulse that determines the effectiveness of leadership and the smooth flow of information through formal channels in the NADA volunteer entity. A smooth flow of communication allows volunteers to understand their specific roles while building a sense of belonging to the organization's mission. At the same time, it creates a supportive environment where volunteers can depend on each other and improve practical competency through observing the actions of teammates in the field. Based on SCT, this interaction proves that the human learning process does not occur separately but rather they refine action strategies through observing others and receiving feedback from the environment (Bandura, 1986). Therefore, communication acts as a critical medium that activates hidden competencies into tangible and committed actions (Hamkar et al., 2024).

While this element is acknowledged to be important, a comprehensive picture of how communication converts individual talents into long-term commitments has yet to be widely explored especially in the Malaysian context. Most existing studies tend to focus solely on individual personality traits or management styles but often ignore the actual process of how volunteers adapt and build strong relationships with the organization (Morrison, 2002; Cho et al., 2024). This study fills this critical gap by highlighting communication as the key bonding that unites all components of involvement.

By integrating SCT and OST, this study examines how volunteers translate individual competency into collective strengths that benefit the community as a whole. Through the lens of SCT, we can see the mutual relationship between volunteers and their environment where continuous feedback drives their professional growth (Bandura, 1986; Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002). At the same time, OST provides a perspective on the evolutionary journey of volunteers from 'outsiders' to truly integrated members of the entity (Traeger et al., 2022). In the final stage, volunteers reach a value equivalence phase where their personal identity aligns with the institutional mission (Chao et al., 1994). Through this approach, a deeper understanding of NADA volunteers' dedication can be gained through clear communication and a high sense of belonging.

1.1 Problem Statement

The NADA volunteers spearhead highly sensitive community-based programs targeting drug prevention, recovery support and social reintegration. Despite this critical reliance, the agency faces a persistent and destabilizing challenge in retaining its volunteers over the long-term. Current operational frameworks within the Malaysian social sector place too much emphasis on initial

recruitment drives. They also focus extensively on brief and standardized training modules. These initial efforts are not sufficient for securing long-term commitment. This traditional approach does provide volunteers with fundamental, localized knowledge and immediate field competencies. However, existing empirical literature demonstrates that isolated skill acquisition and situational adaptability are insufficient predictors of long-term volunteer longevity (Stukas et al., 2016).

Consequently, NADA experiences an unsustainable attrition rate. Highly capable individuals routinely withdraw from service after completing only short-term deployments. This high turnover rate drains institutional resources because the agency must run continuous retraining cycles. It also severely disrupts the continuity of rehabilitation programs. In the field of anti-drug advocacy, successful rehabilitation depends entirely on long-term relationships as it requires high levels of community trust that deeply rooted in the concept of social trust. This critical trust cannot be maintained when the volunteer workforce is constantly changing.

The root of this problem lies in a profound structural and conceptual disconnection. There is a clear gap between individual volunteer capability and the institutional environment. In the demanding landscape of anti-drug initiatives, capability does not function independently of environmental factors. Volunteers may possess the psychological resilience and theoretical knowledge necessary to address substance abuse issues. Even so, they are frequently thrust into complex and unpredictable field environments. They often work without systematic knowledge sharing pathways or clear role expectations.

This specific frontline setting requires an exceptional balance of peer support, strategic planning and high emotional intelligence to handle sensitive cases effectively. Yet, volunteers are often left to navigate these daily complexities in isolation. This lack of structured socialization processes fosters acute role ambiguity and cognitive fatigue. Over time, these negative factors diminish a volunteer's self-efficacy. Furthermore, standard organizational assessments in Malaysia frequently overlook the relational dynamics of the volunteer journey. They choose instead to focus almost exclusively on static personality traits or top down bureaucratic management styles (Morrison, 2002). Current management strategies ignore the socialization processes through which an outsider transitions into a deeply integrated organizational member. Because of this oversight, they fail to cultivate a sustainable sense of belonging and value alignment.

Crucially, existing empirical research has failed to adequately address the underlying mechanisms that drive retention. There is a lack of focus on how raw individual competence translates into long-term behavioural and psychological commitment within the Malaysian context. This conceptual gap is particularly evident regarding the role of organizational communication as an active catalyst. According to SCT, human learning and behaviour modification do not occur in isolation. Instead, they are constantly shaped through environmental feedback and observational modelling (Bandura, 1986). Within NADA, communication functions as the essential operational pulse. It is the vehicle through which peer support networks, feedback mechanisms and role clarity are established.

The distinct competencies possessed by volunteers are frequently left dormant when multi directional communication channels are lacking. This shortfall leads directly to a sense of professional alienation. A lack of structured communication prevents volunteers from reaching the crucial value equivalence phase. This is the stage where their personal identity fully aligns with the institutional mission (Chao et al., 1994). Consequently, a critical gap remains in understanding the underlying relational mechanisms that translate dormant individual capacities into long-term

organizational longevity. To address this structural and conceptual disconnection, this paper adopts a qualitative theoretical approach to explore volunteer commitment within the NADA.

Specifically, this study aims to critically explore how specialized knowledge and situational adaptability shape the internal self-efficacy of volunteers through the lens of SCT. Furthermore, it examines how structured socialization experiences reduce role uncertainty under Organizational Socialization Theory. This includes the strategic integration of field feedback, peer networks, and role clarity. Ultimately, this paper conceptualizes a novel theoretical framework that positions organizational communication as the critical bridging pathway. This pathway transforms basic volunteer attributes into sustained behavioural commitment. By doing so, the study establishes a theoretical foundation for future empirical qualitative investigations while providing practical guidance for the strategic management of volunteer retention.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This conceptual framework offers significant dual sided implications for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, this study integrates individual cognitive domains from SCT with environmental socialization processes from OST (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002). By introducing organizational communication as a dynamic integration bridge, this research addresses a critical conceptual gap that remains largely unexplored within the local Malaysian literature.

From a practical perspective, this qualitative synthesis serves as a strategic guide for NADA management to design sustainable post training systems. These initiatives help prevent the underutilization of grassroots talents and reduce the high attrition rate among community volunteers. Consequently, stabilizing the volunteer workforce helps preserve high levels of community trust, known locally as social trust. This deep social trust is vital for substance rehabilitation programs but can only be sustained through a consistent and deeply committed institutional presence (Stukas et al., 2016).

1.3 Scope and Conceptual Boundaries

This conceptual paper narrows its analytical scope specifically to the volunteer ecosystem within the NADA in Malaysia. This specific boundary was chosen because the community-based drug rehabilitation environment possesses unique operational challenges. Unlike general welfare or disaster relief volunteering, anti-drug initiatives are heavily entangled with deep societal stigma, acute emotional risks and strict case confidentiality.

Therefore, the dual theory integration of SCT and OST proposed in this article is formulated specifically for this sensitive environment. It explicitly captures how organizational communication responds to high stakes frontline situations. Consequently, this framework focuses purely on this specialized sector and does not intend to generalize or represent the broader volunteer landscape. By maintaining this precise scope, the study safeguards the development of high levels of public trust or social trust. This profound trust is a necessary prerequisite for effective grassroots drug rehabilitation but is highly sensitive to the consistency and professionalism of the volunteers involved (Stukas et al., 2016).

1.4 Structure of the Paper

To provide a systematic and logical understanding for readers, this article is organized according to a structured theoretical narrative. The next section, Section 2, provides a critical literature review

focusing on fundamental volunteer competencies. This section also explores the core tenets of SCT and the operational concepts of OST (Bandura, 1986; Chao et al., 1994).

Following this review, the paper presents a synthesized academic argument that directly links multi-directional communication pathways with long-term volunteer retention. Finally, the article concludes by presenting the newly proposed conceptual framework model alongside strategic recommendations for future empirical qualitative investigations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Volunteer Involvement and Its Determinants

Volunteer involvement is not just physical presence in a program but rather a form of self-motivated involvement that deeply connects individuals with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). In the context of the NADA, this involvement is the essential of the community-based recovery process for clients. It serves as the main mechanism that translates clinical interventions into a sustainable social integration process. This goes beyond mere participation in a task because it requires volunteers to be emotionally and mentally involved with the agency's mission in removing the drug abuse crisis (Saks, 2006). There is a significant difference between volunteers who are merely participating and those who truly make a commitment. Some individuals may join the program out of commitment or simply to fill their free time but true involvement is a phase in which volunteers give their whole soul, mind and energy into their role. This level of involvement is shaped by a variety of factors ranging from the individual's personal motivation, perceptions of organizational support and the clarity of culture and expectations shared by the agency towards them (Clary et al., 1998).

Research in the social service sector confirms that high involvement is a key driver of service sustainability and volunteer excellence. In the context of community-based programs, ongoing involvement allows volunteers to provide the high level of support needed to effectively address complex social challenges. In the formal work environment of NADA, volunteers frequently interact with sensitive target groups under very challenging circumstances. In such situations, having a deep and sincere sense of involvement acts as a critical key driver of resilience. This internal commitment serves as a protective layer that helps volunteers maintain their emotional strength while allowing them to keep going despite facing various competency challenges that can lead to mental exhaustion or professional burnout.

By shifting the focus from basic personality traits to the interaction between volunteer competency and organizational needs, we can identify specific retention challenges that lead to low involvement. A narrow focus on individual personality fails to reflect the practical reality of volunteer work that requires specific competencies to function within a structured framework. Therefore, many researchers propose a broader perspective through a study of how gaps in individual competence prevent volunteers from translating their noble intentions into real social impact. This conceptual investigation confirms that the dynamics of volunteer engagement are not rigid straight lines, but rather an evolutionary cycle influenced by the alignment between the practical efforts of the individual and the demands of the organizational ecosystem (Chao et al., 1994).

2.2 Competencies: The Key Instrument of the Task

Based on this perspective, experts consistently state the need for a broader perspective to understand how individual abilities are not simply possessed but are translated into practice through teamwork involvement. This is in line with the direction of this study where competence should not be seen as a static and isolated personality trait but rather as a quality that lives in the social system. In the scope of this discourse, competence is elevated as the basic human capital that volunteers bring to the agency. This manifestation of human capital goes beyond the possession of formal certificates and it demands harmony between local wisdom, a combination of practical competency, knowledge and a proactive attitude towards community issues (Brudney & Meijs, 2014). Therefore, when volunteers lack the integration between these knowledge and competency, they are unable to provide the human capital needed for the agency's programs which ultimately leads to a decline in their involvement.

2.2.1 Scope of Volunteer Competencies

In the specific NADA operational environment, being competent involves more than just basic knowledge or administrative competency. It requires a deep understanding of specialized knowledge including addiction science, the limitations of drug control laws as well as the psychosocial demands of the recovery support role. Current literature suggests that in a social service environment, soft competency have greater weighting than purely technical knowledge. Qualities such as genuine empathy and the capacity to remain calm under pressure are essential for interacting with sensitive populations.

This study highlights that many volunteers face gaps in these competencies that lead directly to low involvement. As described by researchers such as Bakker & Demerouti (2007), volunteers find the psychosocial demands of the role too difficult to handle. In light of the current study, such qualities are particularly needed for volunteers serving under NADA where involvement involves individuals facing substance abuse and related psychosocial crises.

Therefore, the decline in involvement observed in this study is likely the result of volunteers feeling less competency in this soft aspect which leaves them feeling unprepared for the day to day realities of community-based services. These adaptive competencies allow volunteers to handle emotionally sensitive cases while navigating the complex social layers of communities impacted by substance abuse. Research by (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015) shows that specialized expertise is a vital factor for success in high pressure environments. My study highlights that when volunteers lack these competencies, they fail to develop a strong sense of self efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), this firmly held belief in one's personal capability is exactly what drives individuals to create meaningful change during challenging times. Without this confidence, volunteers frequently struggle with feelings of inadequacy which eventually leads to burnout and withdrawal. Theoretically, the phenomenon of decreased volunteer engagement and retention can be formulated as a psychological reaction resulting from a sudden self-efficacy deficit (Bandura, 1997). Without the inner confidence to navigate the complex and stigmatized drug rehabilitation cases, volunteers are likely to experience professional burnout, ultimately leading to the decision to withdraw from the field.

2.2.2 Volunteers' Internal Struggles over Competence

A key piece of evidence in this study shows that the mere possession of basic competency is not a strong enough foundation to ensure long-term volunteer involvement. This phenomenon often

leads to what is known as competency mismatch where individuals who initially appear qualified begin to withdraw because they do not possess the specific professional competencies required for high pressure intervention tasks. Referring to research by Clary et al. (1998), this situation occurs when there is a significant gap between the volunteers' actual capabilities and the cultural demands and roles assigned to them. When volunteers begin to feel that they are not competent enough to shoulder these professional responsibilities, they tend to experience dissatisfaction and a decrease in motivation that ultimately leads them to leave the service altogether. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the apparent decline in involvement is not a failure of the organizational or agency structure itself but rather a direct reflection of the volunteers' internal struggles to master the specific competencies required to carry out the tasks effectively.

This finding is in line with the Job Demands Resources Model which suggests that personal competencies must be supported by the right organizational resources to translate into effective job performance. According to studies by Bakker and Demerouti (2017), this model emphasizes that a supportive environment through the provision of frequent feedback and psychological encouragement is essential to convert individual potential into tangible results. In this theoretical framework, organizational processes serve as an important bridge connecting volunteers' competencies with their level of involvement. Therefore, effective communication is identified as a key enabling factor that activates volunteers' hidden strengths and converts them into lasting contributions to the institution while retaining the involvements. This study argues that when a volunteer lacks these basic competencies, even the best organizational resources will not be able to prevent the decline in motivation that leads to low levels of involvement.

2.3 Communication as an Engine Driving the Process

In general, communication is defined as a systematic method by which meaning is created and shared within a social group. In organizations that rely on volunteer energy, this element functions as an instrument of formal recognition as well as a deeply personal process that influences the way individuals manage and understand their specific tasks. In this study, communication is seen as a complex structure that combines organizational rules with interpersonal interactions. It encompasses a variety of activities, ranging from formal methods such as strategic briefings and official policy documents, to informal moments such as peer mentoring and the natural sharing of field knowledge between volunteers. This dual functional nature of communication is particularly important in the environment of the NADA, where volunteers are required to address sensitive and dynamic community issues. Strong communication ensures that volunteers are always informed, properly guided and continuously supported while delivering their services. In addition, it plays a vital role in ensuring that individual efforts are aligned with organizational goals which ultimately makes the overall program more unified and successful. This research suggests that without a clear flow of information, volunteers are more likely to feel less competent which in turn leads to lower levels of involvement as observed in this study.

2.3.1 Structural Communication vs. Interpersonal Communication

Structural communication serves as the operational backbone of an organization by providing the clarity, consistency and direction needed for all levels of involvement. Its primary goal is to eliminate any confusion during task execution by clearly defining Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and setting out clear requirements regarding daily agency tasks, responsibilities and performance targets. In the NADA framework, such clarity is critical as volunteers must have a clear understanding of the legal limitations and scope of their work. For example, agencies need to provide clear expectations such as the number of home visits required per month or the right

protocols for handling sensitive client data. This knowledge is not only important for regulatory compliance but is also necessary to build confidence and psychological safety as volunteers carry out their duties in challenging field environments. This study shows that when this structure is absent, volunteers are more likely to feel incompetent which ultimately discourages them from continuing to engage.

In contrast, interpersonal communication represents the human and relational dimensions of an organization's operations. Through frequent interactions, informal dialogue and supportive feedback systems, trust can be built and maintained among team members. This ongoing exchange of information fosters professional connections, emotional support and mutual understanding, all of which are essential elements of effective teamwork. By engaging in consistent daily interactions and reflective feedback cycles, volunteers can develop trustworthy working relationships that ultimately enhance organizational success and the quality of service delivery

2.3.2 The Role of Communication as an Active Relationship Mechanism

Previous volunteer management literature has largely emphasized communication as a passive backdrop to management. However, within this discourse framework, communication is repositioned as a reference for active transformation. Organizational communication does not function linearly as a rigid enabler of change but rather acts as a proxy that translates the latent potential competence of NADA volunteers into actual forms of restorative action. Through ongoing feedback and two-way dialogue, the gap between individual technical capabilities and expectations of reality in this field can be closed without the need for conventional statistical tests.

2.4 Deep Integration of SCT

SCT introduced by Albert Bandura (1986), provides a powerful lens through which to examine the internal dialogue that occurs within a volunteer. The essence of this theory lies in the concept of personal, behavioural and environmental factors that suggest that an individual's thought patterns, their external actions and their surroundings constantly influence each other in a continuous cycle. For a volunteer at NADA, this means that their sense of competence is not static but is constantly shaped by the feedback they receive and the successes they observe in their work environment.

2.4.1 Learning Through Observation

SCT suggests that individuals not only learn through their own mistakes but also by imitating or modelling the behaviour of others (Bandura, 1977). In the professional environment at NADA, communication serves as a key bridge for this observational learning process. When a new volunteer observes a veteran mentor handling a difficult client with patience and expertise, they are witnessing an effective act of communication.

The volunteer will observe the specific techniques used, process the information and then try to adapt those actions to increase their own level of competence. Therefore, mentoring programs and training workshops are not just social gatherings but rather important social spaces where tacit knowledge is passed down through explicit communication (Stukas et al., 2016). By observing this professional model, volunteers can overcome their initial lack of competence and build the confidence needed for long-term involvement.

2.4.2 Building Confidence Through Verbal Communication

Self-efficacy which refers to an individual's internal belief in their ability to take on responsibilities, does not emerge in isolation. Rather, it is strongly influenced by social persuasion, a concept in communication that refers to the verbal influence of others on our perceptions of ourselves. When a coordinator provides constructive advice or a teammate offers sincere words of support, they are actually engaging in a form of communicative reinforcement that directly strengthens the volunteer's confidence (Bandura, 1997). In the challenging and often emotionally testing environment of drug rehabilitation, this consistent verbal encouragement serves as an important fuel that prevents volunteers from withdrawing. My research shows that for those struggling with initial lack of competence, such positive communication exchanges are vital to maintaining the motivation needed to remain active in the program.

2.4.3 Cognitive Processing of Communication

SCT also emphasizes that volunteers are not just passive listeners but rather active thinkers who interpret every interaction. Individuals with higher levels of professional competence are typically more effective at interpreting complex messages and information issued by agencies. They are able to understand the strategic intent behind a new policy or procedure, while less experienced and less competent individuals may view the same messages as an unnecessary administrative burden. This suggests that communication and competence work as a two-way street; where being competent allows individuals to process information more effectively, while better communication allows volunteers to showcase their true capabilities (Bandura, 1986). By improving the way messages are communicated and processed, agencies can help volunteers overcome feelings of inadequacy and foster a deeper sense of institutional belonging.

2.5 OST of The Journey to a Sense of Belonging

While SCT examines the relationship between cognition and behaviour, OST focuses on the sociological development of a volunteer. This framework describes the transformation that individuals experience as they move from being complete "outsiders" to being trusted "insiders," through a process of gradually internalizing the culture and values of the agency's organization (Chao et al., 1994).

2.5.1 Stages of Adaptation

This socialization process does not occur abruptly but rather is a series of interconnected stages where each phase relies on a specific mode of communication, such as anticipatory socialization, encounter stage and role management.

Anticipatory Socialization: This phase begins before volunteers formally joins the organization. The way the recruitment announcement is framed and the tone of the initial interview greatly influences expectations of the role (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Cognitive dissonance in this phase often leads to professional discouragement which acts as a major driver of premature resignation among newly hired volunteers. In the context of NADA, if anticipatory communication fails to provide a realistic picture of the work, the resulting uncertainty often increases the perception of a lack of competence in the volunteer and ultimately leads to low levels of involvement.

Encounter Stage: This period represents a critical stage for institutional communication. Upon beginning service, volunteers often experience a deep sense of role uncertainty and confusion.

During this phase, formal orientation programs and informal dialogues between peers serve as important mechanisms for eliminating this uncertainty (Morrison, 2002). For volunteers at NADA, this is the stage where the gap between existing competencies and the required competency set becomes most apparent.

Role Management: Once volunteers have integrated into the organization, they enter a phase of professional identity refinement. Ongoing dialogue with leadership allows these individuals to adapt the application of their competency to meet the evolving operational needs of the agency (Ashforth et al., 2007).

2.5.2 Communication through Culture and Symbols

OST emphasizes that communication involves more than the mechanical dissemination of data. It serves as a fundamental process in the construction of a healthy organizational culture. In this framework, communication is not simply a mechanism for transferring information but rather acts as a symbolic narrative that transmits the agency's core values and institutional identity to new members. Through the documentation of past successes, the performance of ceremonial rituals and the consistent use of mission-oriented discourse, NADA provides clear signals about its priorities and key expectations. When a volunteer's efforts are recognized through these shared cultural symbols, it helps establish their social identity. As a result, their sense of belonging to the institution deepens and effectively transforms their personal identity into one that is intrinsically aligned with the organization's strategic success.

2.5.3 Connecting Systems to Individuals

The primary purpose of OST lies in recognizing both the structural and personal dimensions of organizational involvement. Structural communication which includes standard orientation policy manuals and procedures, serves as a framework of clarity that ensures all participants understand the established rules of governance and operating protocols. At the same time, interpersonal communication, such as mentoring and peer support networks, acts as a vital emotional foundation for maintaining the connection between the individual and the collective. In a complex and sensitive environment such as NADA, this dual function pathway approach is the only viable method to ensure that volunteer capabilities are not just individual strengths but are successfully converted into valuable institutional assets.

2.5.4 Normative and Relational Power of Communication

A key principle in OST suggests that communication functions beyond the exchange of basic information. It is a fundamentally personal process deeply rooted in cultural context. In this framework, volunteers do not simply follow technical instructions provided by the agency. Instead, they go through a process of internalizing specific methods and values that allow them to represent the identity of the institution. The evolutionary path of normative integration within an organization is significantly strengthened through symbolic communication. This communicative approach brings together institutional narratives, historical successes and strategically established organizational rituals to create a clear and recognizable corporate persona (Chao et al., 1994).

Within the operating framework of an agency like NADA, such communication goes beyond simply giving directions. It fosters a sense of coherence that aligns personal values with the agency's broader mandate. By documenting successes through a collective narrative, the organization provides a strategy for new members to navigate their own professional growth. In

effect, this alignment ensures that the transition from newcomer to committed supporter is a smooth and meaningful experience, while strengthening the psychological bond between the volunteer and the agency's mission (Bakar & McCann, 2016).

2.6 Integrating SCT and OST as an Integrated Conceptual Model

The integration of SCT and OST provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individual potential develops into strong organizational loyalty. SCT identifies behavioural actions that lead to change, particularly how self-efficacy and observational modelling drive concrete actions. Meanwhile, OST outlines the developmental sequence and communicative environment that helps a volunteer transition to become an integral member of the organization.

2.6.1 Communication Converts Strategic Goals into Practical Behaviour

In this integrated model, communication serves as a fundamental instrument for activating the potential of individual volunteers. An individual may join NADA with significant expertise but those talents will remain latent without the transformative influence of an effective socialization process. A communicative environment characterized by openness, constructive feedback and active dialogue is an element that certainly provides opportunities for volunteers to learn through observational modelling. In addition, such environments provide the social reinforcement needed to validate their capabilities and encourage commitment to serve in the long-term (Bandura, 1997).

2.6.2 The Influence of Experience on Service Sustainability

The model also suggests that a volunteer's needs undergo significant transitional phases as they progress through various levels of service. For new members, formal and structured communication serves as a critical lifeline as standard operating procedures are essential to navigate sensitive stages in the volunteer journey as they are still finding their way in. These formal protocols are essential to reduce structural uncertainty in the early stages and provide clear direction to individuals who are still facing major difficulties in their roles. By providing a solid foundation of clarity, agencies ensure that the transition from novice to contributing member is based on a defined institutional framework. Therefore, this process builds the trust needed to create long-term psychological commitment (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

2.6.3 Digital Platforms as Modern Socialization Tools

Recent research shows that digital technologies, including platforms such as WhatsApp or Telegram, now function as highly influential agents of organizational socialization. These digital tools facilitate the observation of peer performance and enable rapid dissemination of information. In the modern Malaysian landscape, such platforms accelerate the processes inherent in both SCT and OST theories. By fostering real time connectivity, these tools enable volunteers to build a sense of belonging to an institution much more quickly than through traditional administrative methods alone.

2.6.4 The Importance of Communication Climate

Communication climate essentially refers to the psychological safety and quality of information exchange within an agency. In an open environment, efforts to translate individual talents into agency level outcomes are much more effective. This is because volunteers feel empowered to

speak up, share their concerns and refine their strategies through honest discussions with their peers and leaders (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Existing research suggests that although the relationship between competence and volunteer engagement shows a subtle relationship, the influence of a healthy communication climate has been shown to have a profound impact on the organizational ecosystem. The uniqueness of this conceptual paper lies in its emphasis on communication as an instrument of social bonding. Following the dual theoretical lens involving SCT and OST, volunteer engagement is no longer seen as an isolated internal trait, but rather as a direct result of an agency's efforts to foster an inclusive culture of interaction.

For practitioners at NADA, developing competency such as active listening, empathy and maintaining a nurturing environment are vital to improving client outcomes, reducing burnout in treatment and strengthening the relationship between staff and clients. Therefore, there is an urgent need to foster a strong communication culture within the organization. Long-term commitment will only develop when volunteers operate in an environment that allows them to observe success in real practice, receive constructive feedback and internalize a shared institutional identity.

2.7 Model Development: Integrating Core Components

2.7.1 Conceptual Framework: Activating the Human Potential of Volunteers

Building a complete conceptual model requires moving from general theoretical abstractions to the formation of a structured and contextual chain of ideas. To address the challenge of retaining volunteers in NADA, this proposed framework positions communication climate as a key pillar connecting the individual's internal ecosystem (SCT) with the sociological environment of the organization (OST). The model does not aim to test empirical hypotheses or measure rigid variable relationships, but rather offers a new conceptual lens on how uncertainty in the role of grassroots volunteers can be reduced if communication serves as a channel for activating strong human capital.

The basic premise of the proposed conceptual model emphasizes that while basic volunteer competencies are the cornerstones for quality contributions, this potential will only be optimally activated through a well-designed organizational communications design. In the NADA operational landscape, these competencies are not merely technical, but require mastery of addiction science, an understanding of the limits of drug control laws and the cognitive flexibility to address clients experiencing impending psychosocial crises. Since these qualities of expertise need to be socially integrated, they cannot develop healthily in isolation. Organizational communications provide a critical structural platform to help volunteers align their unique strengths with the agency's strategic objectives. This alignment process is achieved through frequent technical briefings, focused practical training and transparent feedback mechanisms. Without such an interactive support ecosystem, even highly talented volunteers will be vulnerable to role ambiguity and emotional conflict, ultimately leading to psychological disengagement from the agency's recovery mission.

2.7.2 Human Relations and Observational Learning

Beyond the use of technical manuals, communication at the human level serves as a critical trigger for involvement. This includes elements such as peer mentoring as well as informal conversations in the workplace. Referring to Bandura's SCT, it is understood that individuals learn through

modelling. This involves a process in which individuals observe social cues and imitate successful behaviours displayed by their colleagues (Bandura, 1977). In the context of NADA, new volunteers often refine their own professional methodologies simply by watching how experienced members interact with challenging clients. They also acquire competency by observing how colleagues navigate high pressure tasks within the scope of recovery.

At their core, these experiences are communicative acts. When a volunteer listens to a peer discuss an effective outreach plan, they are actually participating in a social learning cycle. This specific interaction strengthens their professional resolve. Current research supports the idea that this form of communicative reinforcement is a key factor behind an individual's decision to remain in a volunteer position long-term (Stukas et al., 2016).

2.7.3 Socialization: Eliminating Role Uncertainty

Integrating the perspective of OST, this model explains how communication accelerates the process of individual adjustment to an organization. This is achieved by eliminating the uncertainty that is inherent in any new role. The socialization process occurs through a combination of orientation programs, mentoring activities and daily conversations that install the agency's core norms and values in volunteers (Chao et al., 1994). Volunteers placed in communication rich environments tend to develop much stronger emotional bonds with the organization. Such environments are characterized by clear goal setting and supportive feedback. On the other hand, when the messages conveyed are disorganized or inconsistent, the adjustment process will fail. This failure causes volunteers to feel uncertain about how to apply their competency to drive the agency's progress (Ashforth et al., 2007; Morrison, 2002).

2.7.4 Communicative involvement and Transparency

The proposed model identifies communication as the mediating engine through which volunteers define their roles and translate competency into tangible actions. This is supported by evidence that a positive communication climate leads to the formation of a much stronger organizational identity. This environment must be filled with accurate and substantive feedback to ensure the effectiveness of the volunteer role.

Formal channels such as regular program updates show volunteers that their contributions are highly valued by the organization. Meanwhile, informal practices such as storytelling and peer reflection sessions allow them to see their contributions as part of a larger mission. This reflects the concept of reciprocal determinism from SCT. In this concept, volunteers and organizations influence each other in a continuous cycle (Bandura, 1986). A volunteer who feels communicatively engaged is more likely to make positive contributions to the environment around them. This situation creates a virtuous cycle in which the flow of information and motivation moves freely and productively.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative conceptual inquiry design that focuses on integrating and expanding existing theoretical frameworks. In contrast to traditional empirical studies, this conceptual approach was deliberately chosen to bridge the gap in the literature between independent competence and continuity of volunteer service through the lens of organizational communication in the ecosystem of the NADA. The analytical procedure is driven by systematic literature highlighting and in-depth document analysis. This process involves screening indexed journal

articles focusing on volunteer involvement, organizational socialization and communication competence.

The development of the analytical framework in this article is carried out through an integrative method where the key concepts of SCT and OST are coherently combined. The argumentation procedure was driven through a process of deductive and inductive reasoning to match global theoretical concepts with the unique dynamics of volunteering in Malaysia. The analysis places a critical focus on the function of communication both in the form of formal feedback and interpersonal guidance as an activating agent that translates the potential technical competence of volunteers into sustainable forms of behavioral commitment before it is ready to be tested through future field research.

4. Conceptual Propositions

4.1. Proposition 1: The Cultivation of Self Efficacy (Focus on SCT)

Proposition 1: Specialized task knowledge and situational adaptability function as foundational cognitive pillars that shape a volunteer's internal sense of self efficacy when navigating high stakes rehabilitation environments.

Through the lens of SCT, a volunteer's psychological resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic cognitive state. Within the sensitive operational framework of the NADA, frontline tasks involve significant societal stigma and emotional risk. When volunteers are equipped with deep localized knowledge and the capacity to adapt to unpredictable field dynamics, they develop the internal confidence required to execute their roles. This alignment shifts their perception of complex challenges from overwhelming stressors to manageable tasks, building the necessary psychological baseline to remain active in the field.

4.2. Proposition 2: The Mitigation of Role Ambiguity (Focus on OST)

Proposition 2: Structured organizational socialization experiences namely continuous field feedback, peer support networks and role clarity serve as the primary mechanisms for reducing role uncertainty among grassroots volunteers.

OST suggests that transitioning from a community observer to a deeply integrated institutional insider relies on minimizing role ambiguity. The unpredictable nature of antidrug initiatives routinely exposes volunteers to complex psychosocial crises. When the agency provides structured socialization pathways, such as peer mentoring circles and ongoing performance feedback, it establishes a reliable cognitive map for the volunteer. This shared understanding prevents professional alienation, counteracts cognitive fatigue and accelerates the volunteer's cultural adaptation to the institutional mission.

4.3. Proposition 3: Communication as the Transformational Bridge

Proposition 3: Multi directional organizational communication acts as the essential transformational pathway that translates latent individual competencies into long-term behavioural and psychological commitment.

While initial recruitment drives and standardized training packages establish fundamental skills, they are insufficient for securing long-term volunteer retention. Organizational communication

operating through both formal structural channels and informal interpersonal dialogues serves as the active link between individual capacity and the broader institutional environment. Continuous communication fosters a strong sense of organizational belonging. This interactive process allows volunteers to reach a phase of value equivalence, where their personal identity and values align seamlessly with NADA's long-term rehabilitation goals, ultimately sustaining their longevity within the agency.

5. Theoretical Implications

The conceptual framework proposed in this study offers a significant theoretical contribution to the domain of organizational behaviour. First, by positioning communication as a critical bridge linking volunteers' competence with their commitment to service, this study successfully extends the applicability of SCT to the non-profit sector particularly in the sensitive issue of addressing addiction in Malaysia. The key pillars of SCT which include observational learning, self-efficacy and reciprocal interactions between individuals and the environment (Bandura, 1986) are discussed in this study as powerful mediums for volunteers to translate their talents into actual commitment.

Second, the integration of OST (Chao et al., 1994) strengthens the argument that volunteer competence does not develop so easily but is instead activated through social activity through agency structures, cultural cues and peer support. This theoretical synthesis enriches the study of humanitarian communication by demonstrating how idealism and unpaid labour can be sustained through a complete socialization mechanism. Finally, the proposed recommendations undermine a long-standing literary tradition that often mistakenly assumes that the possession of competencies will automatically lead to service retention without investigating the intermediary processes that occur in between (Stukas et al., 2016).

6. Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the synthesized conceptual framework provides an action-oriented view for the NADA to institutionalize internal human capital management. Rather than allowing the retention of volunteer services to occur gradually through organizational restructuring cycles, this paper recommends restructuring the communication pathway structure to enlighten the potential of volunteers into sustainable behavioural outcomes.

6.1 Strategically Institutionalizing Agency Communication

To fully leverage volunteers hidden capabilities, NADA needs to take steps toward holistic and consistent strategic onboarding. This framework requires a thorough initial alignment before the start of the formal phase where role parameters, scope of oversight and systemic objectives are transparently codified. By providing clear navigational cues from the outset of the engagement phase, NADA and the volunteers entity can prevent role confusion early on. As a result, this high definition information infrastructure can reduce operational shifts and build psychological resilience workers facing the realities of drug addiction recovery.

6.2 Fostering Lateral Socialization and Human Relations

This conceptual medium emphasizes that professional self-efficacy cannot be built solely through isolated lecture learning. Instead, management must prioritize the structural integration of lateral socialization spaces particularly through formal peer mentoring networks and reflexive focus

groups. In this social context, veteran volunteers serve as role models for consistent engagement while also activating learning loops through observational learning as recommended by SCT. This peer-oriented transfer of knowledge breaks down the naturally planned uncertainty of fieldwork then transforms understood knowledge into shared collective competence.

6.3 Fostering an Open Communication Environment

The ability to transform competence into long-term commitment is highly dependent on the level of psychological safety that exists within the agency ecosystem. NADA must foster a communication environment characterized by responsive vertical feedback and space for non-judgmental exchange of ideas. When grassroots volunteers feel that their field views and experiences are structurally validated by leadership, professional seclusion can be reduced. Such an inclusive environment deepens the sense of belonging to the institution while transforming what was once considered unpaid volunteer work into a core component of their social and personal identity.

6.4 Implementing a coordinated Training Philosophy

Finally, intervention efforts must embrace a holistic dual competence training paradigm. Future training modules should integrate technical knowledge of addiction science and law with advanced human communicative skills such as active listening, empathic boundary setting and crisis stepping down decisions. Equipping volunteers with both aspects such systemic knowledge and relational competence ensures that they are prepared from a sociological perspective to drive the emotional actions of community-based drug recovery.

To better understand how these two theories, work together, it is helpful to look at how communication bridges the gap between structured organizational stages and an individual volunteer's mental resilience. The interaction between these theoretical frameworks and their operational roles within NADA ecosystem is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: The Communicative Medium of SCT and OST Integration in Volunteer Retention

Theoretical Construct (SCT & OST)	Core Communicative Mechanism	Functional Role in the NADA Ecosystem
Observational Learning (SCT)	Lateral Peer Dialogue & Informal Mentoring	Allows new recruits to observe and mirror the emotional resilience of veteran volunteers when handling recovery clients.
Encounter Stage / Role Integration (OST)	Structured Institutional Feedback Loops	Minimizes early stage role ambiguity and reduces the immediate "reality shock" felt upon entering the rehabilitation field.
Self-Efficacy Development (SCT)	Transparent Communication Channels	Builds the volunteer's inner confidence and psychological safety, translating latent skills into long-term commitment.

7. Discussion

This study explains that volunteer longevity in community-based drug rehabilitation is not an innate individual trait but a strong state negotiated at the intersection of internal self-efficacy and the immediate communication environment. By applying the lens of SCT particularly the concept of reciprocal determinism where it is evident that a volunteer's long-term commitment does not develop in isolation from their organizational surroundings. Instead, their psychological endurance is a fluid state, constantly reshaped by active feedback loops within their immediate work environment (Bandura, 1986). While formal administrative mechanisms under NADA such as mandatory briefings and standardized procedural manuals are essential for establishing operational baselines when they cannot sustain motivation on their own. The true driver of resilience is the unscripted human level interpersonal exchange of ideas. This relational exchange provides frontline volunteers with the emotional grounding necessary to navigate the unpredictable and deeply stigmatized realities of grassroots drug rehabilitation (Stukas et al., 2016).

8. Conclusion

This current work outlines a straightforward framework that highlights organizational communication as the vital link between a volunteer's initial competence and their long-term commitment especially for antidrug program initiatives. By combining the interactive nature of SCT (Bandura, 1986; 1997) with the developmental steps of OST (Chao et al., 1994), this study shows that individual talent quickly fades when volunteers are left in the dark without clear information. Top down organizational messaging and everyday peer to peer conversations should not be seen as conflicting management styles. Instead, they work hand in hand to turn basic human potential into lasting community action. Theoretically, this study moves the conversation away from oversimplified to linear views of volunteer retention by offering a more realistic look at how internal thoughts and social surroundings interact in high pressure and mission driven organizations. Practically, it gives NADA leaders a clear plan to improve their community programs, demonstrating that by actively focusing on open feedback, formal peer mentoring and making sure volunteers feel psychologically safe. By doing this, the agency can protect its most valuable human resources. Naturally, this current work has its boundaries as the proposed framework is entirely conceptual and has not yet been tested through interviews or statistical data within the Malaysian volunteer sector. To bridge this gap, future studies should focus on gathering first hand experiences from volunteers working directly on the ground. Looking ahead, future field research should test these ideas with different groups of volunteers across the country as confirming how these communication pathways work is a necessary step toward building a strong and communicative frontline that can truly help eliminate drug abuse at the grassroots level (Bakar & Sheer, 2013).

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