

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING IN PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN COMPANIES

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to researching the potential for corporate volunteering development in Russian business environment. Corporate volunteering as an innovative corporate social responsibility practice in Russia is a recent trend. Transnational and large companies play a critical part in its development. Nowadays medium and small-sized businesses in Russia have both potential for organizing CSR projects and necessary resources for systematic development of CV.

The main problem considered in the article is volunteering and its consequences significant for the development of medium and small-sized businesses in Russia and relevant to their personnel.

The article reflects the results of the poll where volunteers of large Russian region aged from 18 to 60 years old have taken part (N=1208, 2014). There are two types of volunteers described in the paper: those who volunteer 4–5 times a year (48%) and those who participated in volunteer projects 1–2 times (30%). The article proves that the first ones can initiate and maintain corporate volunteering in their organizations. Furthermore, corporate volunteer projects with their involvement could promote development of their companies.

Key words: volunteering, corporate volunteering, personal and professional development of volunteers

JEL Code: H 70, R 58.

Introduction

In Russia corporate volunteering is a certain stage in the development of corporate social responsibility as a business concept and a stage in development of CSR in particular organizations. Leading Russian associations of top managers officially declare corporate volunteering to be an important tool of social activity maintenance in the company which also forms stable relations with the state and local communities. The world practice shows that, on

the one hand, corporate volunteering programmes develop business. On the other hand, corporate volunteering is a sign of social and economic wellbeing of the business.

Despite high importance of philanthropy for business development, growth rates of Russian companies' charitable activity are not actually high. Only 24% of the working Russians say their organization is engaged in volunteering (Public Opinion Foundation, 2015). Corporate volunteering projects and programmes are realised mainly in the large Russian companies implementing CSR standards. The majority of them are Russian branches of multinational companies.

Including corporate volunteering in CSR development strategy of the companies is considered one of the promising tendencies. 90% of companies now support employee volunteering in some fashion. In the countries, where CSR is a common practice, corporate volunteering programmes as well as in Russia are in the course of their active development. CSEV programs are still in a stage of emergence and their integration into firms (Basil D. Z., 2009).

Worldwide, corporate volunteering is developed in close cooperation of business firms and non-profit organizations. Surprisingly, Russian reality is that corporations, to some extent, seem to be more attractive environment for implementation of employees' volunteer activity than non-profit organizations in the sphere of civil society (Krasnopolskaya I., 2014).

Corporate volunteering is relevant for modern Russia, especially during financial and economic crisis when a lot of business entities have reduced charity donations. It can play an essential part in realisation of the declared principles of CSR in the large companies. It can help medium and small-sized businesses in their development during crisis as corporate volunteering has considerable potential in uniting people for collaborative problem solving.

The importance and value of promoting corporate volunteering within society, the value of developing corporate volunteering programmes in various organizations are doubtless. However, there are two research questions: How can corporate volunteering help medium and small-sized businesses in Russia? Who is it possible to rely on in this sphere in our country? Which of employees of various organizations are capable not only to participate once in volunteer projects organized by their company, but also to do it regularly being productive for the society, for the company and for themselves (their social portrait)? We are going to systematize the results of various researches of corporate volunteering from all over the world to answer the first question. We will try to find the answer to the second question among the

findings of Public Opinion Foundation nationwide poll and original sociological researches of volunteers in Sverdlovsk region.

1. Lines of corporate volunteering research and some results of empirical studies

Theoretical review of scientific literature on the problem allowed to distinguish several lines of corporate volunteering research. The first line considers volunteering as CSR direction of an organization, a marketing tool and a leverage affecting public image of the company. (CV has seen extensive industry uptake ahead of empirical evidence supporting its potential benefits. The findings from this study suggest that CV should be considered among the various activities that help develop a CSR image with the consumer base and encourage companies to communicate with consumers regarding their CV programmes (Plewa C., 2015). CV is, on the majority of occasions, one of the instruments deployed by companies within the scope of their corporate social responsibility practices. In essence, it serves as one of the firmest bonds between companies and society and expresses the will to directly and actively participate in the resolution and/or minimisation of existing problems (Santos M. J., 2010). According to such approach, corporate volunteering is connected with the solution of current business challenges, namely with the improvement of reputation and public image of the company in the minds of consumers and workers, potential employees, local community; with the derestriction of interaction with public authorities; growth in popularity of the company; replacement of the charitable budget with non-monetary resources; rendering assistance for NGOs (Corporate volunteering ..., 2012).

The second line shows the benefits of CV including such employee-related benefits as increased productivity, job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism and turnover, team building and development of other job-related (Gilder D. D., 2005). Such findings suggest that partaking in corporate volunteerism is positively related to a host of work attitudes reflective of employees' desire to serve the organization's interests, such as their organizational identification and their organizational commitment (Joel B., 2014)

2. Data and methods

The article represents some findings of nationwide representative public opinion poll carried out by Public Opinion Foundation for respondents aged 18 and older (N=1500, 2015, statistical error does not exceed 3,6%). Residents of 104 cities and rural settlements of 53 territorial entities of the Russian Federation have taken part in the poll.

The article reflects the results of the poll where volunteers of one of largest Russian regions – Sverdlovsk region – have taken part (N=1208, 2014). The sample includes those residents of the region who have provided free assistance to strangers at their own will for the last year. There was a filter question asked for selecting the respondents. It allowed selecting for questioning only those people who had a real volunteer experience in NGOs and those who rendered free assistance to strangers independently.

There is no official statistics on volunteering in Russia. The sample model for volunteers of the region is constructed according to the results of the Russian nationwide poll data of Public Opinion Research Foundation and reflects the criteria of general population: age, sex, engagement in NGO. The sample includes 56% of women and 44% of men. The percentage of young people of 18–30 years old equals 31,5%, 21 to 45 years old – 30,3%, 46 to 60 years old – 27,5%, over 61 years old – 13,7%. 57% of respondents have higher education, 19% are undergraduates, 16% have secondary vocational education, 8% got only general secondary education. There are two types of volunteers selected from the sample and described in the paper: volunteers who participate in volunteer projects 4-5 times a year and those who did volunteer work 1–2 times.

4. The results

Almost every second Russian (48%) among employee volunteers has higher education, their income level is higher than an average across the country (more than 20000 rubles). 37% hold positions of experts, 28% are blue-collar workers, 21% are clerical employees and 12% hold executive positions. The researchers who conducted the poll emphasize that only those Russian people whose primary needs are satisfied become volunteers (Public Opinion Foundation). These people hold permanent positions and have permanent income. 62% of the working Russians are ready to take part in volunteer projects of their companies. 92% among those who have already had such experience would like to continue being engaged in corporate volunteering under certain conditions.

In the course of the poll Ural volunteers were asked a question: "How often have you rendered free assistance to people in need of it for the last year?". 30% of respondents worked as volunteers 1–2 times a year, 48% volunteered 4–5 times a year and more, only 22% of the Ural volunteers did it at least two times a month.

In our research we considered volunteer projects as the most widespread form of volunteering. Currently, that's the most suitable form for NGOs (receiving grants, reporting), for business corporations (for project management, budgeting) as well as for volunteers (time

and resources limitation). Taking part in volunteer projects 4-5 times a year is the most widespread and optimum form of volunteering for Russia due to national economy characteristics. We suppose that the Russians who volunteer 4-5 times a year can develop corporate volunteering within their organizations thereby developing their organization and themselves as professionals and employees of the organization. In the paper this type of Ural volunteers is compared with those who took part in volunteer projects 1–2 times on two matters: volunteers' attitude to volunteer work and their personal self-assessment. The characteristics on which essential differences between the compared groups were revealed are presented in table 1.

Tab. 1: Differences in assessments given by those volunteers who volunteered 4-5 times a year and those who volunteered 1-2 times a year

Differences	Groups of volunteers, % of respondents	
	Those who volunteered 4-5 times a year	Those who volunteered 1-2 times a year
Satisfaction with the results of volunteer work	47	18
Plan to continue volunteering	60	32
Not satisfied with their personal development	20	45
Feel like-minded among other volunteers	77	35
Importance of career motives in volunteering	87	65

Source: author's calculation

The comparison of the volunteer groups shows that those Ural residents who volunteer 4-5 times a year are much more satisfied with the results of their volunteer work. There are 60% of respondents among them who plan to continue volunteering in the future. Only 18% of respondents who took part in volunteer projects 1-2 times are somewhat satisfied with volunteering. Just every third respondent of this group (32%) plans volunteering in the future.

Some essential differences were also found in self-assessment of respondents of the compared groups. Modest 20% of respondents from the first group are not satisfied with their personal development. The percentage of such people in the second group (those who took part in volunteer projects once or twice) is more than two times higher (45%). The respondents answered the question: “Do you feel being surrounded by like-minded people among other volunteers?”. 77% of respondents from the first group and only 35% of respondents from the second group answered in the affirmative.

In motivation assessment block the respondents were offered to choose no more than 3 important motives for their participation in volunteering. The alternatives were divided into four groups: career, altruistic motives, extension of social bonds and self-help. It is worth noting that altruistic motives turned out to be the most frequently chosen among the volunteers of both groups, they were chosen by 94% of all the respondents. Considerable differences between the volunteers of two groups were detected only within career motives group. Such motives as “career prospects”, “promoting own ideas”, “new knowledge, skills, qualification” appeared to be important motives for volunteering among 87% of volunteers of the first group. Just 65% of the respondents who took part in volunteer projects 1-2 times chose career motives.

Conclusion

Numerous researches on corporate volunteering prove that it has an essential impact on employees' productivity, job satisfaction, helps to improve relations inside organization and knit the team together. Nowadays that is exactly the type of solutions needed for the companies which have to face economic and social problems due to Russian economic woes.

The main resource for developing volunteer programmes in Russian companies is the Russians having higher education and permanent income exceeding 20000 rubbles a month. They are experts who have already had experience in volunteering (who volunteer 4-5 times a year). These are exactly the people who could be in charge of developing corporate volunteering. Russian researches demonstrate that 40% of Russian companies started being engaged in corporate volunteering, realising long-term programmes in this sphere upon the initiative of their employees (Krasnopskaya I., 2012).

The Russians engaged in volunteering 4-5 times a year are more satisfied not only with the results of volunteer work they do but also with their personal development what is important for their work efficiency.

Under current conditions people all over the world can't afford volunteering on a regular basis. Continuous commitment to collective habits and organizational procedures is being replaced by the new type of volunteering characterised by occasional efforts of volunteers. The majority of volunteers prefer getting involved in short-term volunteer projects from time to time (Hustinx L., 2010). As these volunteers more often plan to continue engaging in such activities, their corporate volunteering initiative supported by the company management may result in established corporate volunteering practice instead of one-shot

event. Besides, when a company supports volunteering efforts, the employee devotes on average 45% more hours per year to volunteerism (Ariza–Montes A., 2015).

In the process of organising and planning volunteer programmes not only business interest but also the importance of such activities for the employees should be taken into account. We suspect that there is a risk if volunteer activities are determined purely on the basis of availability or business convenience then these activities will not resonate or be as engaging for employees. In addition, managers should also give more thought to regularly communicating with them (Pajo C., 2011).

Altruistic motivation might become the subject for discussions and teamwork during preparation phase of such projects in certain companies. At the same time, opportunities for career self-fulfilment for the initiators of corporate volunteering projects could encourage their initiatives in this field.

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