

## Corporate Volunteering and Volunteer Tourism in The Business-Employee-Community Relationship

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### Abstract

*Volunteering has a vital importance in meeting social needs. Having a long history, volunteer involvement presents plenty of opportunities for both the beneficiaries of the service and for the volunteers. Whether young or old, retired or still working, people from all walks of society can participate in volunteer activities. Employees in the private sector, where changes and developments constantly occur, participate in such activities and try to convert their personal gains into social added values. Analyzing these social needs and demands well, many businesses support their employees' involvement in volunteer activities both in their free time or during vacations, and during their work hours. In recent years, it has been possible to frequently see corporate volunteering and volunteer tourism activities as some of these types of support in the business world. In this regard, in this study the importance of corporate volunteering and volunteer tourism to employees' volunteer involvement and the gains to be made through such involvement for the business-employee-community relationship are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Volunteer Involvement, Corporate Volunteering, Volunteer Tourism*

### Introduction

Many individuals are unable to spend sufficient time, neither for themselves nor others, due to their overly busy work schedules. However, at the same time, there are many people who need the contribution and

support of these individuals and their knowledge and skills in certain areas of specialization. In terms of having these two social segments come together, volunteer work is crucial. By volunteering on such projects, employees have the opportunity to discover more about themselves and the needs of others. Still, in order for these activities to have a higher added social value and for the employees to get involved in volunteer projects more effectively, such activities must be carried out on the basis of an institutional framework. As a result of this requirement, corporate volunteering and volunteer tourism implementations have been becoming more and more prominent and drawing great interest.

Businesses have discovered that their employees' involvement in such volunteer activities bring significant gains not only to the employees and those getting help, but also to the business itself. Moreover, such gains may help the business raise both its financial and social performance. Therefore, employees are encouraged and guided to take part in the institutionally held or supported volunteer projects. Such guidance may be provided both for corporate volunteering activities and volunteer tourism. Thus, while the employees fulfill a need within, and thanks to, their organization, the businesses are able to increase their community involvement according to their changing roles in society.

The corporate volunteering and volunteer tourism implemented by the business world are important instruments for the community involvement of bu-

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businesses both nationally and internationally. By changing the conventional idea of work and vacation, these two types of volunteer involvement bring a new dimension to the business-community relationship with the opportunities they create.

### **Employees' Volunteer Involvement**

Volunteering is the activities for which time, energy and skills are spent with free will for the benefit of others, without expecting any financial gains in return (Birleşmiş Milletler Gönüllüleri, 2011, p. 4). In other words, "*volunteering is a form of civic engagement through which individuals can make meaningful contributions to their own visions of societal well-being*" (Brown, 1999, p. 3). Each individual volunteers depending on his or her sense of responsibility and may prefer the programs that he or she considers to be in areas of priority.

While volunteering helps create a coherent and consistent society, it also creates added value for the services provided by governments (Netto & Manco, 2008, p. 13). Individuals who notice that spending their time and using their skills for the benefit of society results in them having a great deal of satisfaction, save some of their time for this type of activity (Sarıkaya, 2011, p. 78).

Individuals may prefer to both volunteer for social activities that help the poor and to carry out volunteer work where they can use their professional skills. For example, a doctor can participate as a volunteer in a project aiming to provide health services to a poor community, and keep on doing such volunteer work for a long period of time.

There are many reasons that prompt people to become volunteers. When people's motivations to volunteer are analyzed, it is seen that these motivations vary greatly, from altruism to gaining work experience and to a wish to socialize (Parish et al., 2003, p. 8). Volunteer involvement may help individuals improve their self-confidence. Besides its potential contribution to the development of occupational skills and other competencies, volunteer involvement may also significantly help individuals form and expand their social networks (Birleşmiş Milletler Gönüllüleri, 2011, p. 61).

These positive effects of volunteer involvement on the individuals refer to a meaningful value for the employees. By helping employees to develop themselves and discover different aspects of their character traits, volunteering also has a positive impact on both social life and business life due to the sense of satisfaction it provides by helping others.

Having limited time during their lunch breaks, after leaving workplaces in the evening, or on the weekends, employees may spend time, for example, with orphans, to help them with their homework in the social service institutions that are close to their homes or workplaces, visit the elderly in nursing homes, or participate in charity projects aimed at helping the needy (Yurttagüler & Akyüz, 2006, p. 44). Extending these individual efforts to an institutional level will ensure that these volunteer activities are performed more effectively and sustainably. Therefore, volunteer involvement is crucial in making businesses get actively involved in the solution of social problems and using their skilled labor force to help with social activities. Thus, corporate volunteering and volunteer tourism offer an opportunity to use employees' potential within an institutional framework, and allow volunteer involvement to have a systematic structure.

### **Corporate Volunteering**

As the actors of social change, today's businesses are becoming human and society-centered organizations that contribute to the solution of many social problems ranging from environmental problems to poverty (Demir, 2013, p. 189). Businesses' expanding sphere of responsibility leads them to seek new ways of community involvement. One of these, that arises as a result of these pursuits, is corporate volunteering.

Corporate volunteering is not a new implementation. Originating in the late 1970s in the United States, this phenomenon spread all over the world and has become an important tool in facilitating businesses' involvement in the communities that they are located in (Allen, 2003, p. 57). With rising expectations, businesses get increasingly involved in corporate volunteering as a form of community involvement (Muthuri et al., 2009, p. 86). Furthermore, since these types of activities offer benefits not only for the society but also for the businesses, many businesses are

improving and expanding their involvement in such corporate volunteering programs (Peterson, 2004, p. 381). As such, employee involvement in volunteer activities, which are widely accepted to improve served community and business relationships, is actively encouraged (Parish et al., 2003, p. 10).

Kılıçalp-laconantonio (2012) states that businesses support corporate volunteering in two ways. First, businesses encourage their employees' involvement, on certain days, in the social activities that are organized in cooperation with voluntary organizations. Secondly, businesses allow their employees to do volunteer work during work hours in the voluntary organizations of their choice. Also, some businesses ask their employees about which field they would like to volunteer in and get their feedback about the existing projects. However, there are few businesses that systematically measure the effects of the volunteer programs on their employees (2012, p. 61).

Benefits of corporate volunteering can be discussed in three dimensions, as community, volunteer employees, and business. Corporate volunteering helps create new volunteer resources for the community. It is the source of new time, skills, and energy for the voluntary organizations, and, importantly, it brings people into these volunteer projects who are talented and who know how to work effectively. The main benefits of volunteering for the volunteer employees are establishing new social networks and getting social support, acquiring new knowledge and skills, and attaining values like psychological satisfaction. Corporate volunteering offers many benefits for businesses as well. The most significant among these is the benefit of increasing employee loyalty and effectiveness, and its positive effect on the corporate image (Allen, 2003, p. 58).

The fact that employees who participate in volunteer projects feel better, have a higher morale and motivation, and have increased work performance, efficiency and creativity has been drawing the attention of business managers and human resources departments. Consequently, in recent years, some businesses have been letting their employees work in volunteer programs, and even encouraging them to participate in such projects by preparing social projects themselves.

In this way, team spirit is bolstered in the workplace and it becomes a meaningful social environment for the employees rather than just a workplace (Yurttagüler & Akyüz, 2006, p. 44).

For the employees who spend most of their day at the workplace and cannot spare enough time to participate in volunteer projects, the corporate volunteering implementations that are carried out during work hours offer important opportunities (Sarıkaya, 2011, p. 63). Thanks to such volunteer programs, employees have the opportunity to use their specialized knowledge for a social cause, and by working in another area they are able to open a new window outside of their own work life (Kılıçalp-laconantonio, 2012, p. 61).

As can be seen, with its economic and social benefits, corporate volunteering offers a competitive edge for businesses, while affording the business employees significant gains both inside and outside the organization. At the same time, considering the benefits to the society from such work, a triple win situation emerges. The value brought by employee involvement in volunteer work gives the business-employee relationship a different meaning.

### **Altruistic Vacationing and Volunteer Tourism**

Today, individuals' social awareness and sensitivity are increasing, and this sensitivity is becoming international due to more advanced systems of communication and information technology. Individuals are now interested not only in their own community problems but also in the problems of other communities, and displaying altruistic behavior, they want to actively be involved in the solution to these problems. This increase in altruistic behavior leads to a rise in participation both in national and international volunteer work.

Altruism shows its effect in the field of tourism as well. Many people tend to use their vacation to meet the needs of other individuals in various ways. This type of tourism devoted to helping others and indicating a concept of altruism is called volunteer tourism.

Quests for alternative tourism and the need for volunteering has lead to this type of tourism coming to the fore. Thus, with this important phenomenon,

volunteer tourism is now becoming increasingly common (Chen & Chen, 2011, p. 435), and popular among tourists in various locations around the world (Sin, 2009, p. 480).

Volunteer tourism is a form of tourism that allows the host local community to be stronger (Manean et al., 2013, p. 127). Volunteer tourism *“makes use of holiday-makers who volunteer to fund and work on conservation projects around the world and which aims to provide sustainable alternative travel that can assist in community development, scientific research or ecological restoration”* (Wearing, 2004, p. 217).

Volunteer tourism is becoming a more and more important market. In Western Europe, in 2008, the most preferred places for volunteer tourism were Africa, Asia and Latin America, and there has been a 5-10% growth in the market. Depending on the bounds of possibility, volunteer tourism lasts from one or two days to one month, or for longer. However, the most preferred volunteer jobs are those that last from between one to two weeks. The people that prefer this the most are students and people who are between jobs. Areas drawing the most common interest are projects on education, construction, and working with children (Birleşmiş Milletler Gönüllüleri, 2011, p. 31). So, volunteer tourism has a great deal of variety both in terms of volunteer tourists and the projects conducted (Chen & Chen, 2011, p. 436).

Wearing (2001, p. 1) defines volunteer tourists as *“those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in the society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment”*.

The support given for volunteer tourism is also apparent. Both national and international volunteer tourism work involves a certain amount of cost. At this point, by giving financial support, businesses may ensure their employees' involvement in volunteer tourism activities carried out as part of some projects. In this way, employees can afford to have their vacation and also get a sense of satisfaction from helping out others. By enabling employees to have different experiences, volunteer tourism offers new platforms for volunteer involvement.

The community involvement realized by businesses, especially through international volunteer tourism, may lead to the expansion of their sphere of influence as well. Volunteer tourism activities signify an important value not only for the communities served but also for the attitudes demonstrated by sensitive individuals and communities towards these businesses.

## Conclusion

While volunteering and volunteer involvement have a long history, these are issues that have recently been attracting a great deal of interest from individuals. Today, people from all walks of life may want to participate in volunteer activities. Among the most prominent of these people are employees. Both increased sensitivity and the individual feeling of being helpful to others prompt employees to get involved in such projects.

On the other hand, human problems are constantly increasing and the solution of these needs help from volunteers. Such needs can be both national and international. Nowadays, businesses are playing an active role as societal actors in the solution of these problems as well. One of the activities that businesses carry out is guiding their employees towards volunteer activities. Business that ensures community involvement via corporate volunteering achieves benefits regarding the business-employee relationship as much as contributions to the business-community relationship.

As a way of encouraging volunteer involvement, one of the most recent issues is volunteer tourism. The businesses that facilitate their employees' involvement in volunteer tourism, which brings a new dimension to the concept of vacation, try to address the changing social expectations and needs. With their focus on national and international volunteer tourism activities, such businesses make an important difference in terms of community involvement.

In the light of these explanations, a professional approach to volunteer involvement, which is crucial in the relationship of businesses, both with their employees and with the community, emerges as an important need. To this end, while planning volunteer projects, factors such as mission, stakeholder network, and business segment must be taken into account, and

co-operation with voluntary organizations must be emphasized. In the process of ensuring the volunteer involvement of employees, the differences in their knowledge, skills, energy and level of eagerness to volunteer must be analyzed as well. In addition, the gains that employees receive from such volunteer work must be assessed, and these gains have to be ensured to reflect to their context of work. Thus, an increase in both the social added value of corporate volunteering and volunteer tourism activities, and in the financial and social performance of the business, can be observed.

The present study will contribute to future research to be conducted within the context of volunteer involvement. The success of volunteer tourism and corporate volunteering being conducted and supported depends on determining social needs and developing related programs accordingly. In this respect, studies could be carried out on business managers' perceptions and knowledge about social needs and disadvantaged groups. In addition, it is possible to increase the expectations of different communities and disadvantaged groups regarding corporate volunteering and volunteer tourism. Also, another study could focus on the cooperation established between businesses and voluntary organizations, and investigate the effects of this cooperation on institutions and society. Studies and implementations regarding volunteer tourism, a new type of tourism, are not at the desired level. Therefore, is also possible to conduct studies on tourism faculty students' levels of volunteer involvement and on their perceptions of volunteer tourism.

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