

**Funding Grant Award Body:
BA/Leverhulme Small Research
Grant - Is CSR achieved at the
expense of internal organisational
sustainability? Insights into the
development of Employee
Volunteering programmes in
the UK.**

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Project Outline: This project investigates the expansion of Employee Volunteering (EV) programmes in the UK, as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. It seeks to address the lack of academic research on the design, implementation, organisational and individual outcomes of these programmes designed to enhance the social value produced and delivered by corporations. Utilising qualitative methods, the aim of the research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of EV programmes, both from employer and employee perspectives. It seeks to examine employers' motivations for launching EV programmes; investigate the role of programme managers and external actors in their design and implementation; analyse the relationships between EV programmes and equality and work-life balance policies; evaluate the impact of these programmes on existing performance and talent management practices; investigate employees' experiences and the impact of volunteering on working and family lives.

Context and research objectives: For much of the last century, government and voluntary sector providers have been recognised as the primary deliverers of social good. However, the past decades have seen increasing pressure for organisations to engage with CSR activity and employees are now expected to contribute not only to the profit and economic growth of the organisation itself but also to a broader definition of doing good in society. Academic and practitioner research shows that organisations benefit economically from incorporating responsibility and sustainability principles into their strategies (Eccles et al. 2014; Kearns and Woollard, 2019; Mckinsey, 2014). Responsible investment has become an emerging financial industry where organisations are increasingly called to demonstrate the results of their efforts, giving rise to measuring devices such as Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Social Return on Investment (SROI), among others, seeking to assess social value produced and delivered by corporations. These mechanisms produce rankings and ratings attracting a growing type of financial investors now capable of evaluating companies not just for their production of shareholder return, but also for their capacity to effect social change (Barman, 2016).

This study seeks to investigate the expansion of CSR activities through the lens of employee volunteering programmes that extend corporate activity to the sphere framed as 'social' and require an active engagement of the employees in comparison to other CSR strategies (Shachar and Hustinx, 2019). Scholars suggest that companies tend to believe that supporting employee volunteering will help to improve their image and reputation (de Gilder et al., 2015), as well as increase company attractiveness to potential employees (Jones et al., 2014; Jones and Willness, 2013), indicating a strong 'business case' for volunteering programmes. As EV programmes spread within this growing CSR industry, new players have entered the arena, consisting of commercial and non-commercial organisations and consultancies that produce various instruments for deploying, auditing, and reporting on these programmes. They also act as 'match makers' between corporations willing to donate employee time to volunteering and nonprofit organisations, exerting influence on the content and choice of volunteering activities made available to employees. While extant research has focused on the individual and organisational antecedents of employee volunteering (Cornwell and Warburton, 2014; Rodell, 2013; Clary et al, 1998; Peterson, 2004; Pajo and Lee, 2011; Grant, 2012), scholars have given insufficient attention to the tensions related to the plurality of actors, and interests, influencing EV programmes. By exploring how these groups, perhaps with different motives to engage in these initiatives, produce different outcomes for organisations and employees, this research project answers to calls for a more in-depth study of forces influencing the design and growth of EV programmes (Rodell et al. 2016).

Moreover, there has been limited research looking into the individual outcomes of employee volunteering (Caligiuri et al. 2013; Morjza et al. 2011; de Gilder et al. 2005; Mattila and Hanks, 2013). Employee volunteering falls outside of employees' employment contract with the organisation, but it may be viewed



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as an expectation, depending on how organisational practices to encourage volunteering on company time are implemented. Despite some significant and positive impacts of EV programmes on employee attitudes toward their work and organisation, such as employee motivation and commitment, cohesion and teamwork, professional development, performance (Booth et al. 2009; Deloitte 2011; Muthuri et al. 2009; Peterson 2004; Jones, 2010; Vlachos et al. 2010), implications of EV programmes on employees' working conditions and well-being, as well as work-life balance (WLB) require further investigation. One aspect of the research will be to explore how employees cope with the demands of work and volunteering, and how it impacts their work life balance, depending on organisational contexts and individual circumstances. For example, could the expectation to engage in company volunteering programmes to support corporate strategy lead to work intensification for employees? Or create potential issues of equality in the workplace, where those with caring responsibilities may be less likely to engage in volunteering or face increasing work life balance challenges?

Overall, the aim of the research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of EV programmes in the UK, both from employer and employee perspectives. The research aims are divided into five: (i) examine employers' motivations for launching these programmes, along with details of the characteristics of the programme; (ii) investigate the role of programme managers and external actors in their design and implementation; (iii) analyse the relationships between EV programmes and HR management policies, including equality, diversity and WLB initiatives; (iv) evaluate the impact of these programmes on existing performance and talent management practices; (v) investigate employees' experiences and the impact of volunteering on working and family lives.

Methodology: This qualitative study will adopt a comparative case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989) allowing for a replication logic (Yin, 2003) in which cases are treated as independent experiments that confirm emerging theoretical insights. We will conduct semi-structured interviews with managers responsible for designing EV programmes, as well other groups such as consultants and CSR auditing and reporting providers, and employees participating in these programs. Interviews with employers and external organisations will give us a chance to delve deeper into issues related to the design and implementation of programs while the interviews with programme participants will allow us to include their experiences and views. Additionally, the research will include a literature review and analysis of secondary data gathered from documentary evidence such as CSR company reports, agenda, and minutes of meetings between EV stakeholders and other relevant internal documents. We will carry out 10 interviews with organisations running EV programmes in the UK which we will use as case studies. We will use preliminary research led in the hospitality, financial services, and IT industries to identify these employers. Ideally, we intend to cover a range of companies (size, sector, program characteristics, previous experiences) in order to gain a diversity of situations. We will also carry out 10 interviews with organisations and consultants involved in the development and implementation of EV programs. We will also carry out 30 interviews with employees participating in EV programmes (3 per organisation) with the idea of gathering the views of a diversified population of individuals (in terms of gender, age, family situation and job level) across the whole sample.



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