

The rising value of corporate volunteer work

February 7, 2011

More and more companies are offering corporate volunteer work, with the goal of motivating employees and enhancing their sense of pride in contributing to society.

Developing volunteer programs within a company is worthwhile. This is confirmed by over 90 percent of the companies that participate in such programs, [according to a Spanish study on the subject](#).

A total of 105 companies took part in the latest study, most of them with more than 500 employees. In most cases, such programs translate into a better corporate image, better all-round performance and a higher degree of satisfaction among workers.

Partly for these reasons, more and more companies — up to 65 percent — are showing an interest in corporate volunteer work, an activity that, besides having a positive impact on the company itself, benefits society as a whole.

In addition to reporting the benefits, the study includes useful information for designing, carrying out and improving volunteer programs in a company over the long term.

A growing trend

In 2010, the banking, telecommunications and food sectors saw the largest growth in volunteer work, overtaking construction, which held first place in 2009.

A total of 35 percent of companies that do not have corporate volunteer programs claim that

they have other priorities or do not know enough about this kind of work. This shows that much remains to be done in terms of promoting corporate volunteer work.

The good news, according to this study, is that 95 percent of these companies say they are interested in carrying out volunteer programs, either over the short, medium or long term.

Social volunteer work is most common in businesses (accounting for 74 percent), followed by environment-related activities (34 percent) and training (22 percent). Among the groups that benefit most from these programs, children and young people predominate (63 percent), followed by people with disabilities (54 percent) and immigrants (34 percent).

The main challenge for companies looking to get involved is deciding when to do it (43 percent). Other hindering factors are a lack of support or participation among employees (42 percent) and a general lack of resources (38 percent).

Particularly revealing is the fact that, despite Spain's current economic woes, many companies still earmark part of their budgets for corporate volunteer work. The report claims that average spending on such initiatives is just over 10,000 euros.

Management, planning and development

Just under half of the companies involved in volunteer work do it during the workday, while 55 percent do so during employees' free time. These percentages have not changed much from 2009 figures.

The fact that 69 percent of companies seek to develop a volunteer program in line with the culture and values of the business suggests that this kind of work might be done increasingly during work hours, as it could be viewed as a way to add value to the company's culture.

When it comes to planning volunteer programs, half of the companies surveyed prefer to develop volunteer programs in partnership with an NGO or charity group. Moreover, just under half of the companies in the survey have a volunteer committee that organizes and manages these activities.

Generally speaking, though, most companies do not have a formal department to deal with this kind of activity. As a result, the task of managing volunteer commitments tends to be assigned to the department responsible for CSR implementation or human resources.

Evaluating results

Regarding ROI, 43 percent of companies feel it is fundamental to obtain some kind of economic benefit from what they invest in volunteer work, although 89 percent acknowledge they have no way of measuring this. The existence of many intangible factors makes it hard to establish such indicators.

Assessments do, however, help the company adjust their volunteer programs to meet the needs and demands of their employees.

Once the work is completed, it is essential to determine whether expectations were met — not only those of the people who participated in the volunteer work, but also those who benefited from the aid and all others who have a stake in this kind of program.

At the same time, it is important to inform employees about the results that were obtained because it helps them feel like leaders of the program. Over 90 percent of the companies polled say they do this.

All in all, the report provides clear evidence that there is growing interest in and commitment to volunteer initiatives, though much remains to be done in terms of promoting volunteer programs among companies, as well as evaluating their true economic and social impact.

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