

The immeasurable benefits of corporate volunteering

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Corporate volunteer work builds a sense of organizational pride and belonging, while also improving the work environment and boosting the company's image.

Corporate volunteer work is a powerful mechanism for companies to reinforce cohesion among employees, promote teamwork and build workers' capacities, leadership skills and creativity.

For companies participating in such programs in Spain, the main motivations are to improve the work environment, foster a sense of pride and belonging, respond to employee demand and improve their external reputation.

These goals are consistently achieved, which is why nearly all the companies rate the experience as positive.

These findings are from the [2011 edition of an annual report on corporate volunteer work in Spain](#), sponsored by the Corporate Volunteer Work Observatory, a joint initiative of IESE and the NGO Cooperación Internacional.

Solidarity on the rise

Corporate volunteer work has a long tradition in the United States. In Spain, it is a relatively recent phenomenon, with 14 percent of companies currently running corporate volunteer programs only starting in 2011.

However, more companies are catching on, with many saying they plan to launch programs within the next two to three years.

Most align their volunteer activities with their business strategy, further indicating the perceived importance of these activities.

The workers who participate in volunteering programs say what motivates them most is helping those in need, which explains why social volunteer work is by far the most common, followed by environmental initiatives.

The main beneficiaries of such programs are, in order of importance, children and young people, disabled people, senior citizens and immigrants.

Not all smooth sailing

The main problems encountered by companies looking to implement volunteer programs are scheduling conflicts, insufficient resources and lukewarm support among employees.

According to the survey, 60 percent resolve scheduling conflicts by organizing volunteer activities outside working hours.

As for resources, most companies allocate less than 50,000 euros to corporate volunteer programs, with a significant number spending under 10,000 euros.

Although investment increased slightly in 2011 compared with the previous year, the ongoing economic crisis is expected to have a negative impact on results in 2012.

Costs and benefits

When budgeting for a corporate volunteer activity, one must consider such factors as training, technical and human resources, organization, management and lost work hours.

Every expense must be justified and its subsequent yield assessed to measure the scale of benefits for the organization.

Given that, it's perhaps surprising that only 10 percent of the companies look to calculate the return on investment, while only a third use quantitative and qualitative indicators to evaluate volunteer activities.

This general lack of follow-up may be partly due to the difficulty of measuring the intangible

benefits of most corporate volunteering programs.

That said, companies do show a great deal of interest in gauging the opinions of workers, with three-quarters of companies evaluating employee satisfaction.

The importance of organization and communication

Most of the companies surveyed have a committee to organize corporate volunteer programs, which is usually overseen either by the Corporate Social Responsibility Department or Human Resources.

According to the survey, a vital aspect of any corporate volunteering program is communication.

The vast majority of companies use either e-mail or their intranet, not only to inform employees about the activities taking place and to register their participation, but also to share the results of the initiatives.

This helps to motivate employees and encourages them to participate in future programs.

The most active sectors

Of the 117 large Spanish firms surveyed, over half organize at least some form of corporate volunteer activities.

The most active sector is the food and beverage industry, which experienced significant growth over the previous year and now accounts for 15 percent of participation.

Second on the list is the banking and financial services sector, which slipped from first place due largely to financial constraints imposed by the ongoing economic crisis.

In third place was the information and communications technology industry.

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