Corporate-Sponsored Volunteering: A Work Design Perspective

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ABSTRACT. This study explored employee perceptions of participation in a corporate-sponsored volunteer initiative. Drawing on both questionnaire and focus group data, this study reaffirms the importance of altruistic concerns as a key driver for employee involvement in corporate-sponsored volunteering. Characteristics of the volunteering activity also emerged as important determinants of employee's initial engagement and ongoing motivation for involvement in corporate-sponsored volunteering. In the same way that models of work design point to the value of enriched jobs, we see that there is scope to consider how corporate-sponsored volunteer programmes can be enriched so that employees have satisfying experiences and are more likely to participate. Enhancing perceptions of task significance and meaningfulness and incorporating relational elements into the volunteer activity seem to be especially critical in this regard.

KEY WORDS: corporate social responsibility, employee volunteering, job crafting, prosocial motives, task design, volunteering task attributes

Introduction

One of the new ways companies demonstrate their social responsibility is by encouraging and supporting employee involvement in community programmes. In particular, employer initiatives intended to assist and support employees to volunteer are attracting increasing interest. Employee volunteering (also called corporate volunteering or employer-supported volunteering) enables employees to volunteer in the local community with the active support and encouragement by employers through formal and informal policies and programmes (Tschirhart and St. Claire, 2008). Employee volunteer programmes come in many forms and can be either employer-initiated or employee-led (Lukka, 2000). For

example, business support for staff volunteering may include providing staff time off to volunteer, acting as a broker to find volunteering opportunities for staff and organizing team activities for employees to work together on a community project (Benjamin, 2001). Organizations appear to have warmly embraced employee volunteering with several studies indicating that such programmes are amongst the fastest growing areas of philanthropic activity amongst businesses in the UK, Western Europe and North America (Cihlar, 2004; Tuffrey, 2003).

The growth in employee volunteering is often seen as part of a broader agenda to encourage businesses to act as good corporate citizens. Businesses are facing mounting expectations from governments, media and society in general to demonstrate social responsibility and to show how they can contribute positively to the social well-being of the communities they operate in (den Hond et al., 2007; Kanter, 1999; Smith, 2003). Assisting staff to volunteer through employee volunteering programmes is one strategy that enables businesses to actively support the well-being of local communities and to address pressing social and environmental issues (Zappala and McLaren, 2004). Another key driver underpinning the increased interest in corporate volunteering is the changing expectations of employees. Employees are increasingly demonstrating that they want to work for a company that is a good corporate citizen. For example, in a 2007 Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT survey of 1000 Generation Y Individuals (ages 18–26), 26% of participants indicated that the availability of volunteer programmes is a factor in deciding where to work (Gurchiek, 2007; cited in Booth et al., 2009) and other studies have highlighted connections between corporate social reputation and perceptions of organizational attractiveness (Turban and Greening, 1997).

To date research on corporate-sponsored volunteering has been sparse and Benjamin (2001) argues that it has been largely practitioner-oriented and focused on examining how employers implement corporate volunteer programmes rather than on detailed '*analyses of either data or theoretical questions*' (p. 17). Wood (2007) echoes such comments and is critical of much of the CSR literature which he argues privileges upper echelon perspectives (those of CEOs and top management) and marginalizes the views of non-managerial employees. The absence of non-managerial interpretations of CSR seems especially problematic in the context of volunteering, since, as Wood (2007) points out, this is an activity that is typically undertaken by employees occupying less senior positions in an organization. Research that has addressed employee perspectives has shown that the decision to volunteer is a complex one, one that is driven by a variety of individual motivations and perceived benefits (Peloza et al., 2009; Peterson, 2003). Somewhat surprisingly, whilst these studies highlight the diversity of motives underpinning employee volunteering, they have been mostly silent regarding the potential contribution of attributes of the volunteering task. Indeed, most research studies investigating drivers of employee volunteering have drawn on samples of employees from a cross-section of organizations engaged in a broad spectrum of volunteering initiatives, an approach that has tended to reinforce prevailing views of employee volunteering initiatives as relatively undifferentiated and homogenous in character.

In this article we argue that our understanding and appreciation of the phenomenon of employee volunteering will be enhanced by a nuanced approach that recognizes the diversity in employee volunteering activities and considers how attributes of the volunteering task might affect employee perceptions and motivation. Accordingly, we adopt an inductive case study approach to explore employee perspectives of volunteering in a single organization. Drawing on a combination of responses to open-ended survey questions and focus group discussions we seek to ascertain what motivates and sustains employee involvement in a regular ongoing corporate-sponsored volunteering initiative. We look to develop and apply new theoretical insights by considering how the nature of the volunteering activity in an exemplar programme may shape employee attitudes and motivation. We draw on recent contributions from the job design literature to argue for the importance of prosocial motivations and the salience of relational elements and specific task attributes associated with the volunteering initiative.

Employee motivations and volunteering

There is growing interest in exploring the factors that might motivate employee involvement in volunteering initiatives as well as gaining a better appreciation of the individual and organizational outcomes associated with such programmes. Recent studies have suggested that employees might benefit from volunteering through the development of human and social capital (Booth et al., 2009; Muthuri et al., 2009; Peterson, 2003). For example, the results of Peterson's (2003) survey study of the claimed benefits of employee volunteer programmes indicated that employees perceived volunteerism as an effective means to develop or enhance job-related skills including teamwork, leadership, communication and project management skills. Similarly Muthuri et al. (2009) found that employee volunteer programmes involving participants utilizing their key competencies for collective action can generate social capital through the facilitation of social networks and trusting relationships. Similarly, in a case study of a local food co-operative Hingley (2010) highlighted the significant role of employer support for employee volunteering as a mechanism for community liaison and as assisting in maintaining an ethos of community service. From an organizational perspective employee participation in corporate volunteer programmes has been credited with improvements in employee work attitudes such as enhanced morale, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and loyalty (de Gilder et al., 2005). It is also argued that organizations can benefit from such programmes through enhancement of their corporate image and improvements in public perceptions (Basil et al., 2009; Peterson, 2004).

Given the positive array of outcomes reputed to be linked to employee volunteering it is understandable that there has been interest in elucidating the specific motives that lead employees to actively engage with corporate volunteer programmes. These studies have generally borrowed heavily from

functional perspectives applied in the charity volunteer literature (see Clary et al., 1998). For example, Peloza and Hassay (2006) undertook an exploratory qualitative study to establish what motivated employees to engage in prescribed volunteering initiatives planned and endorsed by the employer (what they call intra-organizational volunteering). They reasoned that the pattern of motives and benefits sustaining intra-organizational volunteering is likely to be quite different to that associated with other forms of employer-supported volunteering and for charitable volunteering outside of the work context. Drawing on in-depth interviews with key informants from nine different firms they found that employee decisions to take up intra-organizational volunteering opportunities were complexly determined, but could be grouped into three broad categories of egoistic, charity and organizational citizenship motives. Egoistic motives related to the personal payoffs employees anticipated would accrue from involvement in the volunteering initiative such as the opportunity to develop skills, to gain profile and recognition within the firm, and the chance to interact and work with colleagues in a way that is enjoyable and fun. Charity motives, which were frequently mentioned by respondents, related to employee altruism and the desire to help and to do good deeds with the target charity seen as the primary beneficiary. Organizational citizenship motives driving intra-organizational volunteering related to the desire by employees to assist their employer (by conveying a positive image of the firm and building profile and community awareness) or to help colleagues who had asked them to lend a hand.

In a subsequent study Peloza et al. (2009) used structural equation modelling to assess the specific contribution of each of these motives to employee attitudes towards, and participation in, company-sponsored volunteering activities. Their analysis revealed that egoistic and organizational citizenship motives were the most important drivers of employee participation. Somewhat unexpectedly altruistic motives were not found to be predictive of positive attitudes or ensuing propensity to volunteer for company-supported initiatives. Peloza et al. (2009) suggest that this is not completely surprising as employees would not necessarily be expected to affiliate as strongly with a charity or cause selected by their employer compared to one they had chosen

themselves. They go on to suggest that in the absence of a strong link between altruism and this form of volunteerism that managers looking to promote staff involvement should instead emphasize the opportunities intra-organizational volunteering provides for employees to fulfil egoistic and organizational citizenship motives. In addition, they claim that their results underscore the distinctiveness of intra-organizational volunteering compared to other types of volunteer activity and that this in turn reinforces the need for researchers to pay greater attention to task and contextual elements in future studies. We concur, and agree that whilst it can be said that '…not all forms of volunteerism are equal.' (Peloza et al., 2009, p. 384) it is also the case that not all forms of intra-organizational volunteering are automatically equal. Clearly, unique elements intrinsic to the work context do provide opportunities for employees to satisfy motives and to realize benefits that other volunteering activities cannot easily supply. However, we do not agree that this means that humanitarian and altruistic values are immaterial to employee involvement in intra-organizational volunteering initiatives. Instead, we contend that this highlights the potentially pivotal contribution of task characteristics and relational elements associated with the volunteering activity, an aspect that we elaborate upon below.

Employee volunteering and task attributes

Whilst it is widely acknowledged that there is considerable variation in types of activities and the nature of support for corporate volunteering initiatives (Basil et al., 2009; MacPhail and Bowles, 2009; Peterson, 2003) most studies have paid scant attention to the characteristics of the volunteering activity, except insofar as they are judged to provide opportunities for employees to realize tangible benefits such as learning new skills, developing social capital or providing opportunities for recognition from management. Nevertheless, some authors have recognized that characteristics intrinsic to the nature of the volunteering activity itself can impact employee perceptions and serve to motivate and sustain engagement with specific volunteering initiatives. For example, in a series of experiments and field studies Clary et al. (1998) showed that individuals respond positively to volunteer recruitment appeals when the appeals

address motivations of concern to them, which volunteers who engage in activities that supply benefits that match their motivational concerns express greater satisfaction with their volunteering experience, and that volunteers who derive benefits that match their motivational concerns are more committed to volunteering. Zappala and McLaren (2004) explored perspectives of employees who participated in an employee volunteering programme with three non-profit organizations in Australia and considered their reasons for participating and whether their expected outcomes were achieved. Using a modified version of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1998) Zappala and McLaren found that values (desire to contribute to the community and express important values) was the most important motivational factor, followed by understanding (opportunity to learn about the world, apply skills and abilities) and enhancement (a way to grow personally and improve self-esteem). Similarly, Houle et al. (2005) investigated whether different volunteering tasks were seen as satisfying different motives and whether individuals prefer activities with characteristics and benefits that match their volunteer motives. They found that individuals do differentiate volunteer tasks according to the motives and benefits that the tasks supply. Moreover, individuals were drawn towards and expressed a preference for those tasks that provided benefits that matched motives that were important to them. However, a generalizability analysis of participants' ratings showed that there was little agreement amongst respondents as to which task would satisfy which motive. Put another way, whilst tasks can be distinguished according to the volunteer motives they might satisfy, these perceptions seem to be quite personal and particular meaning that 'People differ not only in terms of which volunteer motives they consider most important, but also in the extent to which they perceive that different volunteer tasks will satisfy different motives' (Houle et al., 2005, p. 341).

Collectively the studies described above are supportive of the functionalist view that volunteering can satisfy a mixture of motives for different individuals. However, the variable and distinctive nature of individuals' motives and perceptions presents significant challenges. Not only are various employees likely to identify different patterns of motivational functions as salient to their decision to volunteer (for some it might be altruism and the warm glow from doing good whereas for others it might be a career-related decision), but they are also likely to have quite idiosyncratic perceptions of the affordances that a specific volunteering activity provides to satisfy particular motives. For intra-organizational volunteering activities, which are more prescriptive and structured than other employer-supported volunteering initiatives, it will be difficult to say with certainty whether a volunteering task will be seen as appealing and offering benefits for all employees. Yet, at the same time organizations need to be assured that commitment to such programmes is sustainable over the longer term, especially if they wish to take a more strategic approach to these initiatives as has been advocated by some commentators (Porter and Kramer, 2002). Whilst we suspect that appeals to citizenship motives are always likely to have some relevance in the context of intra-organizational volunteering, we are not as confident that all intra-organizational volunteering tasks provide the same opportunities for all employees to satisfy egoistic motives, or that egoistic benefits offer a stable and durable motivational base to support an ongoing programme. We also suspect that concentrating on promoting the employee-related benefits and citizenship aspects of volunteering is likely to foster a cynical and short-term orientation amongst employees.

Work design theories and employee volunteering

The highly individualized and idiosyncratic nature of volunteer motives seems to pose a dilemma for those wishing to implement intra-organizational volunteer programmes. However, we propose that motivational theories from the work design literature offer a viable alternative framework for conceptualizing, analysing and evaluating task-related characteristics and motivational functions of intra-organizational volunteer activities. The potential relevance of work design theorizing to volunteering has been reinforced in a recent study that explored the motivations of volunteers contributing to the German Wikipedia project (Schroer and Hertel, 2009). The researchers found that perceived task characteristics (autonomy, skill variety, task significance and feedback) were highly influential in determining the volunteer contributors' engagement and satisfaction. Likewise, Wood (2007) found that aspects of the volunteering

experience itself were highly salient for the 32 non-managerial corporate volunteers he interviewed. He observed that the employees placed little emphasis on personal or organizational benefits and instead stressed the importance of autonomy when volunteering and how they were motivated by the significance of the volunteering work they were doing.

Recently scholars have highlighted the potential for social and contextual elements of work to strengthen perceptions of task significance and meaningfulness (see Grant, 2007, 2008; Grant and Parker, 2009). In particular, Grant (2007) has speculated on how relational job architecture (comprising opportunities provided by job roles to positively affect beneficiaries and opportunities for interaction and communication with beneficiaries) might influence employee motivation to make a prosocial difference. He argues that jobs that provide opportunities for employees to affect beneficiary well-being will engender greater awareness amongst employees of the potential impact of their actions on others and enhanced perceptions of meaningfulness. Likewise, roles that entail contact and interaction with beneficiaries are also thought to enhance awareness of employees of the consequences of their actions for others and, in addition, can also build affective commitment to that recipient group. Building affective commitment and enhancing perceptions of job impact will in turn reinforce employee motivation to make a prosocial difference and will increase employee effort, persistence and helping behaviour. Support for the central premises of this model has emerged from a variety of studies. Grant (2007) found in a series of field experiments that simple interventions designed to strengthen perceptions of task significance were effective in enhancing motivation and job performance for those working as fund raisers and life guards. Similarly, Boezeman and Ellemers (2007) found that perceptions of the importance of charity work were related to volunteer pride, which in turn was related to intentions to remain a volunteer.

In a meta-analysis of the work design research Humphrey et al. (2007) found that task significance was an important predictor of the experienced meaningfulness of work and that meaningfulness was associated with a range of attitudinal and behavioural work outcomes including supervisor ratings of job performance, organizational commitment, job involvement and internal work motivation. Also, in the expanded work design model they tested in their meta-analysis Humphrey et al. (2007) found that social characteristics of the work, including opportunities for interaction outside the organization and social support (which included friendship opportunities on the job), were significant predictors of a range of positive work outcomes and accounted for incremental variance in key criteria beyond the motivational characteristics of the work itself. They reasoned that social activity is likely to engender positive feelings, energy and enthusiasm and thereby enhance employee well-being and satisfaction.

We note that despite its growing popularity and potential importance to employers, employees and non-profits, it is still the case that relatively little is known about employee participation in community initiatives such as employee volunteering. Questions, such as, why do employees volunteer, are employees satisfied with their volunteering experience, how does employee volunteering influence employee attitudes and behaviour towards their employer (if at all) and what characteristics of the volunteering activity are most salient to employees, remain largely unexplored. Accordingly, we draw on the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and recent elaborations by work design theorists (Grant, 2007; Humphrey et al., 2007; Morgeson and Campion, 2003; Parker et al., 2001) to consider how relational aspects of the volunteering task, social, contextual and task attributes might motivate and sustain employee participation in a regular, ongoing intra-organizational volunteering initiative in a single case study organization.

Method

The methodology we adopted was a case study using a combination of data collection strategies. Case studies allow for detailed investigation of events within their natural context and are well suited to investigating complex social phenomena (Stake, 2003; Yin, 2003). Case studies are also appropriate when the goal of research is the generation, extension or enrichment of theory, and are a particularly good fit for projects where research and theory are at a nascent or intermediate stage of development (Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Eisenhardt,

1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). A further strength of case studies is that they typically cultivate a close connection between data and theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) which can be a fertile basis for the generation of new insights. As Flyvbjerg (2006) comments, one advantage of a case study 'is that it can "close in" on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice' (p. 235).

Congruent with recommended practice case selection for our project was purposive. We followed a theoretical sampling strategy whereby a case is selected because it is information-rich, provides a good illustration of the phenomenon of interest, and permits strong conceptual analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2003). Since a key purpose of this study was to generate insights about a complex phenomenon in light of conflicting findings reported in the literature, and because our research emphasized theory development (rather than testing) theoretical sampling is appropriate (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Moreover, by electing to focus on a specific programme in a single organization we were able to control for differences between organizations and across volunteering initiatives that in previous research could have masked the influence of relational and prosocial aspects of the volunteering task. Finally, there was also a measure of serendipity in our choice of case study. Our interest in understanding more about the role of volunteering task attributes happened to coincide with a desire by the focal organization to evaluate their employee volunteering initiative and to ascertain why their employees chose to engage with this activity. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) point out that theoretical sampling of single cases is typically 'because they are unusually revelatory, extreme exemplars, or opportunities for unusual research access' (p. 27), criteria that were all pertinent to our research project.

The volunteering initiative

KidSmart is a global IBM community initiative that enables preschools and kindergartens to use the latest technology to integrate interactive learning activities into the preschool curriculum. The KidSmart programme was established in New Zealand in 2004.

The centrepiece of the KidSmart Early Learning Program is the 'Young Explorer', a computer equipped with award-winning educational software and housed in colourful 'childproof' desk furniture. In the last 5 years, IBM New Zealand has donated more than 300 of these units to New Zealand's less-privileged kindergartens, preschools and early childhood centres, providing more than 20,000 'Kiwi' children the opportunity to experiment with information technology and incorporate it into their learning. In New Zealand IBM employees have the opportunity to volunteer to assist with the installation of the technology and the training of early childhood teachers, and as such are integral to the success of the KidSmart programme. Employees register their interest in assisting on the KidSmart programme and are allocated to an installation group depending on the location of the childcare centre and employee availability. Often, employees are formed into a small team with others who they have never previously met or who might simply be work acquaintances. In other cases colleagues might request to participate together in the same volunteering team. The volunteer activity usually entails a half-day commitment by employees and involves travelling to the childcare centre, assembling the 'Young Explorer' (for many employees they will not have previously had much experience in this sort of task), testing the equipment and software, and responding to queries from teachers and children. As there are only a limited number of these units allocated to New Zealand preschools have to apply through their national body which then nominates those centres that are to be beneficiaries. This also limits the scope of the volunteering initiative and typically there are more volunteers wishing to participate than spaces available.

Data collection

Data were collected using multiple methods and from multiple sources. This approach is typical of case study research and allows for triangulation, which can facilitate the authentication of constructs and theoretical relationships (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). To gain an in-depth appreciation and a holistic perspective about the KidSmart programme we reviewed relevant documentation, interviewed

senior management (the Chief Executive Officer, the Corporate Citizenship manager and the manger responsible for Corporate Social Responsibility in the Australasian region), conducted focus groups with employees and collected questionnaire data. As our primary interest is employee perceptions and motives we concentrate in this article on reporting information gleaned from employees.

Data gathering from employees entailed the collection of information from multiple respondents drawn from different hierarchical levels, functional areas, teams, geographic locations and from individuals who occupied diverse roles in the organization. We used a mixture of open-ended, semi-structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. Focus groups are increasingly becoming a popular method for gathering qualitative data, both as a stand-alone strategy and in combination with other research methods such as individual interviews and surveys (Morgan, 1997). Many of the advantages of focus groups flow from the opportunity to observe group interactions and investigate a range of participants' views, ideas or experiences (Morgan and Kreuger, 1993). Furthermore, Morgan and Kreuger (1993) argue that the real strength of focus groups is not just in examining contrasting views on a topic but in providing insight into complex behaviours and motivations. The group interaction in focus groups provides unique opportunities to learn more about the range of opinions and experiences people have and the degree of consensus and diversity within the group. As Morgan and Kreuger (1993) emphasize 'the advantage of focus groups is that the exchanges amongst participants help them to clarify for themselves just what it is that their opinion or behaviour depends on' (p. 18).

We selected focus groups as an appropriate tool to explore employees' perceptions of the New Zealand KidSmart volunteering initiative because the over-riding goal of this research was to generate explanations rather than trying to answer 'what' and 'how-many' questions. Focus groups were seen as suitable given the exploratory nature of our project and the fact that relatively little is known about employee perceptions of corporate-sponsored volunteering (Litoselliti, 2003). The opportunity to generate large and rich amounts of data in the participants' own words made focus groups particularly apt for this research. Furthermore, we judged the interactions between the participants, and between moderators and the participants, offered important opportunities to compare and contrast different perspectives and to explore why particular issues were salient for respondents within the context of the broader discussion (Knodel, 1993). Interactions within a focus group setting often lead to a snow-balling effect with a comment by one participant triggering responses from other participants (Stewart et al., 2007). In addition, as Morgan and Kreuger (1993) suggest, the interaction within the focus group provided opportunities for participants to learn from each other, develop or re-evaluate their own ideas and become more explicit about the sets of circumstances that might lead to one response rather than another. As Stewart et al. (2007) argue 'this synergistic effect of the group setting may result in the production of data or ideas that might not have been uncovered in individual interviews' (p. 43). Focus groups were also an appropriate method of data collection for pragmatic reasons. Contact with employees for data collection had to fit around existing work schedules and the organization was concerned that the research did not disrupt normal business activities. Unfettered access to employees was not an option, consequently, we judged focus groups to be a practical alternative that allowed us to examine a range of topics with a variety of individuals more quickly and more cost-effectively than if we had conducted individual interviews (Stewart et al., 2007).

Procedure

We carried out five nationwide focus groups, conducted from October to December 2008. The focus groups took place at IBM offices located throughout New Zealand. All employees at IBM were invited to participate in the research via an e-mail sent by the IBM Corporate Citizenship Manager. In total 25 employees provided informed consent, completed questionnaires and took part in the focus groups. Participants were reasonably evenly split in terms of gender, with slightly more males than females agreeing to take part in the research. The majority of the participants (75%) had been employed by IBM

for more than 2 years, and many were long-serving employees with considerably greater tenure. Most of the participants had previously volunteered for the KidSmart programme, although that said, there was a spectrum of experience represented amongst the respondents. A majority of the participants indicated that they had participated in other volunteering initiatives sponsored by IBM, and for slightly more than half of the respondents company-supported activities represented their only volunteering experience.

All participants were first asked to complete a short questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to capture demographic information and details about each employee's volunteering experiences. The questionnaire also served as an initial prompt for participants to consider on an individual basis what aspects of the KidSmart programme were salient to them and what motivated and sustained their involvement. Questionnaires were collected once they had been completed, and then the focus group discussion commenced.

Each focus group lasted for 45 min to 1 h. Consistent with best practice guidelines we identified likely constructs that were of interest, but structured our questions broadly in acknowledgment of the tentative nature of the research and the need to allow for emergent findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). We were genuinely interested in learning about participants' opinions and experiences so it was important from the outset to create an open atmosphere where participants felt comfortable to share their points of view. Overall we adopted a relatively structured approach to encourage everyone to contribute. For example, in the opening instructions to each focus group we stressed that we wanted to hear about a range of different experiences and feelings. Subsequent questions followed this theme by asking for differing opinions. Questions asked were framed around employee experiences of their involvement in KidSmart including:

- why did you volunteer for KidSmart?
- how do you benefit from volunteering for KidSmart?
- how does IBM benefit from (you) volunteering for KidSmart?
- do you believe there should be a business case for volunteer programmes like Kid-

Smart? What would be the business case to justify such a programme?

Focus group discussions were digitally recorded, transcribed and then coded for significant themes and issues.

Data analysis

Participants' responses to the open-ended questions on the survey form asking them to explain why they volunteered for KidSmart and what they saw as the major benefits were reviewed by the first author who inductively coded the 132 separate statements into categories reflecting common themes articulated by respondents. These initial coding categories were then reviewed and refined to produce a more parsimonious coding schema. The resulting coding schema (comprising seven major categories – see Table I) and definitions were then given to the second author who independently coded each of the 132 statements from participants' responses to the questionnaire. Interrater agreement (percentage of statements allocated by each coder to the same category) was 83.9%. Instances of disagreement in coding were resolved through discussion and resulted in further refinements of the coding categories. This coding schema was then used as a broad heuristic framework to explore the focus group contributions.

Analysis of the focus group discussions proceeded through several stages. Initially transcripts were independently reviewed by each of the researchers who read through them in an exploratory way to identify key constructs and themes. This emergent information was then integrated with the coding schema previously generated from our analysis of the questionnaire responses to further refine major themes and theoretical constructs. We then adopted a team-based approach to the remainder of the analysis. Using the focal research question: 'Why do employees participate in a corporate-sponsored volunteering initiative' as a guiding lens we proceeded to interrogate the focus group transcripts, moving in a series of iterative steps from our coding schema and theoretical analysis back to the data. Using this process of constant comparison helps

TABLE I

Coding categories and sample statements showing employee motivations for volunteering

Category	Sample statements	Percentage of informants
Altruism (statements where the person indicated that they were driven by a desire to help, to give back, to assist those who were less fortunate or by the 'feel good' factor that comes with helping others)	I thought it was a great opportunity to help the community [The] joy of giving	64
Meaningfulness (statements where the person made reference to the meaningfulness, impact, worth or significance of the volunteer activity)	It is important to give schools the tools (computers) as technology is important for all our future Worthwhile cause	44
Organizational Citizenship (statements where the person indicated they were motivated by a desire to reciprocate positive treatment from the employer, to support the company or to present a favourable image of the enterprise)	To support IBM Personal give back for flexibility shown by IBM in work/life balance	32
Role Variety (statements where the person indicated that they volunteered because the activity provided the opportunity to do something different from 'normal' work)	Change of scenery Do something other than my day job	32
Relational & Social Task Characteristics (statements reflecting a positive affective judgment about the activity and mentioning relational and/or social aspects)	Enjoyed the enthusiasm of the staff and children from the childcare centres Because it involved working as a team with other people	24
Networking (statements where the person mentioned that volunteering provided the opportunity to get to know others in the organization and/or build their own profile)	Get to know other IBM'ers who are also in the programme Improved networking when first joined the company	12
Personal ('catch-all' category reflecting a variety of idiosyncratic, individual and personalized reasons for volunteering)	Also, my sister is involved in early childhood education, so to support that Because I want to learn more about the KidSmart computers and how they work	40

ensure that the emergent theory is one that has a good fit to the data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Results and discussion

Notwithstanding the abbreviated nature of this corporate volunteering activity we observed that it had considerable significance for those involved. This was evident in the enthusiasm of our participants' responses and their genuine belief in the value of the programme. It is clearly the case that the volunteers we spoke to appreciate the KidSmart programme and welcome the opportunities IBM provides to participate in an activity that they

perceive makes a tangible difference and is personally rewarding.

Table I summarizes the major themes that emerged out of our analysis of responses to the questionnaire. Most respondents identified several different reasons for volunteering and associated benefits, suggesting that participation in corporate-sponsored volunteer activities may be driven by the opportunity to satisfy a spectrum of motives for each individual. However, we also observed considerable variability in the pattern of responses, with only one motive (altruism) surfacing as salient for more than 50% of the participants. It appears that for the employees in our study not only are there many different reasons for volunteering, but also that there

are diverse perceptions of the KidSmart programme and the opportunities it provides to satisfy volunteer motives. These findings are consistent with the results from other studies that have investigated volunteering in general and have shown that respondents' assessments of volunteer tasks can be quite idiosyncratic (Clary et al., 1998; Houle et al., 2005).

Table I shows that humanitarian concerns were a key driver for employee involvement in KidSmart. Peloza and Hassay (2006) report similar findings in their qualitative investigation of intra-organizational volunteerism, noting that charitable support behaviour (the wish to do good deeds) was a commonly mentioned driver for IOV amongst the volunteers they interviewed. Nearly two-thirds of our respondents (64%) report that they were motivated to volunteer for altruistic reasons, that is, by the desire to do something positive for others and the 'warm glow' or feeling of personal satisfaction that comes from helping those in need. The importance of altruistic motives was reiterated in the focus group discussions where many participants expressed quite emphatically that they regarded their involvement in the KidSmart programme as an opportunity to express values associated with empathy, caring, and showing compassion for the less fortunate. The following quote from our focus group discussions captures this sentiment expressly:

> It doesn't really matter what I'm doing so long as I'm giving something back because I have the time to do it.

Furthermore, comments suggesting altruistic reasons sometimes exhibited an egoistic element. For example, some employees expressed feelings of personal satisfaction and fulfilment gained through helping others and making a difference in people's lives as is evident in the quote below.

> You get a warm feeling inside from doing these things.

Consistent with themes that emerged from the Peloza and Hassay (2006) study, our results indicate that some employees were motivated by a desire to be a 'good organizational citizen'. As Table I shows organizational citizenship motives were a reported driver for approximately one-third (32%) of our participants. Informants indicated that their involvement in KidSmart was a chance for them to recip-

rocate sympathetic treatment from their employer or to represent their organization in a favourable light and to help build a positive corporate reputation. Many of our respondents expressed a strong connection to IBM, frequently referring to themselves as IBMers and articulating a great deal of pride in the socially responsible initiatives implemented by the company. Our discussants were strongly of the opinion that the organization was supporting these initiatives primarily for selfless and philanthropic reasons and stressed the absence of ulterior motives. Employees commented on the authenticity of IBMs involvement in the KidSmart programme and seemed very willing to act as ambassadors for IBM as the following quote illustrates:

> You have the company that is actually putting at your disposal so many resources and you just turn up and give your time and personal skills. All of a sudden you become almost like IBM. You are out there and you have IBM gear, you are doing things. It's all part of feeling good I think.

Employees identified a plethora of other reasons for their involvement in KidSMart. As we teased out common themes what struck us was the importance our informants accorded specific features of the volunteer activity itself. Work design theorists have long been interested in characteristics of work tasks and the social environment that might positively influence employee motivation and performance and we found that participants in our study identified similar attributes as important drivers for their ongoing involvement in the KidSmart programme (for recent reviews and elaborations of work design theories see Grant, 2007; Grant and Parker, 2009; Humphrey et al., 2007; Morgeson and Campion, 2003; Parker et al., 2001). In particular, respondents often made mention of the significance of the volunteer activity, identified relational aspects of the task that contributed to their experience of KidSmart as enjoyable, fun and intrinsically satisfying, and spoke about the opportunities it provided to experience role variety. We elaborate on these themes below.

Whilst many of our informants commented that volunteering permitted the expression of humanitarian and altruistic values that were important to them, there was also a common perception that the KidSmart programme was especially worthwhile and

was helping to address legitimate community and societal needs. In the questionnaire, when asked why they volunteered for KidSmart, 44% of participants indicated that it was something to do with the impact, significance or meaningfulness of the activity. In the focus groups our respondents spoke about the importance of information technology and the need to provide suitable educational opportunities for young children. The KidSmart programme was seen as providing opportunities for volunteers to have significant and enduring impacts on the lives of beneficiaries. One of our focus group participants expressed this in the following way:

> It gives the kids with personal computers at home an opportunity to be IT literate …. there's no doubt about it, those sort of skills are going to be mandatory in the future.

In addition, working with centres located in areas of relative deprivation where beneficiaries were judged as especially needy and likely to profit from the initiative was an important aspect of the KidSmart programme. This was seen as further enhancing the perceived meaningfulness of the volunteering activity as can be seen in the following quote:

> I know that these KidSmart units are geared mainly towards lower decile schools and that's a big thing, knowing that the schools that would never have this sort of technology at their fingertips have suddenly got this really cool computer unit that the kids can start learning on

Significance of the volunteering activity was also described in terms of providing a 'good fit' with the core business of IBM. Some employees viewed this fit between the KidSmart programme and the core business of IBM as an important point of distinction. Illustrative of this point is the comment from one of our respondents:

> It makes sense that our main resources and product as a company that our contribution to society and business is technology. It's not only hardware or the software, it's know how, so it makes sense that we give back in tangible form like that.

Taken together we believe the analysis presented above strongly supports a distinction between broad values–based motives that appear to be reflective of a dispositional orientation (what we call altruism and what Clary et al. 1998 refer to as the values function) and employee assessments of the significance, worth, or impact of the volunteer activity (what we call meaningfulness). Whilst these motives are likely to be intertwined in the sense that those with a pro-social or altruistic orientation may naturally prefer to see their helping behaviour directed towards worthwhile causes and contributing in a meaningful way (see Grant, 2008), we nonetheless see the latter as distinct from a generalized concern to help others. Altruistic individuals are like the quintessential Good Samaritan, they simply want to help in any way they can, whereas those driven by a concern for meaningfulness are impelled to action by assessments of the significance, impact or worth of the volunteer initiative.

Consistent with Grant's (2007) model of relational job design we found that opportunities provided by the KidSmart programme for employee volunteers to interact with beneficiaries (children and teachers) was a very salient feature of the activity that resonated strongly with many of our participants. Volunteers relished the opportunity to work directly with beneficiaries and the immediate positive response from children and teachers. The immediacy and the tangibility of the KidSmart programme seemed to foster greater awareness on the part of employees of connections between the volunteer activity and beneficiary well-being. One of our respondents expressed this as follows:

> Going into the classroom and seeing all the kids completely inspired. It's like Christmas has come for them, it's really neat seeing the gratitude – creating little cards to say thank you. Just getting that whole excitement level up in the classroom and the kids and the teachers are so appreciative. They can't do enough for you while you are there.

Moreover, previous research has shown that the social context in which job activities take place can influence employee reactions over and above the intrinsic attributes of the work itself. Aspects of the social milieu, especially opportunities to interact with others outside the organization and to work cooperatively with colleagues in a team-based environment that allows for pleasant interpersonal interactions and camaraderie have been shown to be

important characteristics of work linked to favourable attitudinal, behavioural and employee well-being outcomes (see Humphrey et al., 2007). This dimension of the KidSmart experience was consistently emphasized by employees as a key attribute. Volunteers indicated that they experienced considerable enjoyment and satisfaction working with others and in a setting that enabled them to have fun. The social aspects of KidSmart engendered positive affective reactions and generated considerable energy and enthusiasm from the volunteers. Many of our respondents described being involved in installing a KidSmart unit as an intense, emotionally charged, and involving experience, as the following quote suggests:

> There are kids running around, there's mayhem and I enjoy kids and they see you as the expert and hey, you've got to fumble around with these big lumps of plastic, it's not what I'm used to, it's just good fun.

In addition to the hedonically satisfying aspects of the volunteering activity that social interaction provided we also observed that volunteers frequently made favourable mention of the opportunities KidSmart afforded to introduce a measure of variety into their normal work routines. Employees welcomed the novelty and stimulation associated with doing different activities, interacting with diverse people, and carrying out 'work' in a completely different context to their normal day-to-day role. Furthermore, some respondents indicated that this escape from 'normality' was a form of stress relief, particularly so for those whose job entailed a high degree of monitoring, involved relatively routine tasks or those who described their jobs as highly pressured. This is apparent in the following quotes:

> At IBM we're working to strict pressures or trying to work for the customers. So just taking it out of that complete environment it's so completely alien to us, to sort of detach ourselves from work.

> It's always good doing something new, it keeps the boredom at bay…a change of scenery, going out and meeting new people…I suppose in my job it's mainly fixing things, so going out to put something new in is quite different.

Overall, we were struck by the crucial contribution that relational aspects of the volunteering task made to employee satisfaction and motivation. For example, opportunities to see the impact of charitable behaviour and to interact with beneficiaries appeared to enhance perceptions of meaningfulness and task significance in much the same way as Grant (2007) suggests relational and work context elements might affect employees' reactions to their jobs. Moreover, volunteers report deriving considerable satisfaction and enjoyment from the social and team-based nature of the volunteering activity. KidSmart allowed for congenial interactions with colleagues and beneficiaries and was valued by employees for the stimulating and enjoyable nature of the activity and the chance it provided to build connections and reinforce friendship ties within the organization. Finally, for various employees KidSmart was appreciated for the opportunity it provided to introduce some variety into their 'normal' work role. The novelty of the setting and the task supplied a welcome respite from the usual work context and activities.

Recently, Grant et al. (2008) reported how contributing to an employee support programme could trigger a prosocial sensemaking process whereby charitable giving helped strengthen an individual's perceptions of both themselves and their organization as caring, helpful and compassionate. Strong organizational and prosocial identities were in turn associated with greater levels of employee affective commitment to the company. Grant et al. (2008) speculated that the same prosocial sensemaking process would be applicable to other corporate volunteering and CSR activities and we believe that our study provides tentative support for this conjecture. Our results are congruent with the central thesis of their research, that is, opportunities to express selfless, other-directed behaviour appear to have an important role in cultivating prosocial personal and company identities. For many of those we spoke to the opportunity provided by KidSmart to express charitable behaviour seemed to reaffirm important values central to their identity as altruistic and humane individuals and meant they were more likely to feel good about themselves and their company. We feel that in this way altruistic motives remain a very important driver for employee involvement in corporate-sponsored volunteering, and would not agree with Peloza et al. (2009) that companies should prioritize appeals to egoistic and

citizenship motives in the internal marketing of their programmes. We suspect that promoting corporate-sponsored volunteering programmes solely on the basis of the instrumental benefits for employees and/or appeals to organizational citizenship motives may undermine the prosocial sensemaking process described by Grant et al. (2008) and could foster employee cynicism and distrust.

We also see that changes to individual identity that can accompany involvement in volunteering activities may form part of a broader agenda by employees to craft their jobs. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) define job crafting as 'the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work' (p. 179). Employees are thought to be motivated to modify the task and relational aspects of their work to secure a sense of control, to enhance their self-image and to establish connections with others. In our study participants often reported similar motives in relation to their involvement with KidSmart. We see employees' decisions to volunteer for such programmes as a potential example of a job crafting practice that can lead to specific changes in the meaning of their work and their work identity. Wood (2007) expresses a similar point when he noted that the employees in his study appeared to be drawn to corporate volunteering because it provided a sense of passion and a measure of emotional engagement that was not readily available through their normal work role. Likewise, Berg et al. (2010) make specific mention of volunteering as part of an adaptive strategy ('going outside work boundaries to job craft') adopted by some employees in response to perceived challenges associated with implementing changes to their jobs in their work environment. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) also note that job crafting 'is not inherently good or bad for organizations; employees may change the job in ways that benefit or hurt the organization while benefitting themselves' (p. 187). We suspect that corporate-sponsored volunteering initiatives may function as a vehicle through which organizations can offer employees the chance to engage in job crafting under relatively controlled circumstances. Similar to recent conceptualizations of i-deals (idiosyncratic employment deals negotiated between employers and employees) that frames them as an integration of top-down (traditional job design) and bottom-up (job crafting) elements

(Hornung et al., 2010), corporate-sponsored volunteering appears to occupy a similar middle ground incorporating potentially desirable elements of both.

Practical implications

We also consider our research to have practical implications for managers considering the implementation of corporate-sponsored volunteering activities. By designing volunteering initiatives that foster opportunities to interact with beneficiaries, which allow employees to experience variety and enhance their perceptions of meaningfulness, managers are likely to strengthen employee intentions to volunteer and their subsequent satisfaction with volunteering. We also suspect that those involved in enriched volunteering activities are likely to exhibit higher levels of persistence and performance on the volunteering task. Whilst volunteering per say is likely to address altruistic motives our analysis indicates that employees are also driven by a desire to make a difference and see that their volunteering contributions are meaningful and have an impact. We believe that our results point to the importance of managers involving employees in the design and implementation of volunteering programmes to encourage employee participation and ownership. 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, and providing feedback to, employees about how their participation in the volunteer activity has affected beneficiaries and has made a tangible difference.

Limitations and future research

In this article we have highlighted the important contribution of characteristics of the volunteering activity to employee perceptions of the volunteering task and their motivation to engage in a corporate-sponsored volunteering initiative. However, like most research this project is not without limitations that need to be borne in mind. As this project was a case study with purposive sampling there are

concerns about the generalizability of our findings. Future studies should explore the extent to which volunteer task attributes shape employee perceptions and motivations in a broader range of organizational settings, with varied groups of employees, and in relation to diverse volunteering initiatives. Furthermore, although the participants in our study were quite mixed in terms of intra-organizational volunteering experience, gender, work role and seniority we nonetheless observed that most were enthusiastic volunteers. The extent to which volunteer task attributes might influence the attitudes and behaviour of non-volunteers, or those who elect to participate on an ad hoc or very limited basis is unknown. Given the potential benefits for communities, organizations and individuals associated with effective volunteering initiatives, efforts to better understand the factors that inhibit participation would be worthwhile. Other researchers have also pointed to the need for further studies that focus explicitly on non-volunteers (see Peloza and Hassay, 2006).

Conclusion

In this study we set out to explore what motivates and sustains employee involvement in a regular ongoing corporate-sponsored volunteering initiative. Our research makes three important contributions towards understanding factors influencing employee involvement in corporate-sponsored volunteer programmes. First, our findings reaffirm the importance of humanitarian concerns as a key driver for employee involvement in corporate-sponsored volunteering and provide a counterpoint to recent scholarly contributions that have either downplayed humanitarian drivers or have questioned their motivating potential (see especially Peloza et al., 2009). In our study the opportunity to express altruistic values through the giving of meaningful service to others was a key motivating factor for many employees. Second, in addition to reinforcing the importance of altruistic motives in corporate-sponsored volunteering, we believe our analysis underscores the salience of employee perceptions and appraisals of specific features of the volunteer activity. Characteristics of the volunteering activity, especially evaluations of the meaningfulness or significance of the task, relational elements and

opportunities to experience role variety all emerged as key determinants of employee's initial engagement and ongoing motivation for involvement in corporate-sponsored volunteering. We consider that work design theories, and especially those that emphasize the central contribution of meaningfulness, provide a useful theoretical lens for considering corporate-sponsored volunteering initiatives. Third, our results suggest that corporate-sponsored volunteering can play an important role in building prosocial personal and company identities. Corporate-sponsored volunteer programmes offer opportunities for employees to express compassion towards others and thereby assist their efforts to see themselves and their organization in a more altruistic light. Fostering prosocial personal and company identities can provide beneficial outcomes for the organization that are more than simply public relations or reputational benefits. Finally, our study adds to the limited corpus of research on corporate-sponsored volunteering and does so in a way that privileges employee perspectives and acknowledges their role as a critical stakeholder group.

Consistent with calls for organizations to adopt a more strategic approach to CSR initiatives (Porter and Kramer, 2002), our findings suggest that managers should be mindful of how attributes of the volunteering task might impact employee satisfaction and motivation. Instead, of concentrating on egoistic benefits we would encourage organizations to pay more attention to the 'design' of corporate-sponsored volunteering tasks to maximize their motivating potential. In the same way that models of work design point to the value of enriched jobs we see that there is scope for managers to consider how corporate-sponsored volunteer programmes can be enriched so that employees have satisfying experiences and are more likely to participate. Enhancing perceptions of task significance and meaningfulness and incorporating relational elements into the volunteer activity seem to be especially critical in this regard.

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