

Increasing employee engagement through corporate volunteering

RESEARCH ON THIS RELATIONSHIP

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What does employee volunteering have to do with employee engagement and other positive work behaviors?



PURPOSE

It's well established that employee engagement, defined as a willingness to do more than the job minimally requires, drives corporate performance. For example, Gallup finds that companies with highly engaged employees outperform their peers in earnings per share by 147%.¹ Yet, only 15% of workers globally are engaged.² Not surprisingly, employee engagement is a top business concern. One potential driver of employee engagement is corporate volunteering, defined as employer-organized opportunities for employees to support a charitable cause or otherwise make a positive social impact with their contribution of time.

Might corporate volunteering boost employee engagement?

Voluntare worked with three firms – Orange in Spain, PwC in Colombia and Repsol in Spain – to conduct a study that helps to answer this question. The study also explores the impact that participation in corporate volunteering has on several workplace outcomes closely related to employee engagement: Sense of purpose, pride in employer, personal growth and job satisfaction.

Managers have long noted that employees tend to react positively to corporate volunteering. Workers in the study covered in this paper, for example, described their corporate volunteering experiences as “fulfilling,” “perfect” and “beautifully collaborative.” In other words, anecdotal evidence suggests that corporate

volunteering might affect employee engagement.

Furthermore, pioneering companies – including Caesars Entertainment, HP and Toyota – have discovered correlations between participation in corporate volunteering and employee engagement. The correlations are strongest when the volunteering relates to the work experience. For example, volunteering correlates more strongly with employee engagement when it is conducted with work colleagues or applies workplace skills. These practical findings are consistent with academic research.³

¹Beck, R. and Hater J. (2015). “Companies Are Missing Opportunities for Growth and Revenue.” *Business Journal*.

²Gallup. (2017). *State of the Global Workforce*.

³Caligiuri, P., Mencin, A., and Jiang, K. (2013). *Win-win-win: the influence of company-sponsored volunteerism programs on employees, NGOs, and business units*. *Pers. Psychol.*

The missing element in these studies is a firm answer on the direction of the causality.

Does corporate volunteering increase employee engagement or do more engaged employees become corporate volunteers?

Academic research has not yet fully answered this question. Although several studies have found a positive causal relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee engagement or related outcomes, these studies mostly focus on employee perception of the CSR than on their participation in corporate volunteer programs.⁴ Nevertheless, the few studies on the effect that employee participation in corporate volunteering has on engagement, or related attitudes and behaviors, find that corporate volunteering can improve sense of meaning, productivity and other employee attitudes and behaviors.⁵

⁴ Glavas, A., and Kelley, K. (2014). The effects of perceived corporate social responsibility on employees. *Bus. Ethics Q.* 24, 165–202; Glavas, A., and Piderit, S. K. (2009). How does doing good matter? Effects of corporate citizenship on employees. *J. Corporate Citizenship*; Jones, D. A. (2010). Does serving the community also serve the company? Using organizational identification and social exchange theories to understand employee responses to a volunteerism programme. *J. Occupat. Organ. Psychol.*; Bauman, C. W., and Skitka, L. J. (2012). Corporate social responsibility as a source of employee satisfaction. *Res. Organ. Behav.*

⁵ Rodell, J.B. (2013). Finding Meaning through Volunteering: Why Do Employees Volunteer and What Does It Mean for Their Jobs? *Academy of Management Journal*; Caligiuri, P., Mencia, A., and Jiang, K. (2013). Win-win-win: The influence of company-sponsored volunteerism programs on employees, NGOs, and business units. *Pers. Psychol.*; Jones, D. A. (2010). Does serving the community also serve the company? Using organizational identification and social exchange theories to understand employee responses to a volunteerism program. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*; Glavas, A. (2016). Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Engagement: Enabling Employees to Employ More of Their Whole Selves at Work. *Frontiers in Psychology*.





METHODOLOGY

To help determine if there is a causal relationship between corporate volunteering and employee engagement, this study complies with experimental design principles.

What has been the process?

1. We studied employees who had not participated in corporate volunteering during the prior 12 months.
2. Employees were invited to complete a pre-survey that collected data on employee engagement and related workplace attitudes and behaviors.
3. Respondents were then split randomly into two groups: The volunteer group and the control group. Only the volunteer group was invited to participate in corporate volunteer activities. The volunteering was conducted in a group setting and consisted of a variety of tasks that didn't require any specific knowledge or workplace skills.
4. After the volunteer group had completed between 4 and 20 hours of corporate volunteering, both groups were invited to take a post-survey.
5. An additional follow-up third survey was administered 12 weeks after the post-survey to both groups.

In all, longitudinal data were collected from 117 workers.

The results of this research should not be considered final. This is still among the first studies on the causal relationship between corporate volunteering and employee engagement. As is the case with any new discovery, it should not be considered solid until it has been corroborated many times. Furthermore, like all studies, this one has weaknesses. These include a small sample size and modest response rates (33% and 27% for the post-survey and follow-up survey, respectively). Caution is, therefore, advised in interpreting this research.



Image courtesy of Orange.



THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

This study found that participation in group hands-on (unskilled) corporate volunteering increased employee engagement to a statistically significant degree (95% confidence level).

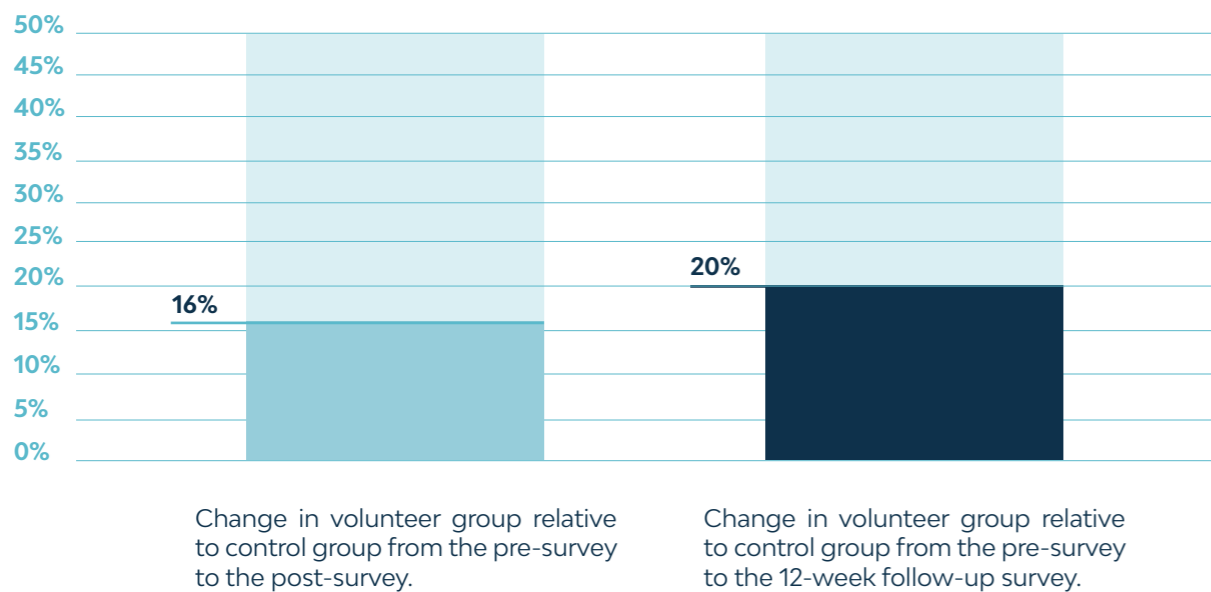
The volunteer group, composed of employees who participated an average of 18 hours in group unskilled volunteer events over a three-month period, experienced a 16% increase in employee engagement relative to the control group, which did not participate in corporate volunteer ac-

tivities (statistical significance = 95% confidence level). This does not appear to be a fleeting impact: Twelve weeks later, during which time most respondents chose to continue participating, the engagement boost remained. Corporate volunteering lifted employee engagement in respondents equally regardless of age, gender, tenure and whether respondents were managers or not.

CHANGE IN ENGAGEMENT

Change in average response to: On a scale of zero to ten, how likely is it you would recommend this company as a place to work?

Percent change in average response on a 0-10 scale.



It should be noted that the corporate volunteering included in this study was extremely well designed and executed. Every respondent reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the experience. Furthermore, the activities were what Chris Jarvis, co-founder of Realized Worth, calls “transformative volunteering” in that they drove high levels of personal growth, including in empathy. Specifically, 89% of respondents agreed that the volunteering met the following list of criteria for transformative volunteering:

- I was clear why I was volunteering.
- I understood who I was benefitting.
- I had a chance to reflect with my group after the volunteer event.
- The volunteering gave me a deeper appreciation of social causes.
- I’m confident I made a meaningful difference to others and/or a worthy cause-que valió la pena.

This study, then, suggests that corporate volunteering can be an effective tool for employee engagement.



Image courtesy of PWC.



IMPACT OF CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING ON OTHER WORKPLACE OUTCOMES

Because employee engagement is closely related to other worker outcomes, it's not surprising that the corporate volunteering that increased employee engagement also boosted other positive workplace attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, compared to the control group, the volunteer group experienced the following statistically significant (95% confidence level) changes:

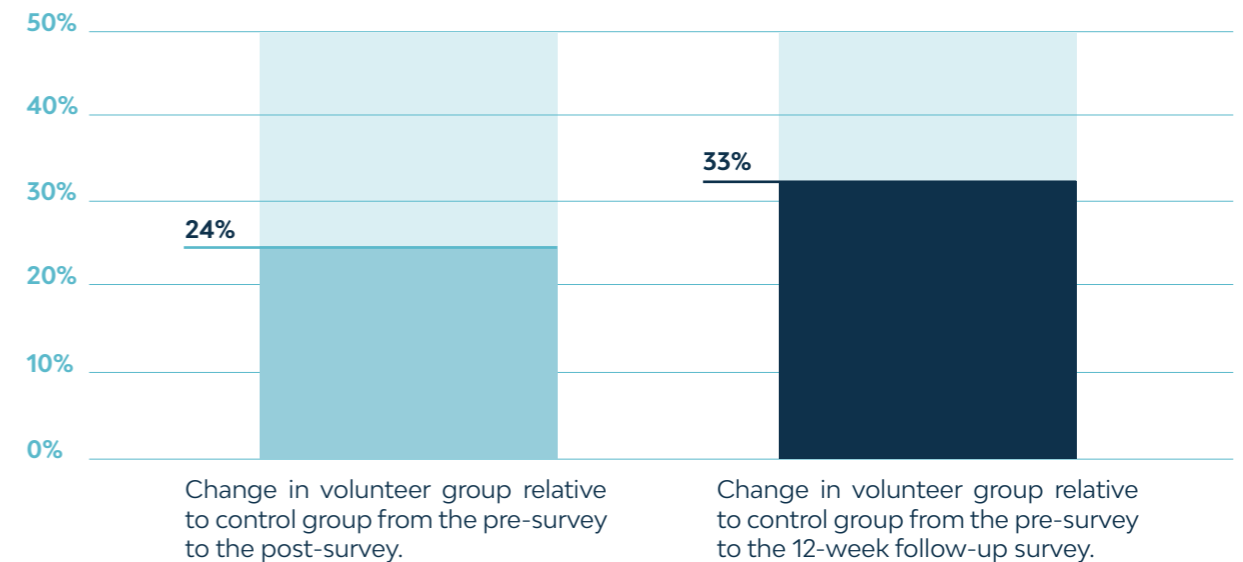
- A 24% increase in sense of purpose at work after the initial volunteering period, which increased to 33% in the 12-week follow-up survey.
- A 20% initial increase in pride in employer's products and services that sustained at 18% in the follow-up survey.
- A 19% initial increase in personal growth that increased to 24% in the follow-up survey.
- A 13% initial increase in job satisfaction that sustained at 13% in the follow-up survey.



CHANGE IN SENSE OF WORKPLACE PURPOSE

I know my work makes a positive difference in the world.

Percent change in average response on a 0-10 scale.



CHANGE IN PRIDE IN EMPLOYER'S PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

On a scale of zero to ten, how likely is it that you would recommend this company's products or services to a friend or colleague?

Percent change in average response on a 0-10 scale.

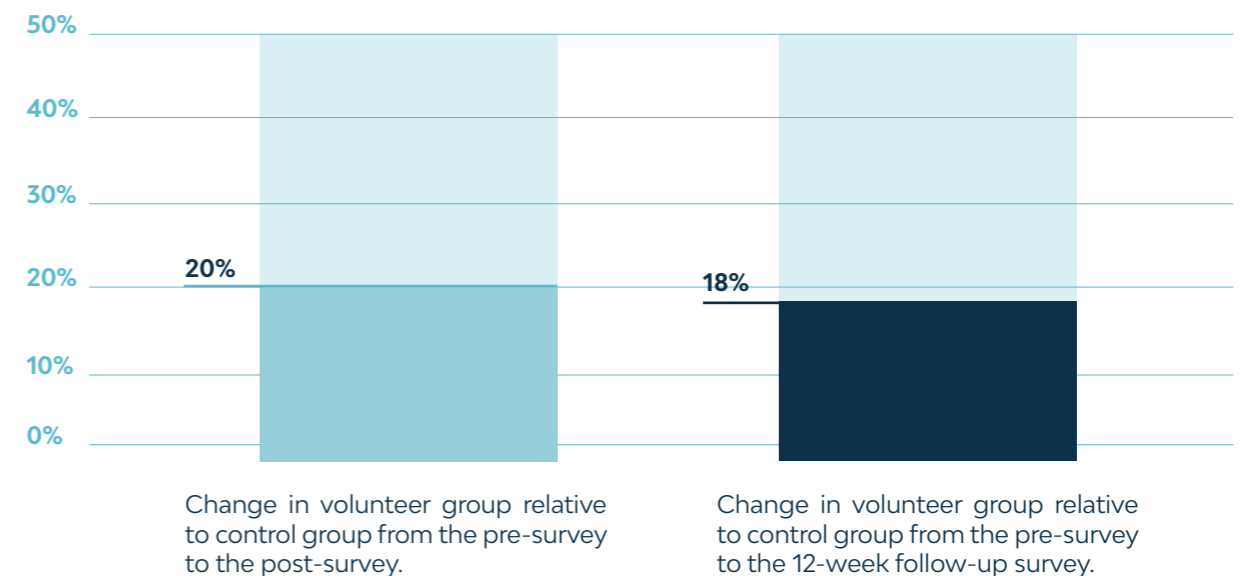


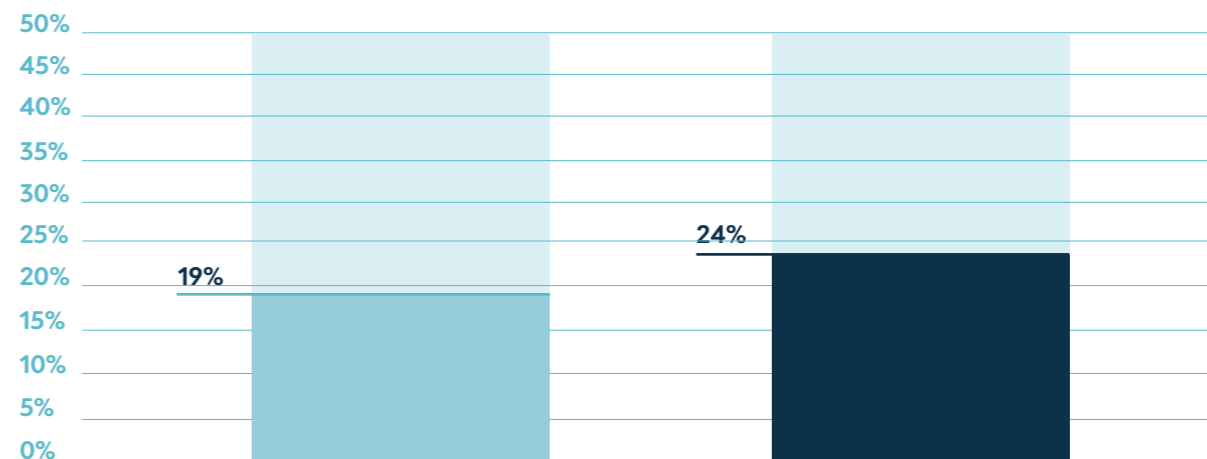


Image courtesy of Fundación Repsol.

CHANGE IN WORK AS A DRIVER OF PERSONAL GROWTH

I view my work as contributing to my personal growth.

Percent change in average response on a 0-10 scale.



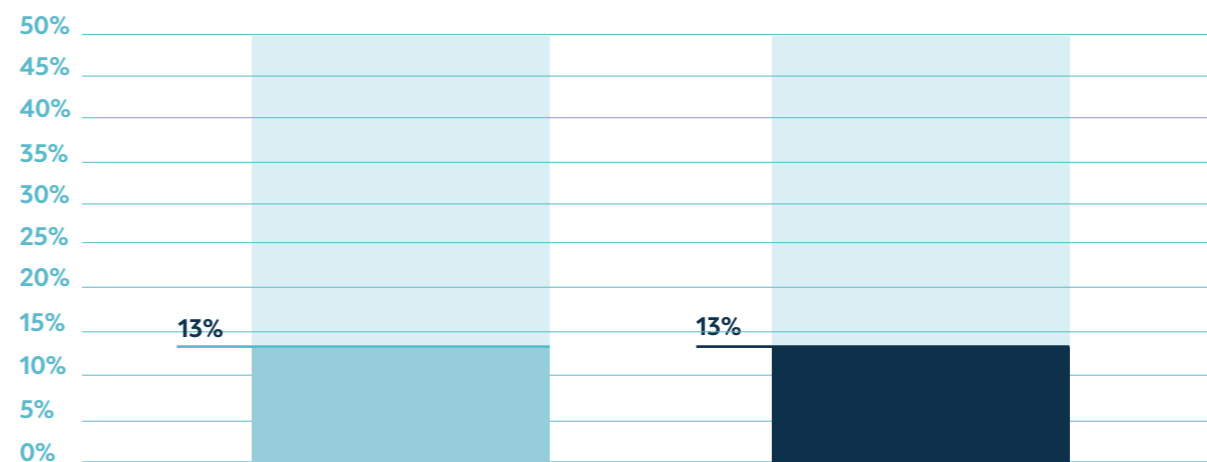
Change in volunteer group relative to control group from the pre-survey to the post-survey.

Change in volunteer group relative to control group from the pre-survey to the 12-week follow-up survey.

CHANGE IN JOB SATISFACTION

In general, I am satisfied with my job.

Percent change in average response on a 0-10 scale.



Change in volunteer group relative to control group from the pre-survey to the post-survey.

Change in volunteer group relative to control group from the pre-survey to the 12-week follow-up survey.



IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE EMPLOYEE'S COMMITMENT THROUGH CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING

RESEARCH ELABORATED BY VOLUNTARE

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING INCREASES EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



OTHER SOURCES

THE IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT ON COMPANY PERFORMANCE



CONCLUSIONS

Six out of seven workers are not engaged in their work. In other words, most of the vehicles on the road, customer service interactions, and other products and service we experience every day are the result of subpar work. The economic costs of employee disengagement are monumental. Gallup estimates that the lost productivity dampens Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by over 2%.⁶ The human costs, however, are even more troubling. Many workers expend decades feeling meaningless and dissatisfied 40 hours a week. Such dissatisfaction makes it almost certain (84%) that they're not very satisfied with life. In other words, thanks to employee disengagement, most people will arrive home to their families today shrouded in unhappiness.

Companies, however, have an underutilized and largely unknown way to help remedy disengagement: Corporate volunteering. Of course, the principal purpose of corporate volunteer programs is to reduce homelessness, injustice, poverty and other societal ills. Nevertheless, this study suggests that corporate volunteering is also a powerful tool in promoting employee engagement.

⁶ Gallup. (2013). State of the American Workplace.

⁷ Tom W. Smith. (2007). Job Satisfaction in the United States. Chicago: NORC/University of Chicago.



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