



# The motivational antecedents and performance consequences of corporate volunteering: When do employees volunteer and when does volunteering help versus harm work performance?



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## ABSTRACT

Theoretical analyses and empirical studies are lacking on the antecedents, consequences, and contingencies of employee participation in company-sponsored volunteer programs. In response, we build on the motivation-based theory of volunteerism to explore the questions of why and when employees engage in company-sponsored volunteer programs and when corporate volunteering experience positively influences job performance at work. Using a three-wave time-lagged study with a sample from a large real estate company, we found that coworker corporate volunteering (but not leader role modeling of corporate volunteering) weakened and social support for corporate volunteering from family and friends strengthened the relationship between prosocial motivation and participation in volunteer programs. Furthermore, we discovered that when employees had positive learning experiences from corporate volunteering, their participation in volunteer programs did not distract from job performance, whereas when employees did not learn much from corporate volunteering, their corporate volunteering harmed job performance at work. The findings contribute to the literature on corporate volunteering and explain the joint influences of personal, social, and learning motives underlying corporate volunteering.

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## 1. Introduction

Employees have opportunities to donate their time and skills to serve others through a wide range of company-sponsored volunteer programs (Grant, 2012; Peterson, 2004a). Companies worldwide have increasingly adopted such programs as an important form of corporate social responsibility. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2013), surveyed 518 human resource professionals and found that 20% reported that employees were given time off for volunteer activities, an increase from 15% in 2009. A survey of 203 European organizations showed that 80% had provided corporate volunteering programs for more than a year (Pérez et al., 2014). A study of 273 Chinese companies revealed that 53.50% encouraged employees to donate time for company-sponsored community work in 2012 and 2013 (Horizon Corporate Volunteer Consultancy, 2014).

Despite the growing popularity of company-sponsored volunteer programs, two important theoretical and practical issues remain. First, although more than 90% of Fortune 500 companies sponsor employee volunteer programs (Points of Light Institute, 2006), some employees decline to participate (Peterson, 2004b; Pérez et al., 2014). A study of 261 participating companies showed a mere 9% median employee participation rate in a volunteer program called matching gift program (Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy [CECP], 2014). Intriguing questions naturally follow: Why do some employees actively volunteer while others do not? What personal and social factors affect their decisions? To answer those questions, many researchers suggest studying multiple motivations behind decisions to help others, especially strangers (e.g., Clary & Snyder, 1991; Clary et al., 1998; Harrison, 1995; Mannino, Snyder, & Omoto, 2011; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005; Rodell, 2013). Specifically, the motivation-based theory of volunteerism focuses on the volunteering motives that include desires (1) to fulfill prosocial, altruistic, or empathetic humanitarian concerns; (2) to adhere to socially developed norms and acquire positive self-images and social acceptance by important others; (3) to acquire learning through

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new experiences for career benefits (Penner et al., 2005). Thus, the motivational approach explains that personal values, social norms, and learning experiences drive volunteerism. Indeed, “volunteer behaviors do not depend solely on the person or on the situation, but rather depend on the interaction of person-based dynamics and situational opportunities” (Clary & Snyder, 1999, p. 159). Likewise, Grant (2012) developed a comprehensive theoretical framework on corporate volunteering to highlight how task, social, and knowledge characteristics affect sustained volunteerism (Grant, 2012). If both personal and situational factors uniquely contribute to employee volunteerism, research on one factor alone may yield narrow and piecemeal understandings of the antecedents of corporate volunteering. Thus, it is critical to consider concurrent influences from internal values and contextual factors.

Empirical research has provided mixed findings about multiple motives impacting corporate volunteerism. Some studies have shown that, when combined, prosocial motives have no significant relationship, and leaders' and coworkers' social support are insignificantly or negatively associated with employee volunteering participation (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Pelozo, Hudson, & Hassay, 2009); some studies reveal that prosocial motives and other social factors undermine each other's positive influences on volunteerism (e.g., Kiviniemi, Snyder, & Omoto, 2002) or prosocial behaviors (Takeuchi, Bolino, & Lin, 2015); and others indicate that prosocial and social motivators can be mutually reinforcing and combine to enhance prosocial behaviors (e.g., Grant & Mayer, 2009). These empirical ramifications suggest that prosocial motives and different social and situational factors may generate differentiated interactive influences on employee volunteerism. Although researchers have suggested that prosocial values are fundamental motives behind employee volunteerism (Pelozo & Hassay, 2006; Penner et al., 2005), situational factors that enable or undermine prosocial motivation influence are largely unclear (Finkelstein, 2009). We take a step further and integrate social influence theory (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) to argue that the source of the social factors is essential: social influences from the work domain, such as leaders' and coworkers' reactions to corporate-sponsored volunteer programs, are likely to exert normative effects on employees' decisions to volunteer, which substitutes for the influence of personal prosocial motives. On the other hand, life domain factors such as social support from family and friends, are less likely to emit normative pressures and more likely to act as a situational enhancer that confirms and magnifies self-views and prosocial motivations.

Second, in addition to examining the antecedents of corporate volunteering decisions, an equally important theoretical and practical question is whether corporate volunteering experience positively relates to work performance. Rodell (2013) in her pioneering research proposed two competing hypotheses: volunteering may (1) promote job performance by making employees more absorbed in their jobs, or (2) hurt job performance by distracting from task behaviors (Rodell, 2013). Results using 172 employed volunteers showed that job performance benefitted through enhanced job absorption. Scholars have suggested that employee volunteerism can be seen as a form of citizenship behaviors (Pelozo & Hassay, 2006), but citizenship behaviors may keep employees from competing and producing at work, as shown in studies of sales agency managers (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Paine, 1999), bank employees (Naumann & Bennett, 2002), and professional service consultants (Bergeron, Shipp, Rosen, & Furst, 2013). The contradictory theoretical viewpoints and findings imply that corporate volunteering can enhance or damage job performance, pointing to the possibility of boundary conditions. Indeed, volunteerism literature has suggested that how volunteerism relates to work-related outcomes depends on volunteer experiences (Caligiuri, Mencin, & Jiang, 2013; Jones, 2010). The

motivation-based theory of volunteerism notes that people value opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge through volunteer programs (Clary et al., 1998; Penner et al., 2005) and their learning experiences may directly affect their work evaluations (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Thus, aligned with this theoretical perspective and to resolve the empirical ambiguities, we identify learning from corporate volunteering as a key contingency of the job performance effects and highlight that participation is more likely to enhance job performance when volunteers have positive learning experiences. This exploration of boundary conditions also offers practical contributions, as many companies hesitate to initiate programs because they are unsure about whether volunteerism takes time and energy away from the pursuit of financial goals (Double the Donation, 2014; Horizon Corporate Volunteer Consultancy, 2014). Therefore, discovering the conditions that will allow corporate volunteering to benefit job performance may help firms choose whether to adopt volunteer programs and how to design volunteer programs to be beneficial for job performance.

Our goal is to fill gaps in the extant research regarding corporate volunteering, extend theory and literature by exploring conditions that are more likely to motivate participation, and determine when volunteering enhances job performance. We draw on the motivation-based theory of volunteerism (Clary et al., 1998; Penner et al., 2005) as an overarching framework to explain how prosocial values and social influences from different domains jointly impact decisions to volunteer and also how volunteering provides learning that affects job performance. We offer three theoretical contributions to corporate volunteering research.

First, we widen theory and literature by investigating concurrent and interactive effects of employee prosocial motivation and social influences from both work and family domains. Although multiple motives are thought to inspire volunteerism, theoretical work does not explicitly explain how the motives interact, and empirical evidence is ambivalent and mixed. We integrate theories of motivation-based volunteerism (Clary et al., 1998; Penner et al., 2005) and social influences (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) to show that due to differences in the salience of normative influences, work-related factors and prosocial motivation create a substitutional person-situation interaction, and family and social support and prosocial motivation generate a synergistic person-situation interaction. Exploring multiple motives extends volunteerism theory and empirical work and advances knowledge of the antecedents of employee participation in corporate volunteering.

Second, joining Rodell (2013), we take a broader view by investigating reasons for volunteering and likely impacts on job performance, a key yet unresolved issue for scholars and practitioners. Volunteerism may contribute to job performance (Rodell, 2013), but the findings are inconsistent and contradictory theoretical concerns remain. We address the need to theorize and document how learning experience acts as a boundary condition that determines whether volunteering enhances job performance.

Third, we specifically focus on corporate-sponsored programs and connect the perspectives and interests of companies, employees, and communities. Social and organizational psychologists have primarily focused on underlying personal and work-related factors (Grant, 2012; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner et al., 2005) whereas sociologists have paid particular attention to how family and friends in the life domain shape volunteerism (Wilson, 2000). The two perspectives have rarely been integrated for a more complete account of employee volunteerism, an especially critical omission for corporate-sponsored volunteer programs that not only can include paid work time but also may take time away from family and friends (Points of Light Institute, 2010). Thus, our focus on social influences from personal, work, and life domains integrates the disconnected literatures on volunteerism, work, and life and offers balanced insights for better

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