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# Effects of an Employee Volunteering Program on the Work Force: The ABN-AMRO Case

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**ABSTRACT.** One of the new ways used by companies to demonstrate their social responsibility is to encourage employee volunteering, whereby employees engage in socially beneficial activities on company time, while being paid by the company. The reasoning is that it is good for employee motivation (internal effects) and good for the company reputation (external effects). This article reports an empirical investigation of the internal effects of employee volunteering conducted amongst employees of the Dutch ABN-AMRO bank. The study showed that (a) socio-demographic characteristics from employee volunteers markedly differ from those of non-volunteers and community volunteers and (b) employee volunteering seems to have positive effects on attitudes and behavior towards the organization.

**KEY WORDS:** Employee volunteering, corporate social responsibility, effects on attitude and behavior, volunteering and socio-demographic characteristics

**ABBREVIATIONS:** OCB Organizational citizenship behavior.

## Introduction

To behave in a socially responsible manner is getting to be more and more an issue for business. In Western European countries, including The Netherlands, the increased social responsibility of companies may be explained by at least three factors. They are, firstly, (1) *the growing awareness of businesses of the economic advantages of being "social"*. Establishing contacts with non-profit organizations may have positive effects on the company reputation and is increasingly being adopted as a marketing instrument (McAlister and Ferrell, 2002; Porter and Kramer, 2002). Some authors even mention the improvement of the company competencies as a positive incentive for community involvement (Hoare, 2004). Hunt and Morgan formulated increasing competencies within their framework of "resource advantage theory" (Hunt and Morgan, 1995, 1997).

A second, related, factor is (2) *the demand for social responsibility*. Consumers, as well as other involved parties, are becoming increasingly critical in their judgment of how companies operate. Certainly in Western European countries, in contrast to the United States, there is a plea for a "stakeholder approach" as opposed to a "shareholders-approach", whereby firms have to prove themselves socially responsible in order to earn their right to exist, or their license to operate (Luijk, 2000). Thirdly, which is certainly the case for The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, there may be (3) *the pressure on business from the political and legislative environment* (Brammer and Millington, 2003: 213). Companies are expected to enlarge their social agenda, to take responsibilities with regard to employee healthcare,

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ecological issues, childcare and pensions, and the like. These factors all refer to the companies' responses to external forces, as if corporate social responsibility activities are mainly directed at external stakeholders.

One of the new ways in which companies show their community involvement and social responsibility is by engaging in employee volunteering. Volunteering typically has been an activity that is performed outside of work, as a consequence of an individual's choice to donate time to non-profit activities. However, some companies enable and stimulate employees to volunteer, to contribute to social goals outside the company, but at the expense of the company: the employees are allowed to do volunteer work during working hours, instead of their regular tasks. Employees may be helping neighborhood schools, may contribute to the development of community safety programs, to the setting up of special youth programs.

For companies, employee volunteering is a relatively new phenomenon and research into employee volunteering is sparse. Simple questions as "who participates and what makes employees participate?" remain unanswered. But also more fundamental questions need attention. In fact, it is not even self-evident that the effects of an employee volunteering program, if at all present, will be positive for the organization. For example, it may be that employees see volunteering as a private issue that should be separated from work; employees may disagree with management that money should be spent on this kind of program in difficult economic circumstances; the program may not lead to increased volunteering when people who already volunteer remain doing so, but now at the expense of the organization, etc. Given the sparse research and theory on employee volunteering that is available, the research questions of the current study are of an exploratory nature. Two central questions will be answered in this study: (1) who takes part in employee volunteering and for what reason? and (2) what effect does employee volunteering have on the participants' and non-participants' attitudes and behavior towards their employer?

A study has been conducted at a major Dutch international bank, the ABN-AMRO, that focused on the relationship between employee volunteerism and involvement in the organization. The lack of

empirical data was an important reason for carrying out the research. Moreover, it offered an opportunity to test existing measurement instruments and develop new questions. Along with its scientific relevance, the study was relevant for ABN-AMRO as well. The bank's management was curious about what kind of employees would enter the program and they were interested in an evaluation of the program. In the framework of a long-term policy regarding company image and reputation, in 2002, ABN-AMRO set up a special "Department of community involvement". One of the Department's tasks included the introduction of an employee volunteering project which has to be centered on the issues "youth, talent and development". The results of this study serve as a first evaluation of this new policy.

### **The current study**

The first question of our study is what explains whether someone does or does not engage in volunteer work and for what reason? In order to answer this question, we studied differences among participants in the program, people who did not participate in the program but did engage in volunteering in their free time (community volunteers), and non-volunteers, with regard to their socio-demographic variables. At the level of the individual participant, as research in volunteer work has shown that socio-demographic variables generally play a role in the decision to volunteer. For example, gender is related to volunteering, as more women do volunteer work than do men (Van Daal and Plemper, 2003: 91). Volunteering also increases with age (*ibid*, 2003: 92.), while family structure also matters, with people who are married or living together with children relatively often doing volunteer work (*ibid*, 2003: 97). Level of education is also associated with volunteer work, with those more highly educated being more active (*ibid*, 2003: 98). The same is true of religion. People who have religious backgrounds are more active in volunteer work than those who have not (*ibid*, 2003: 81; Wilson and Janoski, 1995). However, these findings do not pertain to employee volunteering but to volunteering in general. In the present study, it will be established whether or not the characteristics of the participants of the employee

volunteering program differ from those of non-volunteers and community volunteers.

In the program, only volunteering that was centered on the issues “youth, talent and development” qualified for acceptance by the organization. For this reason, our study also looked at whether the ages of their children play an important role in parents’ participation in employee volunteer work. The expectation was that employees with children, especially older children between the ages of six and eighteen, would participate more in employee volunteer activities. Schools often depend on the parents’ involvement. In that way they evoke volunteering.

The second research question focused on what effects employee volunteering have on the participants’ attitude and behavior towards their employer. To answer this question, we included a number of variables that potentially precede or follow the decision to volunteer. For instance, we looked at the employee’s attitude towards the policy of the organization concerning CSR in the form of volunteer work by employees and at the attitude towards volunteering in general. The expectation was that the more positive the employee’s attitude towards the employee volunteering program (for example, learning new skills) and towards volunteering in general, the more they would participate in the program.

Although volunteering seems to be very positive behavior, it is not self-evident that people regard participation in the program as something positive. People who choose to participate might be seen as not focused on – or not interested enough in – their regular task. On the other hand, people who don’t participate might be seen as not complying with the company’s policies, or as not showing commitment to the organization (cf. Mowday et al., 1979). Therefore, the study explored whether career-oriented commitment, the importance employees attach to making steps on the career ladder (cf. Ellemers et al., 1998), is associated with participation in the program and with attitudes towards volunteering and the volunteering program.

In addition, on the basis of social-psychological studies of behavior determinants, the study looked at the reactions of the (direct) social environment and the attitude of the participants (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Some empirical evidence warrants the

expectation that employees in an environment in which colleagues or family members did a lot of volunteer work would themselves be more inclined to actively volunteer (Jackson et al., 1995).

Besides the above list of potential determinants of employee volunteering, participation in the program may also have consequences for individual attitudes towards work and behavior at work (Mowday et al. 1982). Sanders and Roefs (2002) studied the relationship between the degree to which staff perceive their employers as socially responsible businesses and their bond to the organization. They measured the bond employees felt to the organization in terms of three aspects: affective involvement, organizational citizenship behavior and intended turnover, using part of the McGee and Ford (1987) questionnaire. Their research proved that the degree of the perception of the companies’ social responsibility is positively related to employee bonding. It thus seems worthwhile to examine potential consequences of participation in employee volunteering. For this purpose, we included measures of outcome variables that are often used in research evaluating company policies, such as attitude to work (attendance, performance), intention to leave the organization (potential turnover), identification with the company and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Organ and Ryan, 1995).

## Method

The study was conducted within the ABN-AMRO bank. The ABN-AMRO is a financial services provider with a broad package of products and services in over 70 countries. In June 2002, they established a Department of Community Involvement, as part of their Consumer & Commercial Clients strategic business unit for The Netherlands. The task of the Department of Community Involvement is to give form, content and structure to the volunteering activities that employees want to realize. One condition of the program is that all the projects have to fall within the centrally selected theme of “youth, talent and development”. Under the ABN-AMRO’s Collective Labor Agreement with their staff, a certain number of hours per year can be devoted to volunteer work, based on the employee’s weekly work schedule. For example,

based on a 36-hour week, an employee may spend 36 hours annually on volunteer work. The employee volunteering project fits within the framework of ABN-AMRO policy on corporate image and corporate reputation. In practice, the company does not emphasize these external effects: the employee volunteering project is low profile.

The potential population of the current study comprised all ABN-AMRO employees who work within the Consumer & Commercial Clients business unit for The Netherlands (23,000 employees). The research unit was divided into three groups in such a way that the groups could be compared with one another:

Group (1) employee volunteers	employees who engage in employee volunteering on company time
Group (2) non-volunteers	employees who do not volunteer, either in company time or otherwise
Group (3) community volunteers	employees who engage in volunteer work in their free time

As of mid-2003, the ABN-AMRO employee volunteer project had only briefly been in existence and only a relatively small group of employees ( $N = 200$ ) was registered with the Department of Community Involvement as participants in the program. In terms of its composition, this group was representative of the total ABN-AMRO population, where half of the group worked at the office headquarters and the other half across the network of branch offices. From this group, a random selection was made of 150 employees. The groups of non-volunteers and those who volunteered outside company time had to share, for as far as possible, characteristics with the group of employee volunteers. For this reason, half of the sample group worked at the head office and the other half at the branch banks. This resulted in a stratified random sample of 475 employees from the two groups. Adding the employee volunteers, this resulted in a sample of 625 respondents.

The respondents were sent a written questionnaire with primarily structured 5-point scale Likert-

type questions (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree). The questions were developed for this study and pretested, unless otherwise indicated below. Correspondence was carried out via the ABN-AMRO's internal e-mail system and Intranet. The employees were familiar with this system, which was likely to increase their participation in this study.

Questions were asked about the following subjects, with a representative sample item presented for each:

Attitude towards the program (7 items;  $\alpha = 0.81$ ): I find that ABN-AMRO giving its employees the chance to do volunteer work during company time is a good initiative.

Attitude concerning volunteer work (7 items;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ): The chance to develop contacts with other people and organizations is an important advantage of doing volunteer work.

Social norm (5 items;  $\alpha = 0.65$ ): Many of my co-workers do voluntary work.

Career oriented commitment (5 items;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ; taken from Ellemers et al. 1998): My career is of fundamental importance in my life.

Identification (5 items;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ): I am proud to tell my friends which organization I work for.

Intention to turnover (4 items;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ): I often consider looking for a different job.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (5 items;  $\alpha = 0.66$ ): I will intervene without being asked if it would prevent mistakes being made by others.

Attitude to work (6 items;  $\alpha = 0.67$ ): I still go to work, even if I have an excuse not to.

Of the 625 questionnaires distributed, a total of 274 were returned, amounting to a response of about 44%. Amongst the group of employee volunteers (150), 75 responded (50%). From the combined groups of non-volunteers and community volunteers (together, 475) the response was respectively 119 for the non-volunteers and 80 for community volunteers, thus in total 40% responded.

## Results

The first question in this research was: who participates; do people who volunteer under the auspices

of the program share socio-demographic characteristics that distinguish them from non-volunteers and community volunteers? To answer this question, we looked at differences in age, duration of employment, sex, marital status, age of the youngest child, religion, education and working hours (part time vs. full time). Chi-square analyses showed that the three groups did indeed differ from one another in terms of age category ( $\chi^2$  (2,  $N = 273$ ) = 17.9,  $p < 0.01$ ) and tenure ( $\chi^2$  (8,  $N = 272$ ) = 24.6,  $p < 0.01$ ). Given that age and tenure were strongly correlated ( $r = 0.78$ ), it was understandable that the two characteristics showed very comparable results. It was therefore decided to report only the effects of age group. There were also differences among the three groups with regard to marital status ( $\chi^2$  (4,  $N = 264$ ) = 23.9,  $p < 0.01$ ), religion ( $\chi^2$  (2,  $N = 273$ ) = 14.5,  $p < 0.01$ ) and education level ( $\chi^2$  (6,  $N = 273$ ) = 43.3,  $p < 0.01$ ). Although we had expected more volunteering would occur for employees who had children older than 6 years, there was no specific effect for children's age group ( $\chi^2$  (2,  $N = 128$ ) = 1.5, n.s.).

The associations between the kind of volunteers (participants in the program, non-volunteers and community volunteers) on the one hand and age, marital status and religion on the other hand, showed a singular pattern (see Tables I, II and III). Just as in previous studies, community volunteers as compared to non-volunteers were relatively older, more often married with children and more often religious. Participants in the program, however, the employee volunteers, showed fewer heterogeneous background characteristics than both the other groups. This indicates that age, marital status and religion do play an important role in the cases of the community volunteers and the non-volunteers, but not amongst

the participants in the program. This result suggests that the program has been able to tap a new source of volunteers.

There was also a relationship between level of education and volunteering (see Table IV).

People with higher education, most notably those with a university degree, were overrepresented in the employee volunteering program.

The first research question was not only about how the characteristics of the groups of (non-) volunteers differ, but also why participants in the ABN-AMRO employee volunteer program decided to take part. Participants were asked to what degree their decision to take part had to do with – once the program was set up – the fact that they were asked to do so. Among the participants, 30.7% indicated that “being asked” was indeed an important motivation to participate, 9.3% were neutral, and for 60%, this was not a consideration. For a number of participants (14.7%), the fact that the program was included as part of the Collective Labor Agreement was an important reason for them to participate, 20% were neutral and 65.3% of participants said that the labor agreement played no role in their decision. For the great majority of the participants, either they stated they began doing more volunteer work since the program was initiated (38.7%) or else they actually volunteered for the first time (54.7%). Only 6.7% of the participants continued volunteering they were already engaged in before the program was initiated, but now have their time officially financed by the program. Thus, almost all time spent on volunteering financed by the program can be considered as volunteering that would not have occurred without the support of the program.

Respondents who indicated not to do any volunteering were asked why they didn't volunteer. Of

TABLE I  
Association between the type of volunteer and age group

Type of volunteer	Age group		
	<30 years	30–40 years	>40 years
Employee volunteers	18 (17.6)	29 (27.2)	28 (30.2)
Non-volunteers	38 (27.7)	43 (42.8)	37 (47.5)
Community volunteers	8 (18.8)	27 (29.0)	45 (32.2)

(Expected values in parentheses)

TABLE II  
Association between type of volunteer and family status

Type of volunteer	Marital Status		
	Married/living together with children	Married/living together, no children	Single, no children
Employee volunteers	30 (34.3)	20 (20.1)	22 (18.1)
Non-volunteers	41 (54.0)	40 (31.6)	34 (28.5)
Community volunteers	54 (36.6)	13 (21.4)	10 (19.3)

TABLE III  
Association between type of volunteering and religion

Type of volunteer	Religion	
	Not religious	Religious
Employee volunteers	37 (33.8)	38 (41.2)
Non-volunteers	64 (53.2)	54 (64.8)
Community volunteers	22 (36.0)	58 (44.0)

(Expected values in parentheses)

them, 19.3% indicated they were never asked, 55.5% said they had no time and 25.2% reported other reasons.

The second research question focused on the effects of employee volunteering on the respondents' attitudes and behavior towards their employer. Using oneway analysis of variance to explore this question, there do indeed seem to be differences among the three groups (Table V shows the means and *F*-values). It is no surprise that the attitude towards the program is most positive amongst the participants themselves. They have already chosen to make use of the opportunity to do volunteer work

during company time. Nonetheless, the attitude of the other two groups was also relatively positive, so that the policy need not be at the expense of the groups who do not take part in the program. Also the attitude towards volunteer work in general, the ideas people have about personal development through volunteering, was positive, with the highest score found amongst community volunteers. The response concerning the positive social aspects, the degree to which volunteers come in contact with other volunteers and with positive responses from friends, family members and colleagues, was far stronger for the two groups of volunteers than

TABLE IV  
Association between type of volunteering and level of education

Type of volunteer	Level of education			
	Secondary school	Technical school, pre-university	Technical college/university	University
Employee volunteers	3 (7.7)	18 (34.3)	23 (18.7)	31 (14.3)
Non-volunteers	16 (12.1)	63 (54.0)	27 (29.4)	12 (22.5)
Community volunteers	9 (8.2)	44 (36.6)	18 (19.9)	9 (15.2)

(Expected values in parentheses)

amongst the non-volunteers. It is worth noting that the social norm amongst the new volunteers, the participants in the program, was very quickly developed soon after the program was initiated.

There were no differences found amongst the groups concerning the importance of one's personal career, their commitment to the organization, their intention to leave the organization or the level of OCB. There was, however, a difference found in their attitudes towards their own work. Participants in the program reported a relatively strong level of performance and attendance at work.

Even if there is no opportunity to draw conclusions about causal relationships based on a single assessment made at a single point in time, it is possible to explore what effects the continuation of the new policy is likely to have. For this purpose, a correlation table has been made for the most important variables (see Table VI). The attitude towards the program then becomes particularly interesting, because it is probably precisely this variable that has been influenced by the initiation of the new policy. This variable shows several significant correlations with possible outcome variables. The relationship to commitment to the company is positive, as is the relationship to organizational commitment behavior and to attitude to work. People with a positive attitude towards the volunteer program therefore have a more positive attitude towards the organization and themselves claim to show high organizational commitment behavior and to be strongly oriented to high performance and high attendance.

Several other correlations show similar patterns. The respondents' attitude towards volunteer work in general, the social norm encountered by the respondents and career importance also show significant positive correlations with commitment to the organization, OCB and work attitude. There thus seems to be a broad pattern of results that suggest that the more positive respondents are about volunteer work, the more people work with colleagues and are surrounded by family members and friends that endorse volunteer work, the more positive are their attitudes and behavior towards the organization.

## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate which employees would participate in an employee volunteer program financed by their employer and why, and to what degree the attitudes of the participants would differ from non-volunteers and from volunteers not participating in the program. The results show that both questions are relevant as they shed light on the differences and similarities among these groups of employees. Overall, we argue that the development of the ABN-AMRO volunteer program so far should be evaluated positively.

The most pronounced effect of the employee volunteer program is that a group of employees responded to the opportunities offered by the organization and has started doing voluntary work

TABLE V  
Means and *F*-tests of the research variables (after oneway analysis of variance)

Research variables	Type of volunteer			<i>F</i> -test
	Program participants	Non-volunteers	Community volunteers	
Attitude to the program	4.02	3.61	3.64	12.41**
Attitude to volunteer work	3.71	3.62	3.83	2.87*
Social norm	3.14	2.78	3.36	28.42**
Career importance	2.92	3.06	2.96	0.92
Commitment to the organization	3.71	3.59	3.55	1.09
Intention to leave	2.18	2.23	2.21	0.09
OCB	4.15	4.05	4.05	1.91
Attitude to work	4.37	4.20	4.23	4.61**

(\*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$ )

TABLE VI  
Correlations between dependent variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Attitude to the program	(0.85)							
Attitude to volunteer work	0.36**	(0.83)						
Social norm	0.34**	0.35**	(0.65)					
Career importance	0.13*	0.12	0.00	(0.86)				
Commitment to the organization	0.13*	0.20**	0.17**	0.29**	(0.85)			
Intention to leave	-0.04	-0.08	-0.05	-0.02	-0.48**	(0.85)		
OCB	0.20**	0.22**	0.24**	0.20**	0.30**	-0.14*	(0.66)	
Attitude to work	0.19**	0.19**	0.17**	0.25**	0.42**	-0.20**	0.52**	(0.67)

(\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; reliabilities are reported in parentheses along the diagonal)

they were not doing before the program started. The results suggest that the program participants differ from traditional groups of volunteers, as they cannot be pinned down to specific socio-demographic backgrounds. Volunteers usually are relatively older and more frequently have a religious background, a result that is also found in this study when they are compared to non-volunteers. However, the characteristics of the new volunteers are much more non-specific, suggesting the program is equally appealing to all kinds of groups of employees. For the society as a whole, this can only be regarded as a positive outcome, as the total number of people and the total number of hours spent on volunteer work is likely to increase as a consequence of the introduction of the program.

The results related to the second goal of this study are more equivocal, because the hypotheses were exploratory and the methodology chosen in this study, a one shot case study with self-report data, limits the possibilities to infer causality. Despite the obvious limitations, the pattern of results gives some insight into potential positive effects of the program for the different groups of employees (participants, non-volunteers and community volunteers). In addition, some fears about conceivable negative consequences of the program may be taken away by the results. First, although there are differences among the groups, there seems to be a broadly shared positive attitude towards volunteer work in general and the program. The results show that the program is evaluated most positively by the employees who participate in the program, and volunteer work in general is rated most favorably by

the community volunteers. Despite this, the results do suggest that even the employees that may suffer from the absence of their colleagues who participate in the program during working hours because the same amount of work has to be done with fewer people, still have a positive attitude towards the program. Secondly, the results on the social norm seem to indicate that people who work with colleagues who do volunteer work, are more likely to do volunteer work themselves, either within the program or as a community volunteer, as would be predicted in the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Due to the nature of the study the direction of the relation cannot be established with certainty, but it suggests that as more people start participating in the program, the social norm is also likely to become stronger, thus possibly leading to even higher participation in the program. Future research will have to be performed in order to test this hypothesis.

Of course, the program has been started with the idea that it would have positive effects for the organization, such as an increase in commitment to the organization and potentially better work performance. However, starting a program like the volunteer program could have certain risks as well. For instance, the program might attract people who don't have career opportunities anymore and/or people who are not very motivated to perform well in their primary task, who welcome the diversion, or even people who are not motivated to stay at the organization. Another risk might be that employees who do not participate in the program would have a negative attitude towards the

program. Employees who do volunteer work that is not supported by the program might be disappointed if they would interpret this as that the organization does not value their efforts. These community volunteers and the non-volunteers who chose not to participate in the program might also believe that doing volunteer work is a private matter that should not be financed by the organization, whereas the costs associated with the program also has consequences for the non-participants, as the money spent on the program can not be spent on their preferred interests.

Despite this list of potential risks, the results of the study primarily lends support to the hypothesis that the program has positive effects for the organization. The program is not more attractive for people who don't value their careers, and there is a slight tendency that participants are more committed to the organization and display higher levels of OCB. The clearest difference found among the groups is that participants report higher levels of positive behavior than non-volunteers and community volunteers. The correlational data further support the notion that the results of the program are likely to be positive, as the employees who have more positive attitudes towards volunteer work and employees who work with other volunteers (strong social norm) also report higher levels of commitment, OCB and other work-related behaviors. Finally, although the participants' attitudes towards the program is more positive than the attitudes of non-volunteers and community volunteers, the difference is not very large, and the overall mean attitude for the latter groups is also clearly positive. All in all, the results show some positive consequences of the program, while there is no indication that the effects of the program are in any way negative. On the other hand, one could argue that the effects of the program are rather modest, as the three groups do not differ significantly on each variable and the effect sizes of the significant effects could be considered as small. We argue, however, that small effect sizes were to be expected, for two reasons. First, the study was performed in an early stage of the volunteer program, which makes it unlikely that all respondents have already experienced any consequences from the program introductions. Secondly, the scope of the program is limited, as the program participants

can do volunteer work under working hours for 36 hours per annum. The impact of the program is therefore also likely to be limited, as the main task of the participants is still their regular job. The aspects of their job (e.g., task characteristics, leadership, communication, and reward system) probably influence our dependent variables much stronger than the new organizational policy on volunteering. In fact, it could be argued that the results are quite convincing given the relatively modest introduction of the volunteering policy. We have no reason to believe social desirability explains the results. Although it would have been preferable to have measures from different sources instead of only self-reports, there is no reason why social desirability should differ across the three groups of respondents.

Although the study presented here focused on the effects of the introduction of the volunteering program on the employees, the scope of the program was broader, as employee volunteering can also be regarded as a means for the organization to align with societal pressures to increase the corporate social responsibility displayed by the organization, but still to gain strategic advantage by carefully choosing actions and policies regarding corporate social responsibility that fit the organizations' goals and possibilities. It is not easy to disentangle internal and external effects of the program, but there are some indications that the bank studied in this study may be quite successful in achieving both internal and external effects. So far, the organization has already had some free publicity with regard to their program. As publicity is likely to contribute to the corporate reputation, it is interesting to note that this seemingly external effect may also have an impact on the employees of the organization. It has been demonstrated that employees who believe that people from the outside world think positively about their organization, are more committed to the organization (Smidts et al., 2001). Interestingly, even employees who do not participate in the program will encounter the positive external image, suggesting that the positive effects of the improved reputation may emerge for volunteers and non-volunteers alike. Another potential advantage of the volunteering program may be that the employees who do volunteer work in the name of the organization they work for, will

meet people who are potential clients, who may be especially attracted towards the organization just because they actually experience the corporate social responsibility of the organization. On the other hand, it is quite unlikely that current clients will walk away because of the program, as it is hard to be unsympathetic towards it. Finally, the “outside world” experiences of the participants may be useful in the organization as well. Participants may acquire new abilities, for instance in the realm of co-operation, communication, client-centeredness or leadership (Hoare, 2004; Hunt and Morgan, 1995, 1997). The results do indicate that the volunteers (both participants and community volunteers) think that they develop new competencies while doing volunteer work.

Although the results support the idea that the employee volunteering program works out positively for the employees and the organization, the long-term effects can not be established yet. Furthermore, the discussion on the potential effects of the program on corporate reputation and the positive influence reputation may have on the employees remain speculative for now. This line of research has to be pursued to further establish the validity of our findings and hypotheses.

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