Corporate Volunteering at Macquarie University

A Brief Report
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1. Introduction

Employers want employees who will go the extra mile to help the company achieve its objectives. At the same time, employees want jobs that are challenging and meaningful. A term that is increasingly used to describe this win-win situation is ‘engaged workforce’. Research shows that there may be a new way to achieve engagement: by behaving in a way that is socially responsible and encouraging employees to actively participate in the company’s CSR. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as “business decision making linked to ethical values, compliance with legal requirements, and respect for people, communities, and the environment around the world”\(^1\). It is not difficult to see why such commitment and respect may be related to employee engagement. One of the more successful ways to engage employees in the company’s CSR is through workplace volunteering: employees giving their time freely to help a social cause, with the support of their employer.

MGSM CSR Partnership Network was launched with the aim of creating an evidence-based dialogue on various aspects of CSR, creating shared knowledge and providing participating organisations with a strong network, inspirational practices and tools to enhance CSR and their employee engagement with it. MGSM CSR Partnership Network is based on a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectorial collaboration, and it includes leading companies, not-for-profits, the government and academia.

Initial research, sponsored by Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies, focused on workplace volunteering and is presented here. The quantitative study included over 4000 employees who participated in a survey, providing us with keys to increasing participation in workplace volunteering and employee engagement. It covers participation rate, motivations and barriers, satisfaction levels, and likelihood to participate in the future. Employees also indicated what would help them to continue or start to volunteer through their workplace. Together with their CSR attitudes and employee engagement, there is much to learn about workplace volunteering and how to unlock its potential.

We are delighted that MQ is a member of the MGSM CSR Partnership Network. We are pleased to provide you with a brief report on the above aspects of workplace volunteering.

\(^1\) Aaronson, 2003.
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Compared to the accumulated findings from all participating companies, we analyse workplace volunteering in MQ and finish with key recommendations for higher and stronger participation.

2. Method

To capture corporate volunteering and employee engagement, an online survey was designed and sent out to employees in 10 companies and organisations. The survey included questions on private giving, workplace giving, workplace volunteering and knowledge, employee engagement and job satisfaction, as well as some background variables. Employees who participate in workplace volunteering were asked to detail their motivation, satisfaction and likelihood to continue. Non-participants were asked to detail barriers, likelihood to participate and motivations to join in the future.

The data was analysed to capture levels of participation. The responses of workplace volunteering participants were analysed to examine motivations, satisfaction, and future intentions. Non-participants’ responses shed light on barriers, what would help them overcome these barriers and future intentions. In addition, we have examined CSR attitudes and employee engagement among all participants.

4127 employees participated in the survey overall, including 230 from MQ (6%). Of all the MQ employees, 62.4% were females; 70.5% were full time workers; and 42.0% of these were of professional job level (with an additional 21.5% administration, 12.7% middle management and 6.1% senior management). Regarding income levels, the biggest group (45.1%) was earning $75,000-150,000. About one third (31.9%) were 45-54 years old, whilst around one-quarter (23.6%) were 25-34. 56.5% were born in Australia and 57.1% had postgraduate-level education, followed by bachelor degree (27.2%) and trade qualifications (12.0%).  

2 Note: This report examines MQ responses versus the total responses. It should be noted that the total responses include MQ responses as well as the nine other organisations.
3. Participation Rate of Volunteering at Workplace

All participants were firstly asked about their knowledge of workplace volunteering opportunities at MQ (see Figure 1). MQ respondents had much poorer than average knowledge of the entire range of workplace volunteering options. MQ respondents ranged from 12% knowledge of providing volunteering opportunities or community mentoring based on professional skills (vs. 53% of total respondents) through to 37% knowledge of allowances for paid time off for volunteering and knowledge of the existence of a workplace-volunteering program (vs. 79% and 88% of total respondents, respectively).

![Figure 1: Knowledge of Workplace Volunteering Options](image)

The overall actual participation rate of MQ respondents in any form of workplace volunteering was also, on the whole, much lower than average (27.4% MQ vs. 59.7% overall; see Figure 2). The most significant differences were seen in participation in paid leave volunteering (5.1% MQ vs. 26.5% overall), as well as in team/group volunteering that was organised by the employer (4.1% MQ vs. 34.3% overall). However, significantly more MQ respondents participated in volunteering that was based on their professional skills (20.8%
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MQ vs. 9.7% overall). On average, MQ employees volunteered 19 hours per year through their workplace, slightly higher than the 17 hours average for the total respondents. Additionally, MQ respondents overall demonstrated a shorter than average length of participation in workplace volunteering, although with a slightly higher than average employee involvement beyond 5 years (34.1% vs. 32.8% overall). 29.5% of MQ employees participated in workplace volunteering for 1-5 years (vs. 46.5% overall), followed by 25% who only started last year (vs. 12.9% overall) and 9.1% in the last six months (vs. 6.6% overall).

![Figure 2: Participation in Workplace Volunteering](image)

4. Motivations to participate and satisfaction

MQ employees, who indicated they participated in workplace volunteering in the last 12 months, were then directed to questions regarding their workplace volunteering motivation, experience and satisfaction.

First, participants were given a list of motivations to participate in workplace volunteering (instead of private volunteering) and were asked to rate them from not at all important (1) to very important (5). When the responses “very important” and “important” were taken together, MQ respondents indicated that the most salient motivating factors to participate
in workplace volunteering were “it provides an opportunity to use my professional skills to help others” (72.9%), “it makes works more meaningful to me” (70.1%) and “it provides an opportunity to develop new skills (69.3%). While “it is fun” came as the first motivator overall, for MQ employees it was only ranked fifth.

![Figure 3: Motivations to Participate in Workplace Volunteering](image)

Participants were further asked about who chose the target organisations for which they volunteer through their workplace. The two most common methods of choosing an organisation to volunteer for were by the individual (83.1% responded “I did”) and by the team (9.5%), which is in line with the two most common methods chosen by all respondents (51% and 34%, respectively).

The likelihood of MQ respondents continuing to participate in workplace volunteering is moderate, with “likely” and “very likely” accounting for 68.4% of responses, which is lower than the average likelihood (87.0%, see Figure 4).
5. Barriers to participation

People have different reasons for not volunteering or not participating in workplace volunteering. When MQ employees were asked why they do not participate in workplace volunteering, the most common reasons were:

- Lack of time (35.7%)
- Feeling that their skills are not needed (28.3%)
- No interest in volunteering (21.5%)
- Other commitments (16.8%)
- Insufficient information about volunteering opportunities (12.9%)
- Lack of support from management (10.4%)
- Other factors (6.5%)
volunteering, the primary reason was “I was not asked to” (63.4%) which was far above the overall average (38.2%). The following reasons were “I am too busy” (32.1%) and “I prefer volunteering privately” (29.5%, both similar to the overall average; see Figure 6). However, 51.5% of MQ employees said that they are likely or very likely to participate in workplace volunteering in the future. The motivators that could make them do so are detailed under section 8, “Moving Forward”.

![Figure 6: Reasons for not Participating in Workplace Volunteering](image-url)
6. Employees’ Attitudes: CSR and employee engagement

We further asked employees about their attitudes towards their employer’s CSR and involvement in the community. MQ respondents indicated that it is most important for them to “work for a company that is highly involved with the community” (71.3%). The next most highly endorsed attitudes towards MQ’s community involvement were “Employees who donate through the workplace should be openly recognised by the company” (47.4%, more than the overall average), “my company engages with the community because it is strongly linked to its business strategy” (45.9%) and “My company engages with the community primarily to help make a difference” (43.7%). Whilst several of these attitudes were also the most supported across all respondents, the largest discrepancy was seen with “management is involved in giving”, which was endorsed by 58.4% of total respondents, but by only 17.8% of MQ employees.

MQ employees demonstrated high levels of employee engagement, when asked about their agreement with the statements presented in Table 1. 58.5% of MQ respondents said that “I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation” which is similar to the 61% of total respondents who agreed. 24% of MQ respondents indicated that they did not “feel ‘emotionally attached’ to the organisation” (vs. 19.2% of total respondents), and 26.9% do not feel part of the family at MQ (vs. 17.1% of total respondents).
Table 1: CSR attitudes and employee engagement (percentage of employees who agreed or strongly agreed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Total Respondent</th>
<th>MQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CSR attitudes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's important for me to work for a company that is highly involved with the community</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees who donate through the workplace should be openly recognised by the company</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My company engages with the community because it is strongly linked to its business strategy</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My company engages with the community primarily to help make a difference</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My company engages with the community primarily for image and reputation</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering and donating money are an individual choice</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and giving should be separate</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management is involved in giving</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My company engages with the community primarily to please employees</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really feel as if this organisation's problems are my own</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel “part of the family” in my organisation</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel &quot;emotionally attached&quot; to this organisation</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel a strong sense of &quot;belonging&quot; to my organisation</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Based on a job satisfaction sub questionnaire, MQ employees also demonstrated high levels of satisfaction. In particular, they were satisfied or very satisfied with their relationships with others in the workplace (80%), their achievements (76.5%), with being part of MQ (69.8%) and with their role (73.3%). MQ employees were the least satisfied with MQ’s CSR and with leisure activities (45.4% and 22.6% respectively). Overall, the job satisfaction of MQ employees was fairly similar to that of the total respondents (see Figure 7).
7. Moving forward: Enhancing participating and overcoming barriers

MQ respondents, who participate in workplace volunteering, identified a number of key factors regarding the continuation of their participation in workplace volunteering. When responses of “likely” and “very likely” to impact decision to continue workplace volunteering are combined, the most important factors are: “feeling that we do something meaningful” (91.4%), “making a real difference in the community” (81.8%), “being able to choose the organisation I volunteer for” (79.4%), and “a good experience when I volunteer” (82.4%). The least important factors were, as identified by combining “unlikely” and “very unlikely” to impact decision to continue workplace volunteering, were “if my team/friends from work could volunteer with me” (45.4%), “family volunteering opportunities” (57.5%), and “employer’s support for my personal fund raising efforts” (45.4%).

Figure 8: Motivation to continue volunteering in the future

- Feeling that we do something meaningful
- A good experience when I volunteer
- Making a real difference in the community
- Being able to choose the organisation I volunteer for
- Building and using my skills
- Having more free time to volunteer
- Support from my manager
- Knowing of opportunities to get involved
- Being asked or supported by my manager
- Better communication regarding workplace volunteering
- Getting paid leave or time off work for volunteering
- Being asked directly
- Employer’s support for my personal fund raising efforts
- Recognition when I volunteer
- Family volunteering opportunities
- If my team/friends from work would volunteer with me
MQ respondents, who do not participate in workplace volunteering, were asked what would help them to overcome the barriers for participation. “Being able to use my skills” and “being given the opportunity” (52.5% each) would be the most useful ways to help employees participate, followed by “being supported by my manager” (51.8%), and “ability to choose volunteer organisation” (48.9%).
8. Discussing MQ findings and recommendations

Workplace volunteering is still developing at Macquarie University. It has not been there for very long and it is not very wide spread, which may explain the relatively low levels of knowledge of and participation in workplace volunteering among MQ employees. In addition, MQ was the only non-corporate member of the CSR Partnership Network to participate in the survey, which also explains the significant differences between MQ results and the overall average.

While participation in workplace volunteering is relatively low at MQ, there is one area in which employees demonstrate higher than average rates of volunteering – skill-based volunteering (using professional knowledge and skills). In addition, when examining the motivations to volunteer, MQ employees want to contribute their professional knowledge much more than to have fun. This is a very important feedback from MQ employees. Considering that it is a university, having the most educated workforce of all participating organisations, developing skill-based volunteering in MQ would not only meet employees’ motivations, but can also create a strong social impact.

One of the most concerning findings of the survey is that employees who did participate in workplace volunteering are much less likely to continue to do so compared to their counterparts from other organisations. They are also much less satisfied with their volunteering experience, and much less likely to recommend it to their friends. This requires a more positive volunteering experience, recognising volunteers, creating ongoing support and following up with people who volunteer.

Interestingly, when examining non-participants in workplace volunteering, the biggest barrier is “not being asked” versus “being too busy” in other organisations. This is actually a very positive outcome, as overcoming this could be easier than overcoming the time barrier. With half of the non-volunteers indicating that they are likely to participate in the future, there is great potential for MQ workplace volunteering.

It is very important for MQ employees to work for an organisation that is involved in the community. However, compared to the total responses, a lot less MQ employees feel that the organisational leadership is involved in giving. MQ employees show good levels of employee engagement, although a little lower than the general average. Satisfaction with
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various aspects of their jobs was good and similar to the overall average, but they are a lot less satisfied with their organisation’s CSR and sustainability compared to others.

MQ can do much more to develop workplace volunteering, engaging their employees in it and generating satisfaction with it and commitment. Based on this study, our recommendations are to develop more skill-based volunteering, to ask employees to participate, public recognition of volunteers, and more communication about workplace volunteering, leadership involvement, CSR and sustainability.