



Staff recruitment, retention, satisfaction and productivity: the effects of employee volunteering programs

See also: Employee volunteering and CSR: job seeker perspectives

A sense of obligation to be socially responsible corporate citizens is an important driver for companies to invest in employee volunteering (EV) programs. Companies investing in EV programs have indicated this sense of obligation is the key factor in developing or maintaining EV programs.¹ The benefits accruing to employees are also strong motivators for companies developing or maintaining EV programs. But what are the effects of EV on recruitment, staff retention, staff satisfaction and productivity? New research shows that employee volunteering has a positive impact in these areas for many employers, although progress is still to be made in quantifying these gains.

With the support of Seek, Volunteering Australia completed an online survey of 136 employers investigating:

- the degree to which employers and recruiters promote these programs to prospective employees as a competitive recruitment strategy; and
- the extent to which they measure and value the impact of these programs in terms of retention, job satisfaction and productivity.

This survey was run in conjunction with a survey for job seekers to uncover their attitudes towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in general, and EV programs in particular. The findings from this survey are detailed in a separate research bulletin.

The mostly quantitative online survey was distributed during the month of October 2006 through *The Advertiser*, the site for employers and recruiters who advertise their job vacancies through Seek. The survey was also distributed through Volunteering Australia's corporate contact list. It was not necessary for employer respondents to have an EV program nor for recruiters to represent a client that has one.

The respondents to the survey can be broken down as follows:

- 32% - employers representing companies employing 500+ employees
- 24% - employers representing medium-sized firms employing 51-500 employees
- 18% - recruiters
- 17% - small business employing less than 50 employees.
- The remainder comprised of not-for-profit or government organisations.

What are the effects of employee volunteering on recruitment, staff retention, staff satisfaction and productivity?

Findings

Recruiters

Recruiters were asked the question 'In your opinion are the EV programs of employers an important factor for jobseekers?' Almost half (48%) of the recruiter respondents believed that it was an important factor and could report changes in candidate expectations and consciousness in this area, most significantly in the past two years. Twenty-four per cent had actively promoted the volunteering programs of client companies. This compares to 83% of employers with EV programs indicating they actively promote them. The disparity is attributable, at least in part, to the fact that this question was only asked to employers who already have an EV program while recruiters represent clients with and without EV programs.

The majority of the recruiters' clients were seeking employees for administrative (24%), IT (16%), or management (12%) roles.

Employers

Those who completed the survey on behalf of employers were mostly located in the human resource departments and 43% of employer respondents had an EV program in place. Of the employers who do not have an EV program, 21% said that they were interested in developing a CSR program in the future.

Almost half (46%) of those employers who have CSR programs said they experienced potential candidates asking about their programs. Most estimate less than 20% of candidates make enquiries about CSR during recruitment.

A significant majority (83%) of companies with EV programs are promoting them to potential employees. Employer and recruiter respondents were given the option of providing their contact details to participate in follow up interviews. These interviews revealed that the programs were promoted mostly through the induction process and by having information available on the website.

Almost one in three (32%) said that candidate interest in their programs would influence their recruitment choice as they only employ people whose values match those of the company, and one in five (21%) said it would influence them, but only for certain roles.

Impact of job candidate's community engagement on recruitment

What are the expectations from an employer of a potential candidate's values and sense of community, evidenced through their level of community engagement? The companies with EV programs were asked how important a candidate's level of community engagement is in determining their suitability for a role. Forty-nine per cent thought it was somewhat important, 30% said it depended on the role they apply for, 17% said it was not important and 4% believed that it was very important.

Almost half (46%) of those employers who have corporate social responsibility programs said they experienced potential candidates asking about their programs

Impacts of employee volunteering on retention, satisfaction and productivity

Improved rates of staff retention, increased job satisfaction and productivity are commonly cited as evidence justifying the business case for CSR and EV programs. The survey asked a series of questions to employers with EV programs if they had perceived any improvement in each of these factors, which could be attributable to their programs. If so, had the company measured or traced any changes?

The results revealed that while the majority believed retention, satisfaction and to a lesser extent productivity had improved, most could not support this with statistical evidence. Seventy-four per cent believed that it had improved staff retention levels, of which only 15% had the statistics to confirm it, while 26% could discern no influence. Eighty-one per cent believed it improved employee job satisfaction, of which 19% could confirm with statistics, 4% did not believe it improved satisfaction and 15% were unsure.

There was a significantly higher rate of uncertainty regarding the question of improved productivity (40%). Forty-three per cent believed that productivity was improved but a much lower rate (6%) had statistical support, and 17% claimed there was no positive correlation.

A large proportion of respondents (71%) who were not measuring the reasons for retention, productivity and satisfaction indicated that they were planning to do so in future.

Conclusion

Almost half of the employers with CSR programs and recruiter respondents had reported an increase in the level of prospective candidates' interest in the employers' community activities or volunteering programs.

The majority of respondents with EV programs reported these programs have positive effects on retention, job satisfaction and/or productivity. While the survey revealed a lack of empirical support for these impressions, respondents indicated a high intention to begin systematic measurements of these factors, although as one interviewee admitted, 'the whole thing is really hard to measure'. Finding empirical support for the anecdotal evidence that these programs have beneficial business outcomes will help to ensure the long term sustainability of such programs.

Percentage figures have been rounded to the closest decimal point.

The majority of respondents with employee volunteering programs reported these programs have positive effects on retention, job satisfaction and/or productivity

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