

Employee Volunteerism: Benefits and Challenges for Businesses

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Both businesses and nonprofit organizations are interested in, and can benefit from, understanding the benefits and challenges of employee volunteerism. This fact sheet presents results from a survey conducted by Imagine Canada and the University of Lethbridge in the fall of 2005. A total of 990 randomly selected businesses responded to the survey. Results are accurate within +/- 4% nineteen times out of twenty.¹

The survey asked businesses about the supports they provide employee volunteers. It found that almost half (49%) of businesses operating in Canada encourage their employees to volunteer on their own time. More than a third (35%) accommodate employee volunteering during working hours. One in five (18%) actively encourage employees to volunteer during working hours. Almost three quarters of companies (71%) do at least one of these things.

Benefits

We asked companies that accommodated or encouraged employee volunteering during working hours and/or encouraged their employees to volunteer on their own time to tell us the top two benefits of employee volunteering for their company. Most (71%) were able to cite at least one benefit. The benefits mentioned most frequently were: improves corporate public image (33%); improves employee morale (21%); and improves relations with the surrounding community (17%).

When we grouped the perceived benefits of employee volunteering according to whether they were focused primarily on external stakeholders (the community, customers) or internal stakeholders (employees), we found that businesses were more likely to cite external benefits. Half (50%) the companies cited at least one external benefit (see Figure 1) while less than a third (30%) cited an internal benefit (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. External benefits of employee volunteering

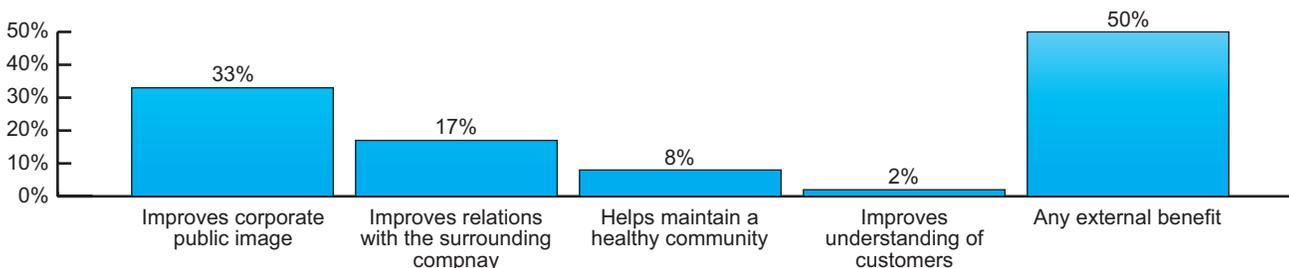
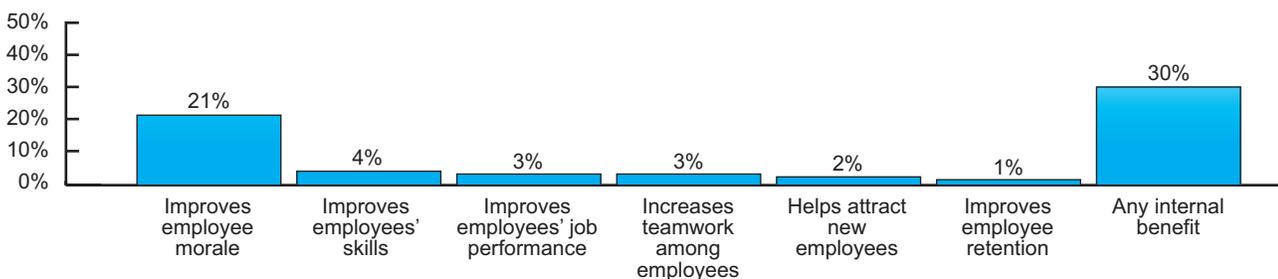


Figure 2. Internal benefits of employee volunteering



¹ The full results of the study can be found in M. Easwaramoorthy, C. Barr, M. Runte, & D. Basil. (2006). *Business support for employee volunteers in Canada: Results of a national survey*. Toronto: Knowledge Development Centre.

Challenges

We also asked companies that supported employee volunteering about the challenges they faced. Interestingly, half (51%) of them said that they did not face any challenges. However, almost a quarter (23%) said that difficulty covering workload was a challenge for them (see Figure 3). Cost was mentioned as a challenge by 3% of companies; 2% said that lack of support from employees was a challenge.

Reasons for not supporting employee volunteering

Companies that did not accommodate or encourage employee volunteering during working hours or encourage employees to volunteer on their own time were asked why they did not do so. The most common reason companies gave for not supporting employee volunteering was that they had never considered (22%, see Figure 4). Fourteen percent (14%) of companies said that they didn't think it was their responsibility; 9% said they couldn't afford it; and 5% said they weren't interested.²

Conclusion

The survey results suggest that, for businesses that support employee volunteerism, the benefits outweigh the challenges. They also indicate that businesses are more likely to view employee volunteerism in terms of the benefits it provides to the company and the community rather than in terms of the benefits it provides to employees.

Nonprofit organizations seeking to engage employee volunteers should keep these findings in mind when approaching companies for support. They should, for example, be prepared to demonstrate how involvement with their organization will improve a given company's image in the community. Organizations might also consider ways of engaging employee volunteers that have a minimal impact on workload. For example, a given volunteer position might be shared by several employees from one company. Finally, organizations should consider approaching businesses that have not previously supported employee volunteering as our findings indicate that many have simply never considered it.

Figure 3. Challenges of employee volunteering

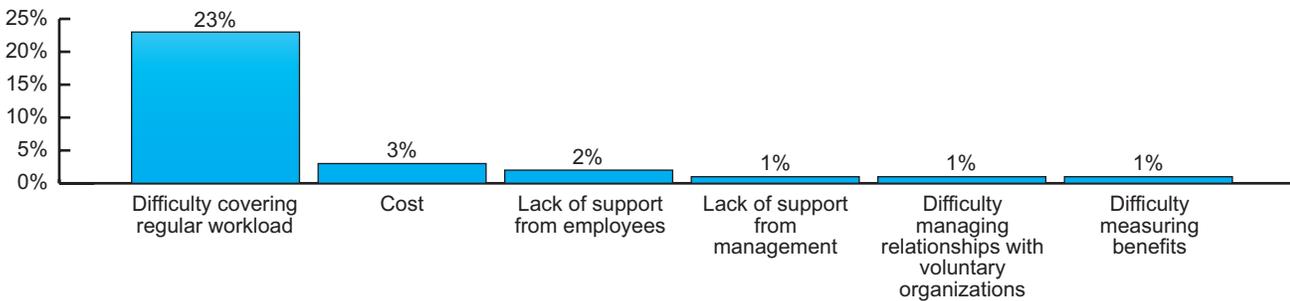
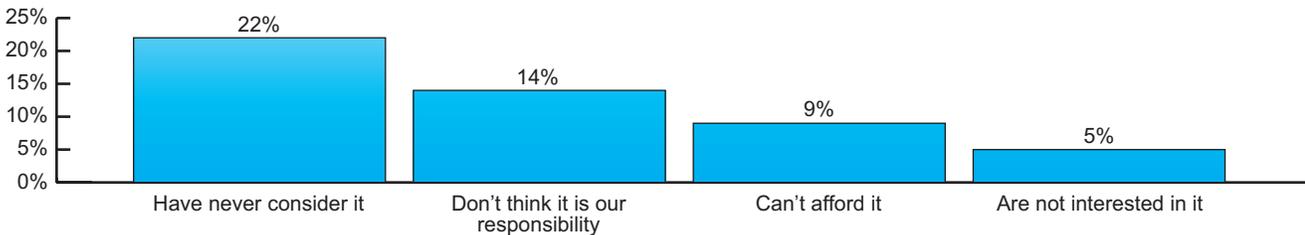


Figure 4. Reasons for not supporting employee volunteering



² Forty-three percent (43%) gave other reasons and 14% said they didn't know.