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Many businesses demonstrate their role as responsible corporate citizens through involvement in corporate volunteering programmes. There is a growing body of research supporting the view that involvement in corporate volunteering can provide many benefits for business. However, little research has been done on the experience for the employee volunteers or community groups involved. This paper presents the findings of case study research with EDS (NZ), examining the experience of corporate volunteering from a variety of perspectives: business, employee volunteers and the community groups involved. This research reveals that corporate volunteering has the potential to address some of the current issues in the corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility literature. By raising awareness and generating dialogue between the stakeholders and the different sectors involved, corporate volunteering has the potential to lead to more sustained community–business partnerships. Corporate volunteering may also provide an important mechanism for business organisations to interact and engage with the local communities in which they operate, in an era when multinational corporations are struggling for legitimacy in a globalised economy.

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The public environment in which business operates today is far different from that of just 20 years ago. For instance, there have been dramatic and far-reaching changes in the perceptions of the relationship between business and society. This has been reflected in the literature. For example, since the 1960s, questions have been raised about the legitimacy of the prevailing market system, and the effect that this has on business’s relationship with society. Similarly, debate concerning the ‘correct’ role of business in society has raged since the 1970s. Additionally, the literature throughout this time has been dotted with numerous case studies of how businesses have related to their communities. More recently, issues such as globalisation and the role and responsibility of multinational corporations have been receiving significant attention.

One particular way in which businesses relate to their communities, which is well established and reflected in case studies, is corporate volunteering. Much has been written describing the extent and the variety of activities that corporate volunteering encompasses, particularly in the US and UK, and the many benefits that involvement can provide for the business. However, there has been little research done on the experience for the employee volunteers and community groups involved.

What does appear to be emerging in the literature, however, is the view that an effective business response to societal issues and a meaningful contribution to a civil society require more than just piecemeal, ad hoc interactions with the community. Literature emerging in the 1990s has been focusing on a ‘new paradigm’ of business, emphasising linked prosperity and partnerships between business, government and society to create a good and civil society.

This paper reports on a case study of corporate volunteering with the New Zealand arm of multinational computing firm, EDS. It examines the perceptions of corporate volunteering from the perspective of the business, employees and the community groups involved. The findings of this study suggest that corporate volunteering generates considerable benefits for all three groups. The findings also suggest that community groups do in fact desire a more sustained commitment from business organisations than is frequently provided by corporate volunteering. The authors suggest, however, that corporate volunteering, by providing opportunities for sharing, dialogue and raising awareness of the perspectives of different sectors, offers the potential to contribute to a number of current and important issues in the corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship literature.

The importance of building on the benefits of corporate volunteering to achieve a more sustained community–business involvement is emphasised, as is the potential for corporate volunteering to provide opportunities for engagement with local communities in the areas where corporations operate. Engagement with local communities is becoming an increasingly important need as globalisation has increased the size and reach of many corporations and diminished corporations’ ties to local communities.

After providing an overview of the methodology employed in this study, this paper highlights key aspects of the literature relating to corporate social responsibility, corporate citizenship, corporate volunteering and partnership in the Asia–Pacific region. A brief description of the corporate volunteering programme at EDS, both locally and internationally, is then discussed before the results and conclusions of the current study are presented.
Literature review

The Western perspective

Despite current fascination in the press in New Zealand and elsewhere about the social responsibility of business, corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship is largely a Western phenomenon, and the attention to this issue in the literature is not new. Writers such as Thurow (1966), Galbraith (1972) and others have focused on the degree to which the priorities and outcomes of the current Western capitalist model create an environment for business that has damaging consequences for society. During the 1970s and 1980s, attention in the literature appeared to focus on the issues arising out of the relationship between business and society. See, for example, Friedman 1970; Beesley and Evans 1978; Jones 1974; Steiner and Steiner 1972; Berger 1981; Carroll 1979; and Dalton and Cosier 1982. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a proliferation of case studies on the ways in which business interacted directly with the community, and debate concerning the correct role of business in society. See, for example, Drucker 1984; Evans and Freeman 1988; Donaldson 1982; Buchholz 1991; Bowie 1991; and Kerr 1996. Lately, protest action in Seattle, Prague, Melbourne and Davos during World Economic Forum and World Trade Organisation meetings have raised issues of legitimacy for multinational corporations and concern for new business and society issues arising out of globalisation (see Zadek 1998).

The Asian–Pacific perspective

The attention to corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship in the Asia–Pacific region is relatively limited, but interest appears to be increasing. This is evidenced by the emergence of centres and associations addressing corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility. The Asian Institute of Management’s Centre for Corporate Responsibility, which recently held a Corporate Responsibility Week in Manila (Basilio 2000), and the Japan Society for Business Ethics (Wokutch 1990) are two such examples.

In addition to this, there appear to be a number of drivers of corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship in the Asia–Pacific context. The responses of corporations and the issues of concern, however, do not appear to be consistent across the region. In some of the less developed regions (such as Malaysia and the Philippines) the issues of corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship are emerging out of recognition of the price of unrestrained and unregulated economic growth (Teoh and Thong 1984; Garchitorena 2000; Basilio 2000). In Japan, interest appears to centre on the movement of Western corporations into the region, and movements of Asian corporations into the West. This has resulted in the translation of current Western business practices (including corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship) into the Asian context and the emulation of Western business practices by Asian business setting up operations in the West (Wokutch 1990; Selwyn 1992). It is important in this context, however, to consider the observations of Antal (1985), Wokutch (1990) and Ang and Leong (2000) that business–society interactions are rooted in deeply seated cultural norms and traditions. Antal (1985), for example, suggests ‘the need to understand the socio-political environment, as well as the organisational culture of particular businesses, in order to understand the way that corporate social responsibility is shaped’ (quoted in Moore and Richardson 1990: 205).
Corporate volunteering

One common way in which business organisations interact with their communities in the West (and to a lesser extent in the East), which deserves further consideration in this context, is corporate volunteering. Much has been written describing the experience of corporate volunteering from a business perspective. For example, the Conference Board (1993), Business in the Community (1993), Caudron (1994), Tuffrey (1995) and Carroll (1996) all discuss business benefits of corporate volunteering programmes. These include developing better workforces, enhancing corporate reputations and investing in the communities in which their businesses trade. Tuffrey (1995) and Quirke (1999) expand on the human resource benefits that corporate volunteering can provide, arguing that corporate volunteering offers opportunities for challenge and skills development for staff and has a positive impact on staff morale and motivation. Community involvement supported and encouraged by the business, they argue, is seen as a way to build a sense of identification with the values and goals of the business.

The literature focusing on employee volunteers’ experiences appears to be less extensive. Tuffrey (1995) and Quirke (1998) touch on the reasons why people choose to participate in corporate volunteering programmes. These reasons include a desire to make a difference to the community, enhancing work performance and meeting other people. Post et al. (1996) suggest that employees can develop leadership skills and other useful workplace skills by participating in corporate volunteering programmes.

From the perspective of the community groups, there are even fewer studies. Tuffrey (1995) suggests that programmes such as short placements for staff in community organisations, to work on precisely defined assignments, or mentoring schemes between business and community organisations, can help to provide expertise to community organisations (see also Business in the Community 1993). Quirke (1998) highlighted benefits for the community groups at two levels: the individual community organisation and the wider societal level. Finally, Business in the Community (1993) suggests that corporate volunteering can offer the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships to develop between community organisations and business. For these partnerships to be sustainable, however, a climate of trust and an understanding of what each hopes to gain must be fostered.

Recently, the corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility literature has focused on this idea of partnership. In theorising emerging approaches to business, concepts such as reciprocal relationships, partnerships, dialogue, diversity and inclusivity are common (RSA 1996; Elkington 1997; McIntosh et al. 1998).

All of these writers stress that the key to an effective business contribution to the community requires developing mutual, beneficial partnerships between business and community groups. Birch (1999), for example, stresses that long-term interactive partnerships rather than short term transactive relationships (Birch 1999: 7) are the key to developing social coalition. Similarly, Kanter (1999) suggests that ‘new paradigm partnerships’ (Kanter 1999: 124) have the potential to attack stubborn social problems and to produce faster innovations and transformations. Birch (1999) also summarises a Danish programme called ‘New Partnership for Social Cohesion’ launched by Karen Jespersen, Minister for Social Affairs, in 1998, which stresses mutuality, reciprocity and sustained participation.

While these writers acknowledge the contribution that transactional relationships, such as corporate volunteering and philanthropy, can make to the community, they tend to argue that these interactions are ineffective. They have the tendency, according to Birch (1999), to be fragile and can lead to one-sided relationships of dependency. Long-term, reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships can help to develop more sustainable outcomes from business interactions with the community.
It is important to recognise, however, that the development of partnerships between business and the community can be difficult and problematic (Murphy 2000). Additionally, these judgements about transactional relationships such as corporate volunteering are made in light of limited research on the perceptions of the stakeholders involved.

Effective partnerships require stakeholder inclusion; an understanding of the expectations of the various parties involved in the partnership is important if the partnership is to be effective. Therefore, there is a need to understand the expectations of employee volunteers and community groups as well as understanding the business case to support corporate volunteering.

Methodology

Previous research on corporate volunteering has largely described the experiences of businesses in the US and UK. In this study, a case study approach was adopted in order to explore the practices and experiences of a business organisation actively engaged in corporate volunteering, in New Zealand, from the perspective of the business, employee volunteers and the community groups involved. A two-stage approach to the research was adopted using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

The first stage of the research focused on gathering data through interviews and focus groups to better understand the phenomenon of corporate volunteering within the New Zealand context from a variety of perspectives.

Interviews were held with EDS senior management responsible for the organisation and management of the corporate volunteering initiatives. In order to probe and explore issues relating to employees’ perceptions of the corporate volunteering initiatives supported by EDS, a random sample of 20 EDS employees who had been involved in EDS’s corporate volunteering programmes were invited to attend a focus group session. Two focus group sessions were held with 12 EDS employees attending in total. Interviews were also held with four representatives from a sample of community organisations that had participated in EDS’s corporate volunteering initiatives in the previous year.

An interview was also held with the Employees in the Community programme manager from the Wellington Volunteer Centre. The key purpose of the interview was to gain an understanding of the role of the Wellington Volunteer Centre in supporting businesses such as EDS to become involved in employee volunteering.

Data gathered during stage one was then used to design a questionnaire in stage two, which investigated the perceptions of the employees and community groups involved in corporate volunteering. A self-administered questionnaire was e-mailed to a proportional stratified random sample of 78 EDS employees throughout New Zealand. The sample was chosen from population of 212 staff who had been involved in EDS corporate volunteering initiatives in the previous year. From the 78 questionnaires e-mailed, 16 were not returned, 18 were returned uncompleted as those people had since left EDS and 44 others were returned completed. The response rate of those who received the questionnaire was 73%. A random sample of five community groups was also sent a questionnaire. Three of these groups responded.

Description of the EDS programme

EDS (NZ) is a subsidiary of EDS, one of the world’s leading outsourcer, integrator and business process management service providers. In New Zealand EDS employs over
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1,100 people and provides services in four key areas: systems and technology services; business process management; management consulting; and e-business.

Corporate volunteering has been a key EDS priority since 1986 in the United States. In 1993 EDS Global Volunteer Day was developed in response to a desire by the company to expand the spirit of volunteerism as the employee base of the company grew abroad. Key objectives of the Global Volunteer Day programme are to have a positive impact on local communities by recognising the commitment of employees' volunteer efforts in local communities and by mobilising new employee volunteers as well as families, friends and clients. During October 2000 EDS volunteers donated more than 38,800 hours working on more than 400 projects in 20 countries including New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Thailand, China and the Philippines in the Asia-Pacific region.

In New Zealand EDS has three distinct corporate volunteering initiatives: Global Volunteer Day, Net Day and the Community Grants Scheme. Global Volunteer Day involves staff voluntarily spending one day per year, usually in the month of October, doing 'hands-on' work in the community. For Net Day, technical staff volunteer their time to install computer networks in Wellington schools. The Community Grants Scheme involves employee nomination of non-profit organisations for a $500 cash grant with allocation made by a selection panel of EDS staff.

EDS (NZ) provides the following institutional support for its corporate volunteering initiatives:

- A corporate volunteering co-ordinator to facilitate employee community involvement
- A staff release-time policy
- Company endorsement

This paper discusses the business's, employee volunteers', and the community groups' experiences in the corporate volunteering programmes undertaken by EDS (NZ).

Results and discussion

The business perception of corporate volunteering

EDS, as a business organisation, viewed corporate volunteering primarily as a way to express its desire to be a good corporate citizen. While also acknowledging that corporate volunteering could provide human resource benefits, and an opportunity to develop a positive public profile and an enhanced reputation, these were not seen as key drivers for EDS's involvement in corporate volunteering.

Expression of corporate citizenship

The key objective for EDS in its corporate volunteering initiatives was to provide a tangible and visible expression of corporate citizenship. For example, EDS management consistently stressed the notion of commitment to community as the key reason for the corporate volunteering programme.

The selection of corporate volunteering as the vehicle by which EDS demonstrates its commitment to being a good corporate citizen appears to be driven by a desire to include employees in the corporate citizenship process. The corporate volunteering programmes in place at EDS are organised to facilitate and foster employee involvement and ownership. For example, the EDS corporate volunteering co-ordinator indicated that there is an emphasis on employee-led initiatives in the selection of projects for Global Volunteer Day. She encourages staff who have connections with community groups to
suggest possible projects. She then follows these suggestions through to completion or staff may manage the projects themselves if they wish. One staff member, for instance, who is involved with an environmental group, sourced and co-ordinated projects involving over 30 employees with this community group for Global Volunteer Day.

Human resource benefits
EDS management also recognised the potential that corporate volunteering could provide for team-building and building staff morale. For example, Global Volunteer Day was strongly promoted as providing opportunities to work in teams in a non-working setting, and one newly appointed manager specifically used corporate volunteering as a means to strengthen teamwork.

EDS management also acknowledged the potential for corporate volunteering to develop employee pride in the organisation. However, no formal assessment measuring staff attitudes to EDS as a result of community involvement has been initiated as yet, indicating that these are not considered to be significant motives in the corporate volunteering process.

Additionally, while research suggests that corporate volunteering has the potential for employee skill enhancement, as programmes are presently structured at EDS these opportunities appear limited. The majority of staff are involved in community projects using general non-work-related skills rather than technical work-based skills. This further strengthens the resolve that corporate volunteering is viewed primarily as a corporate citizenship exercise.

Public profile
Corporate volunteering was also perceived as providing opportunities to raise awareness of what EDS is and what it does in the wider community. While these public relations benefits were recognised, like the human resource benefits they were not seen as key drivers for supporting corporate volunteering, as no measurement of these aspects take place, and little emphasis is placed on them when corporate volunteering is planned and discussed.

The employee volunteers' perceptions of corporate volunteering
The employee volunteers perceived involvement in corporate volunteering initiatives primarily as a way to contribute personally to the community and to gain an understanding and awareness of community issues. In addition to this, the potential for personal gain was also a key benefit cited by many of the respondents. Business benefits were also recognised, but they did not appear to hold as prominent a position for employee volunteers. These results are summarised in Figure 1.

Personal contribution to the community
The desire to help and contribute to the community was a key perception that employee volunteers had of their corporate volunteering experience. For example, statements such as 'a good way to help people' and 'a good way of helping a specific community group' have the highest mean scores, as indicated in Figure 1.

The main types of contribution that employee volunteers thought they made to the community included practical assistance, but opportunities to foster greater awareness and understanding of wider community issues were also significant outcomes perceived by the employee volunteers. For example, volunteers described learning about community organisations that operate in different ways and that face many different pressures compared with a large, for-profit organisation such as EDS.
Potential for personal gain

Employee volunteers also appeared to have a strong perception that they gained some personal benefits from participating in the corporate volunteering programme. A number of the participants in the focus group sessions commented about gaining a personal sense of satisfaction 'the feel-good, nice-warm-glow stuff'. As indicated in Figure 1, these personal benefits included having fun with family and friends and raised self-esteem.

Interestingly, employee volunteers' perceptions of personal gain appeared to be based around personal satisfaction, rather than the development of specific skills. For example, Figure 1 indicates that employees did not perceive that they had learned new skills or developed leadership skills.

Potential for business benefits

Employee volunteers also perceived that EDS would gain from supporting and encouraging staff to become involved in corporate volunteering. As indicated in Figure 1, these benefits include opportunities to develop staff through team-building, enhancing EDS's reputation and getting to know colleagues in a different environment.

Having said this, however, it seems that the employee volunteers viewed the exercise more as a personal exercise, and less as a business exercise. For example, a significant number of employee volunteers participated in corporate volunteering in their own time rather than work time. Additionally, some employee volunteers were unaware of the staff release-time policy, and others perceived difficulties organising teams of volunteers during work time with the nature of existing work schedules. Furthermore, both EDS
management and employee volunteers expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as presently inadequate levels of participation from EDS senior management.

The community group representatives' perceptions of corporate volunteering

The community group representatives involved in the EDS corporate volunteering programme perceived a number of useful benefits that could be derived from the programme. While one of the obvious benefits of corporate volunteering was the practical assistance provided to complete a variety of tasks, it was also acknowledged that corporate volunteering provided the community group with an opportunity to raise awareness of the particular societal issues they were involved in addressing. Additionally, the potential to raise the profile of their organisations through association with a well-known organisation was also cited as a significant benefit. Some community groups also saw corporate volunteering as a means of developing long-term, mutual partnerships with business organisations.

Practical assistance

Community group representatives perceived that Global Volunteer Day provides a good mechanism for completing necessary tasks and in doing so helping the organisation to achieve its goals. For example, community organisations involved had received assistance with general maintenance, gardening, conservation work, a trip to the zoo with retirement home residents, a wine trail with Foundation for the Blind clients and taking IHC (intellectually handicapped children) clients dragon-boating.

Awareness-raising

For many of the community organisations, fundamental to the existence of the organisation was an educative role on a variety of issues such as sight impairment, environmental awareness, intellectual disabilities and others. Representatives from two community groups involved in Global Volunteer Day discussed the opportunities that corporate volunteering provided to expose the wider community to the causes their organisations promote. Global Volunteer Day projects they had been involved in required specialised training before the activities took place. These training sessions and the Global Volunteer Day activities themselves were seen as providing valuable opportunities to break down myths and barriers and help participants to get involved in issues they may have been unaware of.

Raising public profile

A majority of the community group representatives also perceived that involvement helped the community group to raise its profile and generate community support for the work that they were involved in. Ways to work together with the business to achieve this were seen as particularly important for one organisation. This community organisation is involved in a project on a significant area of public land. As such they need to demonstrate to funders that there is community support and 'buy-in' for the work of the Trust. Being part of EDS’s Global Volunteer Day and publicising this was perceived as being very important for the Trust.

Development of mutual partnerships

For one community group representative, a five-year involvement with Global Volunteer Day had provided a strong basis for a mutually beneficial partnership to develop. The representative from this community organisation spoke of the need for both EDS and the community organisation to nurture the partnership with time and energy. Dialogue on what both parties wanted from the relationship was necessary if it was to be an
effective working partnership. She expressed a desire to extend this partnership to gain access to specific business skills, particularly in terms of marketing and promotion.

Another community group that had been involved with Global Volunteer Day for three years also expressed an interest in further developing the relationship they had established with EDS, and was considering ways that they could build and strengthen the partnership for mutual benefit.

Comments from community group representatives stressed the importance of establishing mutually beneficial relationships. While they recognised that the needs of EDS and the community organisations were quite different, with time and communication, the partnership could grow and develop.

Conclusion

This study of corporate volunteering reveals a number of important benefits for all three key stakeholder groups involved. Corporate volunteering enables business to make a tangible contribution to the community, involve their employees, and to receive some additional benefits in the form of team-building and employee pride. The employee volunteers gain an opportunity to contribute to the community and to learn about wider community issues. The community groups, in addition to receiving practical assistance, fulfil their educative role and also raise awareness of the various causes their organisations represent. Corporate volunteering provides opportunities for sharing, dialogue and understanding between different sectors to develop. This offers a potentially useful contribution to a number of areas of current corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility interest.

While the corporate volunteering initiatives in place at EDS have not at this stage developed into extensive, mutually beneficial partnerships, this research reveals that the benefits derived are meaningful, welcomed and positive for the groups involved. Corporate volunteering therefore has the potential to develop partnership opportunities between business and the community.

In addition to this, corporate volunteering provides opportunities for sharing, dialogue and understanding, allowing business organisations to interact and engage in the communities in which they operate. This is becoming important as evidenced by growing unrest over the darker side of unregulated and unrestrained economic development and an increasingly globalised business environment.

It is also important to consider that business–society interactions reflect varying social, cultural and organisational values. Further research to better understand the socio-political environments and organisational cultures shaping business–society interactions is needed in order to assess the degree to which these New Zealand case study findings can be generalised into different contexts such as the Asia–Pacific region.

However, notwithstanding these potential contributions, and the importance of further research in these areas, the practice of corporate volunteering provides a number of useful and important benefits in its own right.

References


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