

Measuring the Benefits of Employee Volunteerism in Business-Education Partnerships as a Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy

Evelyn K. Green, Cyndi H. Gaudet, and Heather M. Annulis

Abstract—This paper discusses leveraging organizational competencies in hospitality management education through employee volunteerism in business-education partnerships, and the needs for partnership accountability and performance measures for continued investment from business partners. Study results of employee-volunteerism in a casino management business-education partnership suggest untapped corporate social responsibility benefits for employers.

Index Terms—Business-education partnerships, casino, hospitality and tourism management, corporate social responsibility, employee volunteerism, organizational competencies, performance measurements, Phillips ROI Methodology™.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE U.S. is losing global competitiveness and this trend is evident in institution competitiveness, higher education, and the U.S. casino industry [1], [2], [3], [4]. An industry's competitiveness depends on its ability to produce a highly skilled workforce and higher education plays a key role in preparing students with skills critical to workplace success [5]. To help close student skill gaps and industry needs, higher education entities form business-education partnerships [5], [6]. The use of organizational competencies in business-education partnerships (BEPs) through employee volunteerism (EV) is the “design specs” for preparing students to succeed in the 21st century workplace [7]. The skills can reduce the growing mismatch between industry needs and workforce skills preparedness.

Additionally, corporations use employee volunteerism as a

corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy to enhance corporate image and increase public trust [8]. However, EV is frequently not aligned with mainstream business strategy and is not well-captured or formally reported [9], [10], [11]. Lack of accountability by education partners often leads to partnership breakdowns or failures [12], [13]. When unable to account for, and align EV in BEPs with corporate goals, business leaders become reluctant to continue investing in the partnerships [14], [15].

The purpose of this study is to describe employee volunteer and employer benefits from BEPs as perceived by employee volunteers (EVs) of a BEP. The study population consists of EVs from business partners in a United States (US) casino jurisdiction engaged in a US undergraduate casino management program. The study seeks to establish a systematic reporting process and standard to measure corporate employee volunteerism in BEP for casino, hospitality and tourism management programs.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Workplace Skills Gaps and Shortages

Employers find U.S. students deficient in skills critical to workplace success [16]. Casner-Lotto [16] suggests the first step toward ensuring a work-ready 21st century U.S. workforce is to define the skills gaps and address them through collaborative business-education partnerships. According to the American Society for Training and Development [5]:

A skills gap is a significant gap between an organization's skill needs and the current capabilities of its workforce. It is the point at which an organization can no longer grow and/or remain competitive in its industry because its employees do not have the right skills to help drive business results and support the organization's strategies and goals. (p. 5)

The leadership-competency model for the lodging industry identifies self-management, strategic positioning, implementation, critical thinking, interpersonal, communication, and leadership as competencies future hospitality leaders must possess [17]. Reasons skill gaps occur include changes in workforce demographics; the loss of jobs in many industries; the startling numbers of unprepared high

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E. K. Green is with the Casino, Hospitality and Tourism Management Department, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS 39406 USA (phone:601-266-6511; fax:601-266-6707; email: evelyn.green@usm.edu).

C. H. Gaudet is with the Economic and Workforce Development Department, The University of Southern Mississippi, Long Beach, MS 39560 USA (e-mail: cyndi.gaudet@usm.edu)

H. A. Annulis is with the Economic and Workforce Development Department, The University of Southern Mississippi, Long Beach, MS 39560 USA (email: heather.annulis@usm.edu).

school and college graduates; and more jobs in the knowledge economy requiring workers with increased knowledge, training, and skills [5]. An unprepared workforce can hamper the performance and growth of an organization and nothing is more devastating to an organization than not having a fully prepared workforce [18]. According to Elkeles and Phillips [18], “an unprepared workforce can reduce profits, impede market share, create inefficiencies, lower morale, and/or increase attrition. More importantly, it can affect the quality of service provided to customers” (p. 17).

Furthermore, the 21st century workforce is entering a period of realignment [19]. As the baby-boomers retire, taking their skills and institutional knowledge with them, the U.S. faces a shortage of available workers and the pool of talented workers available is even smaller [20], [21]. Faced with the paradigm shifts of the 21st century workplace, experts predict skill shortages will intensify in the coming years with a greater need for high skilled, knowledge workers to help their organization’s global competitiveness [21], [22], [19]. To ride the age wave, organizations must have management momentum, i.e. take early action and prevent problems with talent supply by increasing its attractiveness to potential employees [21].

B. Business-Education Partnerships (BEPs)

Business-education partnerships (BEPs) are ongoing involvements between higher education and businesses, established to provide activities to strengthen instruction and enrich the educational process through the talent and idea power of employee volunteers (EVs) from the participating businesses [6]. Business-education partnerships help to close student skill gaps and industry needs through organizational competencies, a nonfinancial resource. Organizational competencies are functional capabilities and experience a corporation possesses by virtue of the way it integrates and blends the individual skills of its personnel to achieve a benefit [7]. Through employee volunteerism, students gain social learning, situated learning, and experiential learning opportunities in which they engage and interact with industry professionals, observe industry professionals in action, and gain firsthand knowledge through experience. These opportunities include but are not limited to employees serving as mentors to students in course projects, internships, management associates program, job-shadowing programs, summer practicum jobs [15]; as field trip hosts; and as guest presenters in face-to-face and online instruction. Although the original intent is for employee volunteerism to assist in academic program growth and development, research suggests the employers of the EVs also benefit from volunteerism [24], [25].

C. Employee Volunteerism

Employee volunteerism (EV) is a corporate social responsibility strategy that corporations increasingly use in times of economic crises as they scale back charitable donations to their communities [9], [10]. Corporations increasingly engage in employee volunteerism as a form of community involvement in response to increased expectations for companies to become socially responsible [14]. Geroy,

Wright and Jacoby [25] believe the growing trend of EV is motivated by corporations’ perception of EV as a corporate social responsibility strategy that enhances the competitive standing and financial performance of the business [27]. Although EV contributions are significant to organizations, and ultimately, to the community and society as a whole, the value of EV contributions is currently not explicitly considered nor formally recognized in financial reporting [28]. Bussell and Forbes [24] attribute part of the challenge of including EV in CSR reporting is the difficulty in defining a volunteer and establishing operating standards because of the wide variety of employee volunteerism [29].

D. Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) describes the relationship between business and the larger society. No single definition of CSR exists because perspectives on CSR are dependent on and fluctuate with current issues [30]. Kok, Wiele, McKenna, and Brown [31] describe corporate social responsibility as “the obligation of the firm to use its resources in ways to benefit society, through committed participation as a member of society, taking into account the society at large independently of direct gains of the company” (p. 287).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting is “a method of self-presentation and impression management conducted by companies to insure various stakeholders are satisfied with their public behaviors” [32] p. 176. Gray, Owen, & Adams [33] define CSR reporting as “the process of communicating the social and environmental effects of organizations’ economic actions to particular interest groups within society and to society at large” (p. 3). Research finds the quality of CSR reporting to be poor [9] due to inadequate assessment and the inability of organizations to clearly align corporate resources expended in CSR strategies to their corporation’s bottom-line payoffs [34]. Hoogheijmstra [35] suggests it is in the best interest of corporations engaged in CSR to report their social responsibility because there is skepticism about the worthiness of expenditures in corporate citizenship [36]. Many corporations do not measure the results of their employee volunteerism, and those that do focus on output, e.g. quantity of hours and volunteers, rather than impact, e.g. effect of volunteerism [28]. Her findings are consistent with literature on corporate social responsibility in which researchers find CSR reporting to be generally poor [12], [9], [13], [35].

E. Employee Volunteerism Performance Measures

Although there is no formal method of valuing volunteer services there are several alternative methods with which the contributions of volunteers can be measured (Atkinson & Sullivan, 2011). These methods include input-based models, cost-benefit models, and output-based models. Input-based models focus on economic capital by calculating the economic value to the beneficiary of the efforts of employee volunteers. An example of an input-based model is one that multiplies the number of labor hours provided by an appropriate labor rate, e.g. use of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the average hourly earnings of production or management workers [39].

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach developed by Kaplan and Norton [40] is a common input model used among

large organizations as their internal process for measuring external and internal economic value. However, the BSC model does not incorporate employee or other stakeholder's perspectives on firm performance and organizations have trouble incorporating either new or less tangible organizational performance measures such as corporate social responsibility to their Balanced Scorecard [41].

An example of a cost-benefit model is the Volunteer Investment and Value Audit (VIVA) that is designed by the Institute for Volunteering Research. VIVA calculates the cost benefit ratio by comparing the costs of a volunteer program (input) with the value of the volunteer time donated (output). This model provides a measure of both the scope and importance of volunteerism for the beneficiary organization as well as the volunteering organization's payback on its volunteering investment [29].

Proponents of output-based models argue input and cost-benefit models focus on the financial value of volunteer work rather than capturing the monetary value of the intangible benefits gained by the volunteers and their organizations, e.g. improved employee morale, improved corporate image, etc. The output-based model takes a social accounting approach of focusing on the effect of volunteers on outcomes, or the impact of their efforts on those served by their efforts. An example of output-based model is the Expanded Value Added Statement (EVAS) that calculates the value added by volunteers and assumes that value is created and distributed by many stakeholders [42].

Atkinson and Sullivan [38] suggest alternative economics is necessary to place value on efforts that are currently not explicitly valued, e.g. the efforts of individual volunteers, as current economic measures do not consider either the value of human work or the value of the environment. Such measurements are particularly important in challenging economic times when employee volunteerism is vital to the economic recovery of the nation. The Phillips ROI Methodology™ is a comprehensive performance solution tool that combines all of the abovementioned methods into one methodology, providing measures for inputs, process, outputs, and intangible benefits [43].

F. The Phillips ROI Methodology™

Consistent with research on CSR reporting, Phillips and Phillips [44] find the number one reason CSR programs fail is lack of alignment with the business. The results framework of the Phillips ROI Methodology™ commonly referred to as the V-Model (Figure 1), supports this alignment by connecting five levels of program needs with its objectives and the

evaluation of its success. The Phillips ROI™ five levels of evaluation and measurement focus are as follow:

- Level 1 – Reaction and Planned Action
- Level 2 – Learning and Confidence
- Level 3 – Application
- Level 4 – Impact and Consequences
- Level 5 – ROI

Level 1 represents reaction from participants as well as actions planned as a result of the program. Level 2 measures learning and confidence, asking questions such as whether the participant know how to do what they have learned, or if they

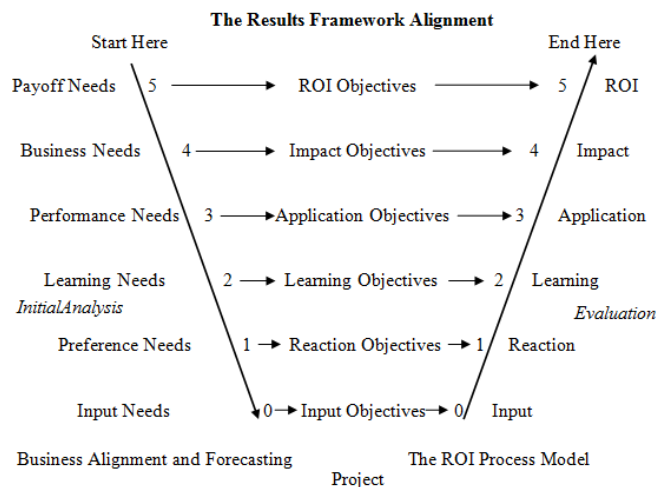


Fig. 1. The V-Model. The Green Scorecard: Measuring the Return on Investment in sustainability initiatives” by Phillips & Phillips, 2011, p. 75. Adapted with permission of the author.

are confident in applying their newly acquires skills, knowledge, or information. Level 3 asks questions to determine the application and implementation of what participants learned from the program. Level 4 determines whether a program caused the impact by isolating the impact of the program on measures such as output, quality, costs, time, and customer satisfaction. Level 5 completes the evaluation chain by measuring Return on Investment (ROI), the ultimate level of evaluation in which a program's monetary benefits are compared with the program's costs. ROI can be expressed in several ways but it is usually represented as a percentage or benefit-cost ratio [44].

To show the chain of impact and to simplify the collection and analysis of data in the results framework, The Phillips ROI Process Model™ [43] (p. 2) provides a step-by-step process for collecting data, summarizing and processing data, isolating the effects of programs, converting data to monetary value, and capturing the actual ROI (Figure 2).

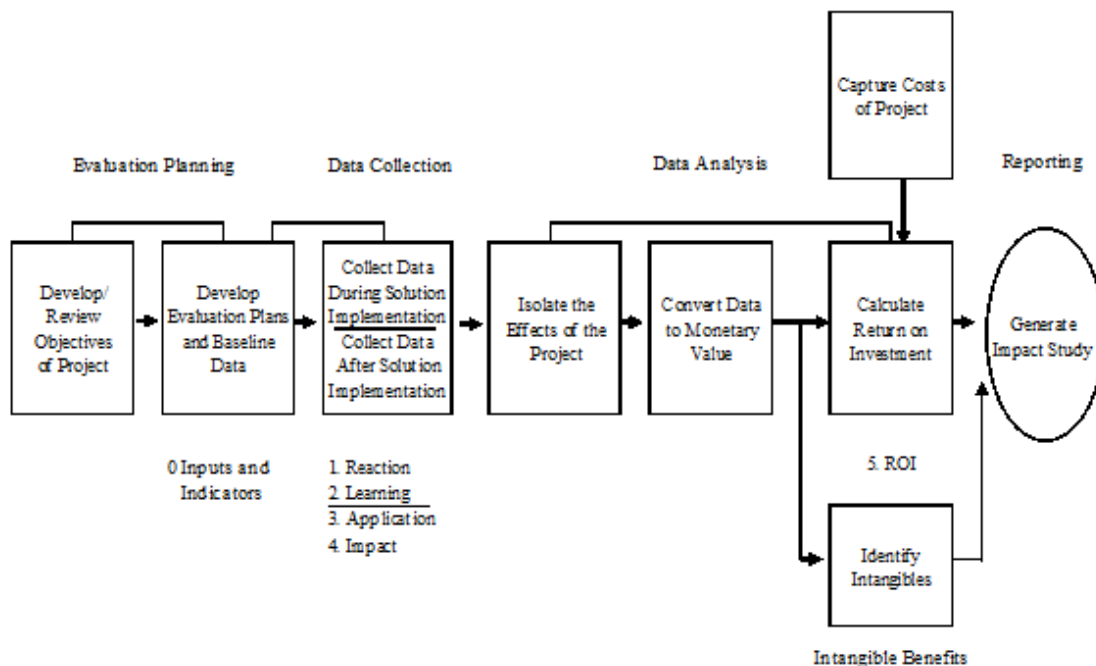


Fig. 2. Phillips ROI Process Model™. The Green Scorecard: Measuring the Return on Investment in sustainability initiatives” by Phillips & Phillips, 2011, p. 78. Adapted with permission of the author.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study established seven research objectives to determine employee volunteer and employer benefits from business-education partnerships. The study population consisted of employee volunteers of a business-education partnership between casino industry partners from a U.S. gaming jurisdiction and an undergraduate casino management program at a U.S. institution of higher education. Employee volunteer benefits were determined relative to knowledge, skills and abilities gained through EV. Employer benefits were described relative to improved employee productivity, satisfaction, and loyalty, increased attractiveness of employers to future employees, improved corporate image with stakeholders, and improved corporate bottom line, as perceived by employee volunteers. The Phillips ROI Methodology™ was identified as the most appropriate method for measuring EV in BEPs because the methodology provides a comprehensive measure of inputs, process, outputs, and intangible benefits [43]. The Phillips ROI Methodology™ meets all the criteria of today’s “triple bottom line” which defines corporate value from economic, environmental, and societal perspectives, and uses the language of business that is familiar to and respected by business executives [45].

Due to study limitations, i.e., no access to non-volunteer employees, business partner financial and proprietary information, and no pre-implementation data, the study used a cross-sectional, descriptive nonexperimental ex post facto research design to collect data. Because of the small finite study population of 106 employee volunteers, the study applied a mixed-mode data collection method of online and paper survey distribution to increase response rate to avoid conclusion validity threats such as low statistical power and

unreliability of measures.

The study used a researcher-designed survey instrument that contains 30 questions taking approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey used scaled, multiple choice, multiple responses, ranking, fill-in-the-blank, and open-ended questions to collect descriptive quantitative and qualitative data. The instrument was designed and distributed via Qualtrics, an online survey instrument development software. A panel of subject matter experts was recruited to review the data collection instrument for face and content validity. A Cronbach Alpha was conducted to ensure instrument reliability.

IV. RESULTS

The study successfully applied the Phillips ROI Methodology™ to answer the research objectives identified. The population consisted of 106 employee volunteers (EVs) from U.S. regional gaming jurisdiction (the jurisdiction) who volunteered in the undergraduate casino management program (the program) at the local 4-year state institution of higher learning (the institution). Fifty-five volunteers (52%) responded to the survey. Data was analyzed using levels of evaluation found in Phillips ROI Methodology™ Chain of Impact Logic Model. The levels included in this study were input or indicator data (Level 0), reaction data (Level 1), learning data (Level 2), and application data (Level 3), and intangible benefits. Due to study limitations, impact data (Level 4) and ROI (Level 5) were not included in this study. The model utilized a systematic approach to isolate the effects of EV and create a chain of impact that demonstrated the benefits of EV in BEP.

Level 0 or input data collected for ROI revealed majority of the employee volunteers held entry to mid-level management positions of managers and directors, respectively.

Over half of the employee volunteers fall between the ages of 30 through 49 years with undergraduate or graduate degrees. The EVs averaged 14.5 years of work experience in the industry with 11.5 of those years spent in the gaming jurisdiction. A majority of the EVs had no prior work experience in other jurisdictions. Employee volunteers with work experience outside of the jurisdiction primarily worked in Las Vegas and New Jersey.

Employee volunteerism in the program is increasing in terms of number of volunteers and diversity of roles and activities. Respondents primarily served as face-to-face presenters but the EVs' roles are trending towards online guest presentations and volunteers are taking on more diverse roles and activities. The EVs spend most time in adjunct instruction and the least in assisting with career placement networking. About half of the EVs became volunteers because they were approached by the institution and one-third, were approached by their employer.

A large majority (over 80%) of the EVs perceived their volunteerism in the program a worthwhile investment for their career development and their employer. None of the EVs thought volunteerism in the program was not a worthwhile investment for them or their employers.

Almost two-thirds of the EVs perceived competencies gained through the program were relevant to job success. All of the respondents thought volunteerism to be relevant to job success.

Employee volunteers perceived communication, interpersonal and leadership were the skills gained most from volunteerism in the program. They identified strategic positioning as the skill set least gained from volunteerism.

Communication, interpersonal and leadership skills were skills most often transferred to the job and applied almost one-third of the time to the volunteers' job. Employee volunteers also occasionally transferred implementation, industry knowledge and critical thinking skills to their job. Most of the transfers of competencies to the workplace were applied by entry-level management volunteers. Respondents identified strategic positioning as the skill least gained from volunteerism and technology least applied to the job. Volunteers perceived competencies acquired through volunteerism important to their job, with communications as the most frequently used skill. Employee volunteers agreed management support, staff support, technology support, peer recognition and industry recognition supported their application of competencies to the job. Lack of time and no direct benefit to the job were barriers to competencies application to the EVs' job.

All EVs reported that at least 80% of their current job requires the competencies applied in volunteerism in the program. Employee volunteers perceived 10% - 20% of estimated improvement, of which 10% was attributed to EV, and EVs were 80% confident of their estimate. The adjusted contribution of EV in the program to competencies improvement is between 1% - 1.6%.

All EVs agree their volunteerism in the program are beneficial to their employer particularly in corporate image in the local community, employer attractiveness to potential employees, and corporate image in the industry. They

perceived corporate bottom line and loyalty to employer least influenced by their volunteerism. The business measure of improved corporate image with the regulatory authority, received the most *strongly agree* responses. The EVs perceived attractiveness of employer to potential employees to be most directly linked to volunteerism in the program. Improved corporate image in the local community and job satisfaction were also perceived as most directly linked to volunteerism in the program. However, these benefits had no standard measures and were reported as intangible benefits.

V. SUMMARY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings reveal employee volunteerism in business-education partnerships can be a powerful competitive business tool for business partners if education partners collaborate with business partners to maximize on professional development opportunities for employee volunteers. Results reveal intangible benefits such as attractiveness of employer to potential employees, and improved corporate image in the local community, industry and to the casino regulatory authority.

Results of this study validate employee volunteers perceive their investment in BEPs worthwhile for them and their employers because of the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired and applied to their jobs. Employee volunteerism in business-education partnerships can be recognized beyond just being a corporate social responsibility strategy implemented in lieu of cash donations. Through innovative instructional strategies, business and education partners can develop employee volunteerism in higher education into a competitive business strategy that represent cost savings for business partners in terms of employee recruitment, retention and professional development.

Education partners need to establish accountability reporting and reporting standards for the partnership to directly link cost savings to the corporate bottom-line to ensure long-term support of business partners. Business-education partners are recommended to form a taskforce to develop a formal plan for recruitment, training, and assessment of employee volunteers, a Phillips ROI Methodology™ -based evaluation plan, and adopt a ROI reporting standard that aligns with corporate CSR reporting standards and needs.

For future research, the author recommends following up this seminal study with an in-depth ROI that allows access to pertinent information and individuals. If an in-depth ROI study is not feasible, the study recommends an ROI forecast based on the job contribution of improved competencies. Finally, replicating the study to measure employee volunteerism in other gaming jurisdictions, in hospitality and tourism, and other undergraduate programs is recommended for comparison study purposes.

This study determined benefits of employee volunteerism in an education-business partnership for casino business partners. Study recommendations provide the basis for consideration of an employee volunteerism in business-education partnership instructional model for casino, hospitality, and tourism management education. As an

accountability framework, the reporting standards established for EV in higher education provide rationale for including employee volunteerism as part of a corporate social responsibility strategy that leverages human capital development opportunities through business-education partnerships.

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Evelyn K. Green earned a Ph.D. in human capital development, a M.S. in instructional technology, an M.B.A with a marketing emphasis, and a B.S. in hotel and restaurant administration from The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, U.S.A. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor with the Department of Casino, Hospitality and Tourism Management at The University of Southern Mississippi. Her business-education partnership instructional model earned her the University's first Exemplary Online Course award in 2012. Her research interests focus on casino, hospitality and tourism business-education partnerships; employee volunteerism performance measures; and instructional methods for a developing a Millennial workforce.

Cyndi H. Gaudet, director of the Jack and Patti Phillips Workplace Learning and Performance Institute (WLPI) at The University of Southern Mississippi, is a full professor in the Department of Economic and Workforce Development and directs the Human Capital Development doctoral program. Her cutting-edge workforce development research received awards from NASA, the Southern Growth Policies Board, and the American Society for Training and Development. Her research has been published in journals such as the *HRD Quarterly*, *International Journal of Instructional Media*, *NABTE Review*, *URISA Journal*, the *Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, and the *Performance Improvement Quarterly* focusing on post-Katrina workforce development.

Heather M. Annulis, Assistant Director of the Jack and Patti Phillips Workplace Learning and Performance Institute (WLPI) is an Associate Professor of Workforce Training and Development at The University of Southern Mississippi in the Department of Economic and Workforce Development.. She is the Director of the Workforce Training and Development master's degree and certificate program. A Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP) from the American Society for Training & Development, her research focuses on determining the return on investment of performance focused programs. In 2006, she was named to the Mississippi Business Journal's *Mississippi's Top 40 Under 40*.