A study on the responses to employees' volunteer activities in Korea

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Corporate volunteer programs is very active recently in Korea, as a part of corporate social responsibilities (CSR). According to a recent survey (2007) conducted by the Korean Federation of Industries (KFI), more than 70% of large companies in Korea indicated that they encourage their employees to become involved in volunteer activities. What these figures imply is that more Korean companies are recognizing the strategic importance of corporate philanthropy including employees volunteering that are aligned with corporate values and missions.

Among many forms of corporate citizenship activities, an increasing number of Korean firms are adopting corporate volunteer programs as a primary area of corporate community involvement, due to the numerous community and company benefits associated with such programs. As many scholars (Peterson, 2004; Hess et al., 2002) in this area have indicated, the greatest indirect community benefit associated with volunteer programs is a more favorable corporate image. Given the benefits of corporate volunteer programs, it is natural that many Korean firms are also devoting significant time and resources in support of corporate volunteer programs. In this study, a corporate volunteer program is defined as any formal organized company support for employees and retirees who wish to volunteer their time and skills in service to the community.

While it would be simple to emphasize the significance of corporate volunteer programs for both companies and communities, it is not so easy to manage successful and effective corporate volunteer programs because employees are not always motivated to give their time and talents voluntarily. Among others, a major issue in managing and supporting corporate volunteer programs concerns how effectively recruit and maintain employees' participation. The main thesis of this study is derived from these background and concerns. More specifically, this study tries to answer these questions: (1) What is the current level of corporate volunteer activities among major companies in Korea?

(2) What factors make corporate volunteers feel positive about their volunteer activities, resulting in continuation of their volunteer activities?

(3) What factors make corporate volunteers feel negative about their volunteer activities, resulting in burnout or negligence? Among many factors, this study will pay a special attention on the effects of individual variables, company’s supporting system for corporate volunteer activities, and community/NGO’s institutional factors on the positive or negative response to employees volunteering.

Theoretical backgrounds to explain the volunteer activities are diverse ranging from the traditional models emphasizing individual and families variables to more recent institutional capacity model which are introduced recently (Hong et. Al 2008). Most well known individual variables which are related to volunteerism in general include gender (Smith 1994; Sundeen 1990; Wymer & Samu 2002), social connection (Wilson & Musick 1997), income (Penner 2002; Smith 1994), church attendance (Penner 2002), and age (Midlarsky & Kahana 1994). To emphasize the institutional capacities at encouraging volunteering, literature in this area reported the relationship between various aspects of recipient organizations and the level of engagement of corporate volunteers. According to Hong et. al (2008), flexibility in job assignment and scheduling have been known as important in recruiting and retaining volunteers. However, corporate volunteer activities are usually planned and executed within a company context maintaining participants’ status as employees. Therefore, what kinds of management and supporting systems are applied to the volunteer participants are critically
important in predicting the response of corporate volunteers to their volunteer activities. While this study will depend upon broadly an ecological model which originally derived from Bronfenbrenner (1979), the response to corporate volunteering could be best explained by an integrated approach (Kulik 2007) that combines a broad range of individual and institutional variables including both local nonprofit organizations and companies.

The research sample will consist of corporate volunteers who are serving in various types of social service organizations. Data will be collected from volunteer program participants using a structured questionnaires survey. This study will ultimately contribute to effectively manage company volunteer programs by revealing the factors which affect corporate volunteering participants’ response to their volunteer activities.

Reference


