

ABSTRACT

European Research Network On Philanthropy
8th International Conference Copenhagen, July 13-14, 2017

A Different Driver: Exploring employee involvement in corporate philanthropy

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 Keywords: corporate philanthropy, employees, decision-making, SMEs
 Topic: Corporate philanthropy and CSR
 Research method: Qualitative
 Geographical focus: Single country (European)
 Type of article: Research article

Abstract:

Corporate Philanthropy (CP) is multi-dimensional, differs among sectors and is decided upon both at the individual and the organizational level. However, the CP literature characteristically focuses on strategic decisions made by business leaders of multinational organizations, and often ignores the role of lower level employees, especially those working in small and medium-size enterprises. The research presented in this paper is an initial attempt to gain insight into these different drivers of CP. It builds on the literature of employee involvement in CSR, including corporate volunteering and giving (Liu and Ko 2011; Mize Smith 2012; Muller, Pfarrer, and Little 2014; Roza 2016). It studies lower-level in particular shop floor, by which we mean low status and low paid - employees own experiences with CP and decision making, in order to understand what, if anything, is distinctive about lower level employees perspective in contrast to that of business leaders.

In order to answer the research questions, we conducted a qualitative study of the experience of lower level employees in ten workplaces, including supermarkets, retail banks, restaurants, a gambling company and an administrative office in the South East of England between August 2011 and May 2012. The results show that in the ten workplaces observed in this study, shop floor employees experienced limited involvement in CP decision making. Most, and especially the financially more significant CP initiatives, were predominantly decided top-down by business leaders. Key objectives of the business leaders were strategic goals such as improved company reputation, brand-building in targeted markets and strategic alignment partnerships. Business

leaders typically limited employee involvement in decision making to only smaller CP initiatives with low stakes involved. There employee involvement did result in less strategic CP decisions, as predicted by Muller, Pfarrer and Little (2014) and previously found by Mize Smith (2012). Building on the work done by Liu and Ko (2011) in relation to employee volunteering activities, we argue that truly strategic CP incorporates both internal and external strategic goals, and as such involves both business leaders and employee representatives from a range of levels in the strategic CP decision making. Only then all the internal and external benefits ascribed to CP, such as strategic goals and HR benefits, can be realized.

Most important references:

References

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