



## What Keeps Corporate Volunteers Engaged?

Susan van Schie - ESSEC Business School | Arthur Gautier - ESSEC Business School | Anne-Claire Pache - ESSEC Business School | Stefan T. Güntert - ETH Zürich

The article explores the factors that drive employees to internalize a volunteer identity in a corporate context. This study is relevant for practitioners because the insights can lead to more effective, engaging, and sustainable volunteer programs that benefit both volunteers and the communities they serve.

What factors explain why employees internalize a volunteer identity in a corporate context and how do these factors influence sustained participation in corporate volunteering activities and by extension, the desired outcomes?

The **quality of motivation experienced by employees while volunteering is more important than repeated participation**. In addition, **the ability to choose causes is critical for fostering a volunteer identity**. Interestingly, organizational pressure, recognition, and managerial support often lead to controlled motivation, and this does not support long-term engagement.

[#Corporatevolunteering](#) [#Volunteermotivation](#) [#Corporatesocialresponsibility](#)

### Background

&

### Context



- **Corporate volunteering (CV)** has **grown rapidly in recent decades**, with many companies implementing programs to encourage employees to donate their time and skills to charitable causes. These **programs are believed to benefit employees, businesses, and society**. However, the impact of CV programs, especially when participation is one-off, remains uncertain.
- Previous research indicates that the benefits of **CV are more likely to occur if employees internalize a volunteer identity**, making volunteering a part of their self identity.
- This study explores the factors contributing to the assimilation of a volunteer identity in a corporate setting by testing and extending the **Volunteer Work Design (VWD)** model with insights from **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**. It examines key factors such as the enriched project, organizational practices, targeted causes, repeated participation, and the quality of motivation, incorporating a SDT component into the model.
- A **cross-sectional survey design** was used, gathering data from **619 employees across 58 CV projects** in France. Participants evaluated the characteristics of their CV activities, organizational practices, motivation quality, and volunteer identity.

# ERNOP Research Note

## Academic articles on philanthropy through a practitioner lens

### Take aways & Learnings



- The **quality of motivation experienced by employees during volunteering** is more significant than repeated participation in fostering a volunteer identity. Self-determined motivation, such as intrinsic motivation and identified regulation, is crucial for embracing a volunteer identity.
- **Projects that employees perceive as meaningful and aligned with their personal values** are essential for fostering a volunteer identity.
- **Organizational pressure, recognition, and managerial support** often **do not foster a volunteer identity**. They can potentially undermine the altruistic nature of volunteering.
- **SDT-extended model**, which focuses on the quality of motivation, **provides a better explanation for the internalization of a volunteer identity** than the original VWD model. This model highlights the importance of creating a **supportive environment that promotes self-determined volunteerism**.
- Corporate volunteering programs should focus on providing meaningful projects and **allowing employees to choose causes**, rather than emphasizing recognition, managerial support, or prestigious causes.
- **Future research** could focus on longitudinal studies, explore additional factors influencing volunteer identity, and investigate **long-term impacts of corporate volunteering** on all stakeholders.



Figure 1: A **volunteer identity pyramid** illustrating that a strong foundation of quality motivation is necessary to support the growth of autonomy, self-determination, and ultimately, sustained volunteer identity.

ERNOP Research Notes provide easy-to-read, practice-oriented summaries of academic articles on philanthropy and are written by practitioner experts. This ERNOP Research Note 2025/6 is published in March 2025 and has been written by Ashifa Agede from Centre for Health Systems Support & Initiatives for Development. More information can be found at [www.ernop.eu](http://www.ernop.eu).