

Trinity College Dublin



**To give *and* to gain: An investigation into skills-based volunteering as an
avenue for learning and development**

Submitted for the Degree of PhD

2022

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DECLARATION

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Kiera Louise Dempsey-Brench

2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was born out of copious conversations and feedback sessions from many supportive individuals, of whom I would like to thank. Without their unlimited encouragement and understanding, this thesis would not be the work that it is today.

First, to my main supervisor Professor Amanda Shantz. You have been an invaluable source of support through this whirlwind of a ride! Your knowledge is second to none and you have been a guiding light in this journey. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity, giving me faith in my abilities, and helping me to strengthen my passion for the field. I could not have asked for a better supervisor. I look forward to our future research endeavors.

To Dr. Sheila Cannon, the academic and administrative staff within the School of Business and to my fellow PhD researchers, who have been great sources of help and encouragement.

To Andy, for always making me smile, laugh and grounded. You deserve a medal. Thank you.

To my family - words will never do justice for the love and thanks I have for you all. To my parents, thank you for the endless love, support and...perseverance. Thank you for always giving me the time and space to ramble about my work when it didn't make sense. You inspired me to "dig deep" and to be the best one trick pony there is. Without your love and guidance, I wouldn't be where I am today. To my sister, Zara, thank you for being the best role model and motivator. You will always be my biggest source of inspiration. To my Grandma, my bestest friend. I couldn't have asked for a better cheerleader. Thank you for your unending love and encouragement. Finally, for those no longer with us, I hope I have

made you proud.

ABSTRACT

Skills-based volunteering has entered the corporate vernacular. Sitting at the intersection of corporate philanthropy and human resources, skills-based volunteering is a strategically driven activity that offers employees the opportunity to donate specialist skills that are required by a non-profit organization, while providing a forum to simultaneously develop new ones. This thesis presents three studies. Study one is a systematic review of 36 peer-reviewed empirical articles at the nexus of employee volunteering and learning. This study offers a definition of skills-based volunteering and a theoretical model to drive forward future research. Study two investigates employee volunteers' responses to learning from volunteering. The findings from interviews with employee volunteering managers (n=5), focus groups (n=28) and interviews with employee volunteers (n=30) show that while some volunteers recognize that they gained new skills, others became angry or defensive at the notion of learning from volunteering. In Study three, the focus shifts to service-based learning in higher education. Twenty-five MBA students who volunteered (as part of their coursework) to support a non-profit organization were interviewed. Whereas some used newly acquired MBA skills, others donated established pre-MBA skills. The findings revealed that students who donated newly acquired MBA skills gained new business-related skills and experiences, which were seen to enhance their employability. Students who donated pre-MBA skills directly supported project success through the translation of skills and indirectly by facilitating less experienced team members learning. In the final chapter, each study's findings are integrated, and the implications for theory and practice are expounded.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	IV
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Epistemological grounding	4
Access and ethics	6
A brief overview and motivations of the studies.....	7
Publications from the thesis	12
Conclusion.....	13
References	14
CHAPTER TWO: STUDY ONE.....	20
Abstract	21
Introduction	22
Method	24
Literature search and inclusion criteria	24
Definition of skills-based volunteering	25
Theoretical model.....	29
Overview	29
Program characteristics	29
Links with firm strategy	29
Embedding volunteering in training.....	33
Gaining and giving skills.....	35

Gaining skills.....	35
Giving skills.....	37
Interconnectedness of giving and gaining skills.....	38
Employee volunteer characteristics.....	39
Existing skills	39
Employee volunteer motivation	40
Motives and giving and gaining from volunteering	42
Context	44
Line managers	44
Co-workers	45
Non-profits	46
Firm outcomes of skills-based volunteering.....	47
Firm-level performance	47
Talent and leadership pipeline.....	47
Employee performance.....	48
Employee attitudes	48
Non-profit outcomes of skills-based volunteering	49
Access to skills	49
Sustainable impact.....	50
Partnership development	50
Future volunteerism.....	51
Discussion	52
Tensions between employee motives and skills-based volunteering	53

The role of HR in skills-based volunteering	55
Firm and non-profit outcomes	57
Limitations.....	58
Practical implications	59
Conclusion.....	60
References	62
CHAPTER THREE: STUDY TWO	74
Abstract	75
Introduction	76
Literature review	78
Skills-based volunteering	78
Attribution theory	81
Methods	82
Research context and data sources	82
Analysis	84
Findings	90
Rejection of learning	90
Anger	90
Defensiveness.....	92
Acknowledgement of learning	92
Curiosity	92
Attributions of skills-based volunteering	94
Egoistic attributions of the firm’s intent.....	94

Altruistic attributions of the firm’s intent.....	95
Line manager support	95
Discussion	96
Limitations and future research	101
Practical implications	102
Conclusion.....	103
References	104
CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY THREE.....	112
Abstract	113
Introduction	114
Literature review	116
Service-learning.....	116
Skills-based volunteering	121
Methods.....	122
Research context and data sources	122
Analysis	124
Findings.....	128
Pre-MBA KSA donation	128
Translation of KSAs	131
Enhanced project performance	132
Facilitate team members’ KSA development.....	132
MBA-acquired KSA donation.....	134
Technical skill development.....	135

Recognition and confidence in one’s own KSAs	136
Enhanced employability	137
Interpersonal skill development	137
Positive impact of KSAs on the social enterprise and development of a more socially responsible mindset	138
Discussion	139
Limitations and future research	144
Practical implications	146
Conclusion.....	147
References	149
CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL DISCUSSION.....	157
Contributions to employee volunteering literature.....	158
Contributions to service-learning literature.....	161
The risks associated with skills-based volunteering	162
Non-profit organizations	162
Firms.....	163
Employee volunteers	164
Society	165
General limitations and future research	167
Practical implications	169
Conclusion.....	170
References	171
APPENDICES.....	177

Appendix 1: Chapter three (study two) interview guides..... 177

Appendix 2: Chapter four (study three) interview guides..... 182

REFERENCES 184

Chapter One: Introduction

Organizations are increasingly emphasizing, investing, and reporting on corporate social responsibility initiatives (CSR; CECP, 2021; KPMG, 2020). Although traditionally firms provided significant monetary support to non-profits in need, today, they often express their commitment to the environment and community through various channels, one of which is employee volunteering (CECP, 2020; Points of Light, 2020). Employee volunteering is defined as employees' donation of time during an organized activity for an external non-profit organization or charitable cause (Rodell et al., 2016). For instance, employees may participate in an organization-led fundraising event for a charity, or volunteer on company time by clearing rubbish from a park or serving people who are struggling with homelessness at a soup kitchen. Firms show interest in supporting employee volunteering initiatives because they hold promise to enhance their CSR image (Plewa et al., 2015), improve community relations, and increase employee morale (Basil et al., 2009).

Whereas employee volunteering has been a common practice in organizations for the past two decades, a new form of volunteering has recently entered the corporate vernacular: skills-based volunteering (Delaney, 2020; CECP, 2020). Skills-based volunteering is a strategically driven activity that requires volunteers to donate job-related expertise (e.g., marketing, accounting, and project management skills) to a non-profit that requires them, while providing employees the opportunity to develop and acquire new skills. For example, an accountant who works in a financial institution that supports skills-based volunteering programs might use her finance skills to help local non-profits manage their books. In using skills in a new environment, solving different problems, and interacting with diverse people, the accountant may cultivate new skills such as leadership, communication, and project management.

Employee volunteering has been reported as a clear ‘win-win-win’ opportunity (Caligiuri et al., 2013), and is labeled as an activity where all parties involved gain. For example, the non-profits stand to benefit from the infusion of new business skills and intellectual resources to help them advance their mission and goals (e.g., McCallum et al., 2013; Muthuri et al., 2009; Pless et al., 2011). Organizations gain because employee volunteering programs are regarded as a well-established employee engagement initiative that has spillover effects on individual and organizational-level performance (Rodell et al., 2016). Although research on skills-based volunteering is sparse, studies within employee volunteering and learning have shown that there are positive outcomes for employees. For example, employees who apply their job-related skills view volunteering as more valuable, are more likely to report higher levels of skill development (Caligiuri et al., 2013), and they see themselves as more successful in their job roles (Booth et al., 2009). Although research on employee volunteering and learning have highlighted that employees, firms, and non-profits can gain, little research has investigated the role of employees’ skill donation and development.

Like many businesses, business schools are also starting to incorporate CSR into their curriculum (Gomez & Preciado, 2013). In the past, business schools have received criticism toward their lack of focus on social responsibility and business ethics (e.g., Christensen et al., 2007; Hühn, 2014; Navarro, 2008), with some decrying that business schools contribute to management hubris (Sadler-Smith & Cojuharenco, 2021). As such, many business schools have made a social turn, and now incorporate sustainability, community, and ethics into its teaching curricula (Jack, 2020). One practical way in which business schools encompass these factors into curricula is through service-based education. Service-learning projects are

a form of experiential learning where students donate and build upon their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), all while contributing to society (Block & Bartkus, 2019).

Despite both firms and business schools increasingly offering programs that are designed to enable individuals to give back to society *while* developing KSAs, there is little known about the learning effects and conditions linked with these types of experiences. Therefore, the focus of this thesis is to investigate the role of learning and skill development from skills-based volunteering programs. Doing so is important, as it will help to create a more in-depth and appropriate definition for skills-based volunteering and will give further research more balanced and honed results. It will also help create more considered understanding on the learning processes involved in skills-based volunteering participation, which will help to advance knowledge on how to maximize employee volunteer learning and create valuable insights and descriptions into the how's, why's and therefore's of skills-based volunteering. In what follows, I describe the epistemological grounding that underpins this research, outline the data approval for the research undertaken, provide a brief overview and motivations of the studies, explicating how each study interconnects, and finally show the publication status of the studies presented in this thesis.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL GROUNDING

This research adopts a critical realist perspective. Critical realism is the middle ground between interpretative and positivist paradigms (Houston, 2001; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010), which seeks to explain events instead of predicting them (Wynn & Williams, 2012). In this way, critical realists view the world as “theory-laden, but not theory-determined” (Fletcher, 2017: 182). Critical realism is ‘critical’ in that it accepts that

knowledge is limited and imperfect, and that some perspectives are more accurate compared to others (Edwards et al., 2014; Wynn & Williams, 2012).

Critical realists believe that the world operates on three levels (Fletcher, 2017). The first is the 'empirical' level; this level refers to events that people experience. At this level, researchers use empirical measurement and 'common sense' to explain phenomena. However, events are always mediated by human interpretation, and so knowledge creation is considered to be an inherently human activity (Zachariadis et al., 2013). The second level, is the 'actual' wherein there is no filter of human experience; events occur independent of human observation, interpretation, or experience. As such, the world exists outside of the researcher's zone of awareness. Therefore, the world is both real and socially constructed (Parr, 2015). The third level, the 'actual', is where causal structures and mechanisms exist and act to produce events. Critical realism brings these three levels together to explain social events, and research under this umbrella aims to explain events that occur at the empirical level, and reference causal mechanisms to explain why and how events occur.

Critical realism operates as a general methodological framework and is not associated with a particular research method (Fletcher, 2017). In other words, it is methodologically inclusive and pluralist (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Therefore, the research methods that are employed in this thesis (systematic literature review, interviews, and focus groups) are supported epistemologically. Further, this thesis uses flexible coding processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) that are consistent with a critical realist perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fletcher, 2017).

Critical realism is accepted as a practical philosophical lens to conduct social science research (Wynn & Williams, 2012). The underlying premise of critical realism is to explain

why things occur, and as such put theory first (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). In this way, this thesis sets out to explain why and how skills-based volunteering may result in learning, and the role of skill giving and gaining within this process.

ACCESS AND ETHICS

The Trinity Business School Ethics Committee approved data collection methods where necessary in this thesis. Study one was a systematic literature review; study two involved interviews and focus groups with employee volunteers from financial institutions; and the final study interviewed MBA students within a service-learning project.

Data access was obtained in two ways. First, for the second study, the researcher's supervisor obtained initial access to two European financial institutions. Organizational representatives invited employee volunteers to participate in focus groups and interviews so long as they fit the selection criteria (see chapter three). Participants could partake in all or some of the research. For example, just because a participant engaged in a focus group did not mean they had to participate in an interview.

In the final study, I engaged in several processes to obtain data access. First, I attended the service-learning module, and introduced the research project and myself to MBA students. I also asked the director of the MBA and the module leader to encourage student participation. However, we paid particular attention to the delivery of this message and ensured that students were aware that: (1) their participation would not have any bearing on their performance on the MBA and, (2) that it would not affect their relationships with module or MBA leaders.

Throughout the data collection process, strict ethical guidelines were followed. Prior to data collection, participants were informed (by email or verbally) of the study details.

Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, that their responses would be made anonymous, and they could end their involvement at any time. Study details were revisited at the start of each focus group or interview, and participants were invited to ask any outstanding questions they might have. With participants' approval, all data was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW AND MOTIVATIONS OF THE STUDIES

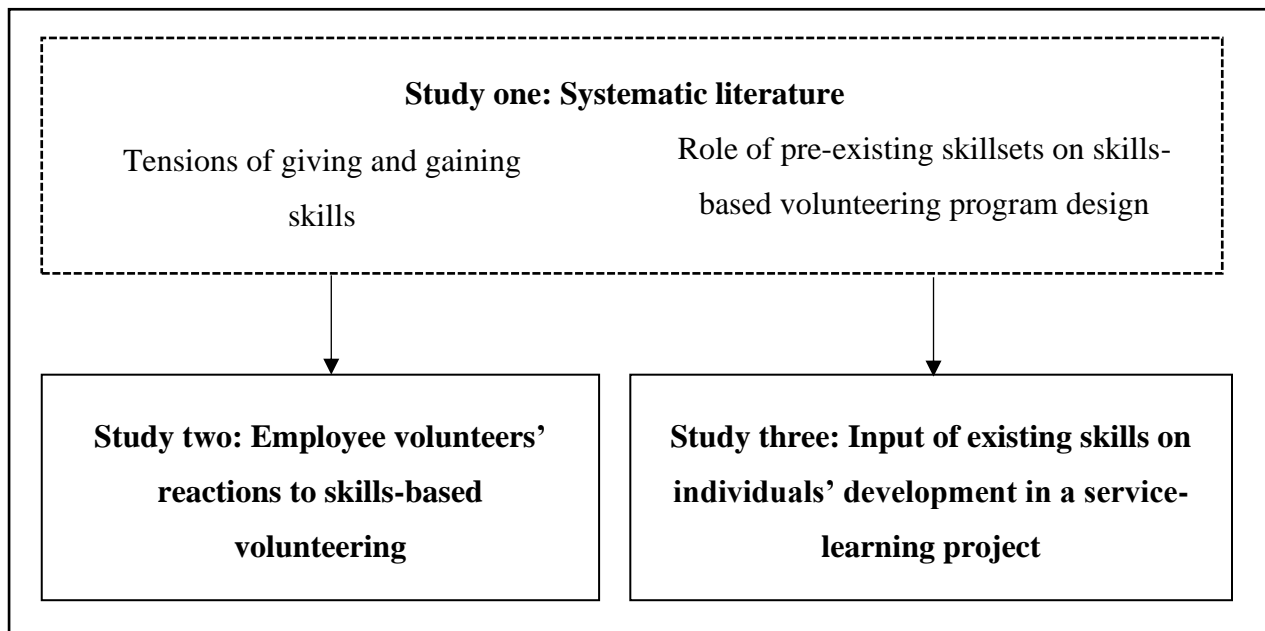
In 2017, I undertook an MSc in Corporate Sustainability and Management at Cranfield University because I am passionate about how organizations can work with communities to help mitigate social challenges. As I came toward the end of my MSc degree in 2018, I applied for a scholarship to study under Professor Amanda Shantz on the topic of skills-based volunteering. This was of great interest to me because skills-based volunteering offers one way in which organizations can connect the needs of the business with those of society. Although my professors had discussed this practice as a way to deliver benefits to multiple stakeholders simultaneously, there were rarely clear accounts of *how* each stakeholder could benefit. As such, I was interested to dig deeper under the surface of skills-based volunteering, to make sense of the 'how'.

Like many PhD journeys, my research process was not linear, and I experienced many twists and turns that ultimately resulted in this presented thesis. I now proceed by discussing this iterative journey and how each study came to fruition and interconnect with each other. Figure 1 graphically illustrates how the studies build off each other.

I started my PhD in September 2018. My first point of call was to get a clear handle on the literature, prompting the inception of study one: a systematic literature review. At first, I set out to do a review of skills-based volunteering, however, despite the wealth of

interest from practitioners and organizations toward skills-based volunteering (CIPD, 2021; SHRM; 2019), academic research into the phenomenon is scarce. Only three papers made specific mention of skills-based volunteering (Cook & Burchell, 2018; McCallum et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018), and so the literature search was broadened to look at research at the intersection of employee volunteering and learning. The result was a systematic literature review containing 36 peer-reviewed empirical articles, which outlays the current state of literature at the intersection of learning and volunteering and provides an operational definition of skills-based volunteering. Alongside developing a theoretical model that explains the core features of skills-based volunteering programs, the factors that affect them, and the firm and non-profit outcomes, the review also showed that skill giving and gaining is seldom the centerpiece of research questions, and study designs. These findings opened the door to a host of new research questions, one of which was addressed in the second study.

Figure 1: Interrelations of studies



The second study is the first empirical study of the thesis, and investigates employees' responses to their organization's messaging around skills-based volunteering. The systematic review unearthed tensions between employees' motives and skills-based volunteering, and proposed that future research may look to attribution theory to further examine these tensions. This is important, as the existing body of research fails to elucidate how people respond to claims when their employers explicitly position volunteering as a forum to develop or cultivate skills. The study uses interview and focus group data from two European financial institutions that purposefully fuse employee volunteering activities with learning.

At first, I developed the study with attribution theory as the underpinning theoretical lens, however, as data collection progressed, some of the responses that employees gave came as a surprise. Some interviewees became angry or defensive, and subsequently rejected the concept of learning from volunteering activities, whereas others expressed curiosity, and used the interview process as a forum to make sense of what they learned. These findings were unexpected for two reasons. First, extant research, which is often conducted through survey questionnaires, has shown that volunteers welcome learning through volunteering (e.g., Booth et al., 2009; Jones, 2016; Peterson, 2004). Second, the managers of the volunteering programs who were interviewed as a part of this study had explicitly said that the organization blends volunteering with learning and development. This begged the question: Why did some of the interviewees react in this way? The findings prompted me to open my perspective, and to read about and engage in a process of abduction. There are several recommended steps to follow when using abduction, such as, evaluating plausible explanations individually and with others (Saetre & Van de Ven, 2021). As such, I engaged

in extensive debates with my supervisor, attended conferences to engage in discussions with other colleagues, and returned to the literature. Throughout this iterative process, the alternative literatures on moral outrage (Goodenough, 1997), defensive routines (Argyris, 1985, 1990, 1994), and sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) were used to elaborate on the findings.

During the abductive process that I undertook for study two, one line of exploration that piqued my interest was how individuals came to realize what they had learned through their volunteering experiences. Although some employees learned from volunteering, the vast majority did not naturally make this connection on their own. As such, the research highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for individuals to be able to reflect on their volunteering experiences. This led to several interesting conversations with my supervisor, who at the time was the MBA director. It was in these conversations that we could see the relevance of skills-based volunteering to management education.

Trinity MBA students, as a part of their education, were offered the opportunity to engage in a service-learning project that worked with local social enterprises that required specific business skills to enhance their social mission. These types of projects are curated to enable students to build knowledge experientially (Block & Bartkus, 2019). As such, findings from study two were used to help re-design the MBA service-learning project, whereby, the module carved out the time and space for students to reflect on experiences through implementing two coaching sessions.

It was here that I turned to the service-learning literature, to establish the role of team coaching within service-learning education. Research suggests that an essential component to service-learning is student reflection (Eyler, 2002; Steiner & Watson, 2006; Yorio & Ye,

2012), and that team coaching provides a forum for members to reflect individually and collectively, to facilitate learning (Jones et al., 2018). However, there was a paucity of research that had investigated the role of coaching in service-learning projects. As such, the original aim of study three was to investigate into how team coaching facilitates students' personal and professional development in service-learning projects. A qualified coach, who was independent of the course, offered two team coaching sessions for each group: one at the start and one at the end of the project. The first session was designed to facilitate introductions, identify leadership, and professional development goals, and help students to develop a team charter. The second session was designed to draw out the learning gained from the project at an individual, team, organizational (client), and societal level.

However, after data collection and analysis, it became apparent that the coaching sessions were used as a forum for student teams to make sense of team dynamics, rather than discussing the team's learning about the service-learning project. However, this research had theoretical implications that I did not anticipate. During the data collection and analysis phase, it became evident that there was a variation between the types of skills donated and the types of skills gained. This led the research question to change in light of the findings, and as such, study three sought to examine how student outcomes differed in service-learning projects when students donated different types of skills. I returned to the service-learning literature to find that it had all but ignored the role of pre-existing skills in student outcomes. However, findings from study one's systematic literature review on skills-based volunteering had highlighted several ways in which pre-existing skills may influence skill donation and development in an organizational setting (e.g., Caligiuri et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018; Turner et al., 2021). I therefore turned to the skills-based volunteering literature to help make sense

of findings. Findings from a comparative case analysis (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999) found that the types of KSAs that are donated resulted in different student outcomes.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE THESIS

It is worth noting the publication status of the studies presented in this thesis (See Table 1). Leading business schools follow the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) and Financial Times (FT) journal lists to establish the quality of publications. The studies presented in this thesis are different from the manuscripts that have been published, as published papers underwent rigorous revise and resubmit processes. The findings of study one are published in Human Resource Management Review (CABS 3). Study two is published in two journals. Preliminary findings of study two are published into MIT Sloan Management Review (MIT SMR; CABS 3 and FT), and the full study’s findings are published in the International Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM; CABS 3). According to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (2021): “Secondary publication of material published in other journals or online may be justifiable and beneficial, especially when intended to disseminate important information to the widest possible audience.” The studies published in MIT SMR and IJHRM are qualitatively different, with the latter containing new insights, an elaborated theoretical model and more data. Further, the readership is different for each publication, as MIT SMR is predominantly a practitioner audience, whereas IJHRM’s is mainly academic. Finally, preliminary findings of study three were accepted and presented at the Irish Academy of Management.

Table 1: Overview of thesis studies publication status

Study	Publication medium	Status	Citation
Study one	Human Resource Management	Published	Dempsey-Brench, K., & Shantz, A. (2021). Skills-based volunteering: A systematic literature review of the intersection of skills and employee

	Review (CABS 3)		volunteering. <i>Human Resource Management Review</i> , https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2021.100874 .
Study two	MIT Sloan Management Review (CABS 3 & FT)	Published	Shantz, A., & Dempsey-Brench, K. (2021). How volunteerism enhances workplace skills. <i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i> , 62(4), 1-6.
	International Journal of Human Resource Management (CABS 3)	Published	Dempsey-Brench, K., & Shantz, A. (2021). When give-back turns to blowback: Employee responses to learning from skills-based volunteering. <i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1996434 .
Study three	Irish Academy of Management conference (peer-reviewed)	Accepted for presentation	---

CONCLUSION

Although each study in and of themselves provides significant contributions, it is important to show how they interlink. The focus and main contribution of this thesis is to home in on learning from skills-based volunteering and the role of giving and gaining of skills. Doing so is important, because thus far, research has yet to examine the factors that influence learning from skills-based volunteering. Chapters two, three and four present the studies that make up this thesis. Finally, chapter five summarizes the contribution of knowledge that this thesis provides and explores the implications for future research and practice.

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Chapter Two: Study One

**Skills-based volunteering: A systematic literature review at the intersection of skills
and employee volunteering**

ABSTRACT

Skills-based volunteering programs sit at the intersection of corporate philanthropy and human resources. These programs enable employees to volunteer their specialized skills to support non-profit organizations, while developing new skills along the way. While these programs are the fastest growing way that firms deliver on their corporate social responsibility strategy, the academic literature has all but ignored them. However, there is ample opportunity to build an understanding of skills-based volunteering from existing research that crosses the realms of employee volunteering and skills. This systematic literature review of 36 peer-reviewed articles forms the basis of this study, and provides a definition of skills-based volunteering, and a theoretical model to guide future research and practice on skills-based volunteering.

Keywords: skills-based volunteering; employee volunteering; learning and development; human resources

INTRODUCTION

Skills-based volunteering has recently entered the corporate vernacular and is one of the fastest growing trends in corporate citizenship (CECP, 2020). Take, for instance, a project manager. A traditional employee volunteer program may invite her to distribute food to homeless people, sell tickets for a charity event, or tidy a local park. Skills-based volunteering, on the other hand, would leverage her professional skills, such as project planning, quality control, or cost management to third sector organizations (including, non-profit organizations, registered charities or social enterprises; herein referred to as non-profits) in need. Not only does skills-based volunteering offer valuable expertise to non-profits, but also these programs promise to enhance employees' skills that they can bring back to the workplace (Bengtson, 2020; Letts & Holly, 2017). Leading human resources (HR) practitioner bodies are beginning to recognize that skills-based volunteering programs are blurring the line between corporate social responsibility (CSR), and key HR practices, such as learning and development [CIPD, 2021; Hirsch (SHRM), 2019].

Despite practitioner interest in skills-based volunteering, little scholarly research has directly examined these programs (cf. Cook & Burchell, 2018, McCallum et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018). However, the broader literature on employee volunteering indicates the potential for employees to donate and develop skills while giving back to the community (e.g., Booth et al., 2009; Caligiuri et al., 2013; Pless & Maak, 2008). This work has largely demonstrated that skill utilization and development are beneficial to employees, the firm, and non-profits. At a time when organizations are pursuing ways to accelerate their CSR strategies, and HR scholars and practitioners are seeking ways to contribute to them (De

Stefano et al., 2018; Hewett & Shantz, 2021; Stahl et al., 2020), the time is right to shine a light on skills-based volunteering.

The purpose of this study is to present a comprehensive review of research at the nexus of skills and employee volunteering. Such an endeavor is worthwhile for at least three reasons. First, while most research suggests that volunteering provides opportunities to learn, other findings warn of possible risks (e.g., Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015; Hu et al., 2016; Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021). These mixed findings may frustrate practitioners searching for research-based prescriptions for implementing skills-based volunteering programs, and may create difficulties for researchers who look to extend prior research. Consequently, a systematic literature review is necessary to consolidate existing findings and provide a path forward for both research and practice. Second, there is little definitional consensus of skills-based volunteering. Clearly, for research to progress, an operational definition is required (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Third, although research has shed light on the intersection of volunteering and skills, it tends not to be the primary focus of research. If the volunteering literature were a picture painting, volunteer skills is in the background, rather than the focal point that is deemed worthy of further scrutiny. This review zooms in on skills in the context of employee volunteering, bringing to light a wealth of new research opportunities.

This review sits alongside several excellent reviews on the relationship between CSR and HR (e.g., De Stefano et al., 2018; Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016; Xiao et al., 2020), and employee volunteering (Rodell et al., 2016). Although these reviews have set the landscape for skills-based volunteering, there is a critical mass of work on the donation and development of skills through volunteering that warrants a systematic review of this research.

This study proceeds by describing the protocol of this review, followed by a definition of skills-based volunteering. Next, it describes a framework that seeks to capture different strands of work that cross the realms of skills and volunteering. It concludes by providing implications for future research and practice.

METHOD

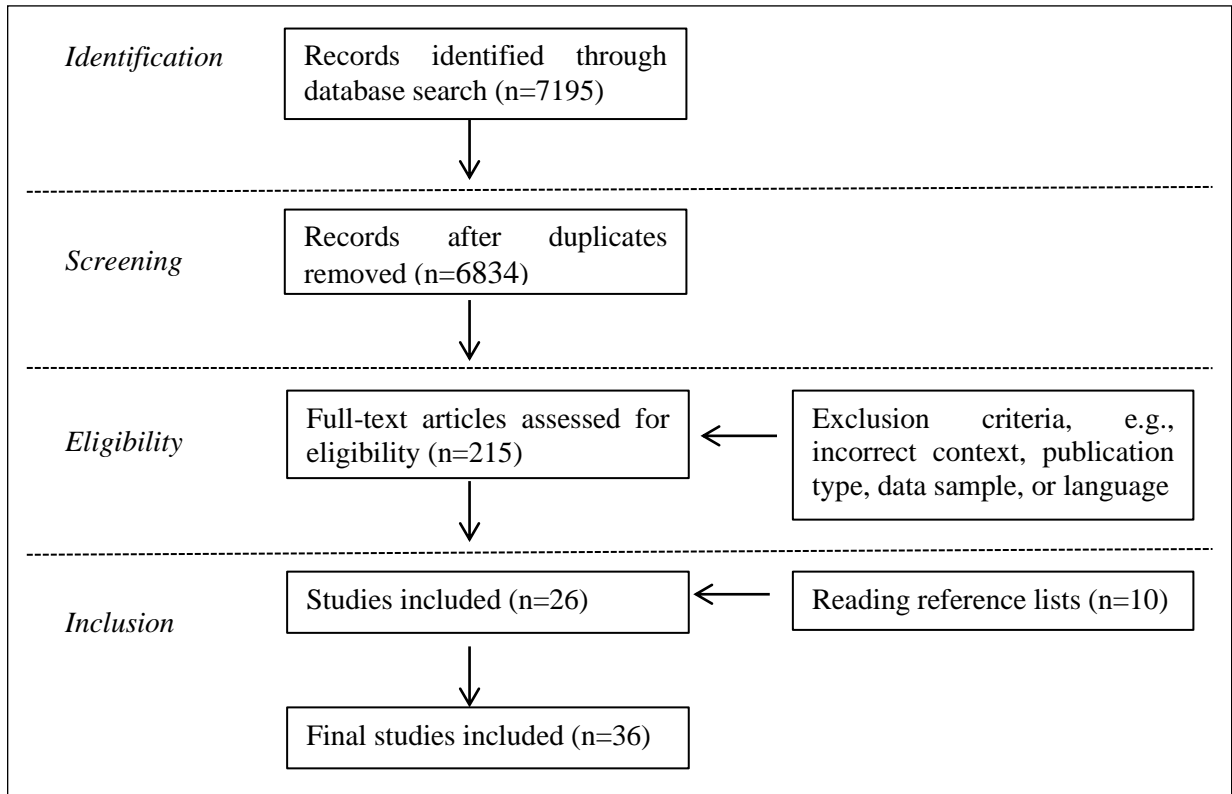
Literature search and inclusion criteria

This review followed guidelines set forth by Short (2009) and Tranfield et al. (2003) as illustrated in Figure 1. First, several computerized databases were searched between February and March 2021 to identify potential studies for inclusion: ABI/Inform, Business Source Complete, and Web of Science. The study used a Boolean search for studies that included the terms *corporat**, *organisation**, *organization**, in combination with *volunteer** or *service-learning*, and *skill**, *develop**, *learn**, *train** or *educat** in the title, abstract, or keyword sections of peer-reviewed papers. Since employee volunteering is a relatively new field of research, there was no restriction on publication dates.

Covidence software was used to assist the review process. The initial search yielded 7195 potential articles; after duplicates were removed, 6834 articles were left for title and abstract review. Articles were excluded based on the following criteria: articles needed to (1) situate volunteering in a corporate context (personal volunteering undertaken by individuals outside of the work domain were excluded); (2) report empirical data; and (3) include an employee-based sample (student, retired, or unemployed samples were excluded). The papers also needed to be published in (4) peer-reviewed journals; and (5) English. Exclusion criteria were not prioritized; articles were removed using the first exclusion criteria evidenced within the text. This resulted in 215 articles for full-text review.

Full-text review articles were excluded on the same criteria as the screening process. From this process, 26 studies were retained, published from 1990 to 2021. The references sections in each paper were examined, leading to the discovery of ten additional articles. The final data sample consists of 36 studies, listed in the references with an asterisk (*).

Figure 1: Literature search and evaluation for inclusion figure



DEFINITION OF SKILLS-BASED VOLUNTEERING

The practitioner literature is rife with examples of skills-based volunteering programs. For instance, a global professional services firm partnered with New Women New Yorkers (NWNKY), a non-profit organization that helps female immigrants gain employment. After identifying a match between the needed skills on both sides, determining the fit with the firm's strategy, and clearly defining the objectives, employees implemented a negotiation

skills workshop for women clients at NWNV. The “employees leveraged their consulting and presentation skills, worked with and learned from senior colleagues, and even honed their own skills in negotiation” (Bengston, 2020). Although this review found a multitude of case studies like this in the practitioner literature, the review surfaced only three articles that specifically mention skills-based volunteering (Cook & Burchell, 2018; McCallum et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018). Despite this important work, the scholarly discourse has yet to formulate a clear definition. Following recommendations for construct definition (Podsakoff et al., 2016), and using insights from this systematic review, together with case study materials from the practitioner literature (Bengston, 2020; CECP, 2020; Points of Light, 2020) the following definition of skills-based volunteering is offered:

Skills-based volunteering is a *strategically driven activity* that involves employees *donating job-related skills* and *acquiring or developing skills* for an external non-profit organization *that requires certain skill sets*.

There are four unique elements that set this definition apart from other forms of volunteering. First, it is a strategically driven activity that directly contributes to the firm’s mission or CSR strategy. Whereas firms are often actively involved in other forms of employee volunteering (e.g., selecting the non-profit for volunteer opportunities, or program administration), skills-based volunteering programs clearly support a firm’s stated purpose. For instance, Loosemore and Bridgeman (2017) studied a volunteering program that was purposefully aligned with the organization’s priorities; the construction firm offered its employees an opportunity to volunteer for a non-profit organization that provides students from disadvantaged communities with career opportunities in the construction industry. Volunteer participation helped to develop industry awareness, which enabled the creation of

future apprentices and graduate schemes. As firms are increasingly embedding CSR into their core strategy (Howard-Grenville, 2021; Stahl et al., 2020), direct links can also be made between skills-based volunteering, and a firm's stated social or ecological purpose (Bart et al., 2009; Vian et al., 2007).

The second dimension is that skills-based volunteering encourages the donation of job-related skills. The donation of job-relevant skills can come in an array of forms; a chef may donate his skills to cook lunches for the homeless, whereas a doctor may donate her skills through Médecins Sans Frontières. A focus on the donation of job-related skills differs from previous definitions of employee volunteering, which include the donation of employee time; volunteering experiences are planned or supported by the firm; and they benefit a non-profit organization (e.g., Pajo & Lee, 2011; Rodell et al., 2016; Tschirhart, 2005). Although some definitions of employee volunteering include the donation of employee skills (e.g., Rodell, 2013; Caligiuri et al., 2019; Tuffrey, 1997), the current consensus is that job-relevant skill donation is not a necessary component of employee volunteering (Rodell et al., 2016).

The third dimension involves cultivating new or refining existing skills. This is a key distinction that departs from most established definitions of employee volunteering (e.g., Pajo & Lee, 2011; Rodell et al., 2016; Tschirhart, 2005). However, this dimension aligns with international service-based learning programs, several of which appeared in the review. These programs are discrete volunteer assignments located in international settings that are designed to help volunteers build knowledge about themselves and their professional role, while contributing to the creation of social goods (Block & Bartkus, 2019; Pless et al., 2011). For instance, five papers in this review examined Project Ulysses, an international service-learning program run by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC). Project Ulysses is embedded

within a leadership development program that takes participants away from their desks to an international location for several months. However, employees do not need to travel to international locations to learn from their volunteering experiences, and the donation of skills can be delivered episodically, rather than through intense short bursts of time. Therefore, international service-learning programs may be a type of skills-based volunteering, so long as they meet the other criteria as outlined here.

The final dimension is that non-profits require the skills that are donated to them. These may be process-related (designed to help the operation of the non-profit itself) or programmatic-related (designed to help non-profit clients; Almog-Barr & Schiller, 2018). This may seem obvious, yet research suggests that in some cases, the volunteer skills that are offered to non-profits fail to meet their needs (Cook & Burchell, 2018). Skills-based volunteering programs ensure that volunteers have the needed knowledge and skills that will benefit the non-profit or its cause, often through a matching process. For instance, at IBM, skills are matched via a technological platform jointly managed by IT and HR called On Demand Community that registers employees' skills and the needs of non-profits (McCallum et al., 2013). In other cases, skills-matching is conducted via brokerages, an increasingly common third-party organization that liaises between firms and non-profits to ensure that skill demand matches supply (Cook & Burchell, 2018).

While skills-based volunteering has entered the corporate vernacular, this is the first scholarly attempt to define it. The definition is an ideal type, and not all of the papers that are reviewed squarely fit this definition. Instead, there are elements of skills-based volunteering across the studies, which provide an opportunity to guide future research and practice by specifying its key elements. In what follows, this study presents a model of skills-

based volunteering based on the literature reviewed, to showcase its important elements, ultimately delivering promising outcomes for firms and non-profits.

THEORETICAL MODEL

Overview

The analysis of the literature produced five key themes, and these are incorporated into Figure 2 to provide a map of the current understanding of skills-based volunteering. The study discusses each theme, in turn, in the subsequent sections. First, at the heart of skills-based volunteering is the program itself. The definition provided in this review implies that skills-based volunteering programs are strategically oriented, and the study describes ways in which this manifests (alignment with the firm's mission or CSR agenda), and HR's role in aligning learning and development with volunteering activities. The second section shows how these attributes give rise to employee skill use and skill development. Third, the review draws on papers that examined volunteers' individual characteristics for volunteering in a corporate context to identify tensions between these characteristics with skills-based volunteering. Fourth, the review identified three features of context: line managers; co-workers; and non-profit involvement. Skills-based volunteering programs do not reside in a vacuum, but instead, these contextual features shape employees' experiences of programs. Finally, the study summarizes the outcomes of skills-based volunteering, showing that while it holds potential to create positive outcomes for both business and society, it also entails risks.

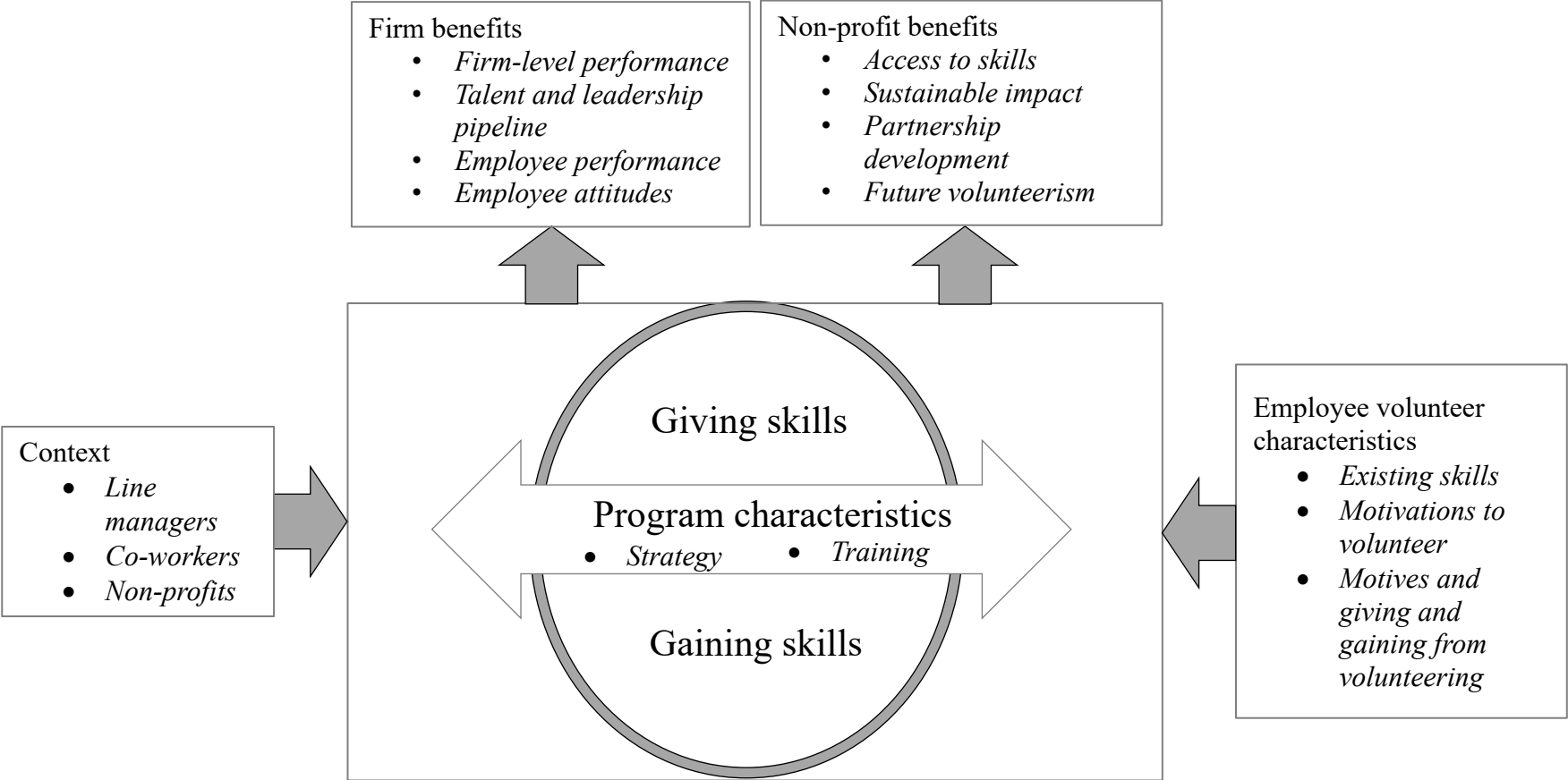
Program characteristics

Links with firm strategy. The scholarly and practitioner literatures have drawn attention to the importance of tying volunteer activities to the firm's strategy. For instance, the Center

for Corporate Citizenship suggested that organizations move through stages of implementing employee volunteer programs: at a nascent stage, employers support episodic, undeveloped volunteering activities that tend to be initiated by employees themselves, and as firms become more sophisticated in their approach, employees' efforts become increasingly linked to community needs while producing benefits for the firm (Mirvis & Googins, 2006). Pelozo and Hassay (2006) distinguished between inter- and intra-organizational volunteer programs, whereby the former are passively supported by the organization, and the latter are actively supported and aligned with a firm's strategy. Although this review found no research that directly examines the outcomes of strategically aligned programs, scholars attest that a strategic approach creates synergistic value for the firm and society (Camilleri, 2016) by directing employees' expertise and development needs (Bart et al., 2009; Pelozo et al., 2009), which may help develop employees' competencies (e.g., Camilleri, 2016; de Gilder et al., 2005; Pelozo & Hassay, 2006).

Research shows that employees who participated in a formal volunteer program perceived greater job-related skill enhancement compared to those who volunteered informally (Peterson, 2004a), and firms that market their volunteering programs as a way for employees to develop skills have higher rates of participation (Peterson, 2004b). This review builds on this prior work by articulating two ways in which intra-organizational programs can align with a firm's strategy: volunteer activities support a firm's mission and/or their CSR strategy.

Figure 2: Theoretical model



Firms that tie volunteering activities to their mission encourage employees to volunteer in ways that will support their core purpose. For instance, Hershey Food Corporation joined the Accelerated Cocoa Production Project, a partnership run by two non-profit organizations in collaboration with US and Belizean government agencies, due to growing concerns over the global decline in cocoa production and quality. The organization identified a business need to join the partnership; it aligned with their mission and long-term strategic objectives. This enabled the firm to ensure a steady flow of quality cocoa to continue the production of goods, while benefitting Belizean farmers by offering employees' specialist skills to equip them with capabilities to improve production (Gaarder & McCommon, 1990). In another example, volunteers who worked in a company operating in the oil and natural gas sector were encouraged to volunteer to promote knowledge in topics that aligned to the firm's mission, such as energy efficiency and road traffic safety (Nave & do Paço, 2013).

Skills-based volunteering can also be tied to a firm's CSR strategy. The private sector is increasingly positioning itself as an important social change agent, due to the seemingly unending wave of corporate scandals, declining trust in domestic and global institutions, and the rising saliency of grand challenges, such as climate change, poverty, and geopolitical unrest (e.g., Howard-Grenville, 2021; Stahl et al., 2020). Volunteer programs can help to realize some of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), such as SDG17, which suggests that grand challenges need to be addressed through inter-sectorial partnerships (UN SDG, 2021). For example, Pfizer's Global Health Fellows Program was created to support its CSR strategy, touting that it has "initiated a unique program of international corporate volunteering that attempted to integrate these two concepts, pairing international partnerships

in capacity building with employee volunteering” (Vian et al., 2007: 31). Pfizer loaned their employees’ competencies to beneficiaries that required specific skills, such as managing clinical trials, pharmacy management systems, grant writing, and application for laboratory accreditation (Vian et al., 2007). Another example is Ford Motor Company’s volunteering program, which seeks to align their activities to the needs of stakeholders both inside and outside the organization: “As a company, we are responsible for the welfare of our customers, our employees and our society” (Bart et al. 2009: 124).

Not all of the articles in this review showcased volunteering programs that were strategically aligned with the firm’s mission or CSR strategy. There were several examples of what Pelozo and Hassay (2006) called inter-organizational volunteering, where organizations provide passive support to employees, and provide an unfocused or “scatter gun” approach to volunteering (Geroy et al., 2000: 286). For example, Breitsohl and Ehrig (2017: 278, 269) examined European subsidiaries of a US-based firm that manufactured goods and products for business-to-business markets. The study made explicit reference that the “employee volunteering program allows employees to create their own projects...freely choose beneficiaries...projects are completely employee-driven and independent from company strategy”, and as such, programs were “weakly tied to the workplace”.

Embedding volunteering in training. A strategic approach to skills-based volunteering implies that learning and development practices support volunteering programs. For instance, PwC’s Project Ulysses is a flagship leadership development program that was positioned as “one of the major strategic pillars of the firm” (Pless et al., 2012: 879). The goals of the program were interwoven into its design, with the Head of Global Talent Development running a weeklong induction phase, where participants become familiarized

“with the overall vision of the Ulysses learning experience in the context of PwC’s strategy” (Pless et al., 2012: 879).

Several features of programs that embed volunteering into learning and development were noted. First, some firms initiate a process to identify the skills their current workforce can offer, which informs volunteer program design and implementation (e.g., Pless et al., 2011; Pless et al., 2012). This is consistent with the broader training literature, which suggests that employee skill identification is an important first step in designing and implementing training (Allen, 2006; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2019). An example is Pfizer’s Global Health Fellows Program that identifies and matches “the unique knowledge, skills, and abilities of its selected employees to each Global Health Fellow initiative” (McCallum et al., 2013: 487). Another study that examined this same program found that skill identification enabled non-profits to “design the scope of work for the three- to six-month assignments and select Fellows” (Vian et al., 2007: 31).

A second theme that arose is that some organizations embedded volunteering activities into talent management, or career progression programs. For instance, Novartis developed the Entrepreneurial Leadership Program, an “action-based leadership development program sending global teams of talent to emerging markets to develop a solution to country-specific health challenges” (Pless & Borecká, 2014: 531). Programs such as these explicitly connect volunteering with skill development (Pless & Borecká, 2014; Vian et al., 2007), and often involve competitive selection (e.g., Pless et al., 2011, 2012; Vian et al., 2007).

A third feature of some programs was learning support mechanisms, including reflection and coaching (e.g., Bartsch, 2011; Pless & Maak; 2008; Prayukvong and Rees,

2010), and 360-degree feedback, meditation, yoga, storytelling, team building and project-based learning (Pless et al., 2011; Pless et al., 2012). Whereas most of the studies in this sample were in-house programs, Bartsch (2011) investigated the ‘Blickwechsel’ program, an outsourced management development initiative that blends volunteering with learning and development. The program used coaching, reflection, and goal setting to help managers identify learning from volunteering activities, and how to apply it into their professional role. This is important, as many employees only come to realize what they learn from volunteering once they have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences (Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021).

Studies that explicitly connect volunteering with learning tend to rely on Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory. In this approach, learning is reliant on six assumptions: (1) learning is a *process*, not a series of outcomes; (2) learning is continuous and grounded in *experience*; (3) learning requires the individual to resolve tensions between *dialectically opposed demands*; (4) it is a *holistic* experience; (5) it involves a *transaction* between person and environment; and (6) the learning process *creates knowledge* (Kolb, 1984). For instance, Pless et al. (2011) emphasized that Kolb’s experiential learning theory is consistent with the philosophy of PwC’s Project Ulysses design, which enabled affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning outcomes.

Gaining and giving skills

Gaining skills. The vast majority of research suggests that employees gain interpersonal skills in areas such as leadership, teamwork, and communication. Although some studies showed that employees developed technical skills, such as financial planning, media relations (e.g., Bussell & Forbes, 2008), office (e.g., Booth et al., 2009; Loosemore &

Bridgeman, 2017; Pless & Borecká, 2014; Tuffrey, 1997), and project management capabilities (e.g., Jones, 2016; Peterson, 2004; Tuffrey, 1997), in the main, most research points to employees' development of broader interpersonal skills. For instance, Vian et al. (2007: 33) found that 78% of supervisors reported that employee volunteers displayed greater levels of "professional and personal skills", whereas 38% agreed that employees gained "new technical or scientific learning". Echoing these findings, Booth et al. (2009) found that 79% of respondents agreed that they gained interpersonal skills from volunteering, while only 32% reported that they gained technical skills.

Although employees tended to report multiple areas of development, the most frequently reported interpersonal skill was leadership or management (14 papers), followed by teamwork or collaboration (10 papers), and communication, influencing or presentation (nine papers) skills. Research has shown that the amount of time that is dedicated to volunteering influences the number of skills developed, and the depth of skill acquisition. Booth et al. (2009) found that volunteer hours predicted employees' perceptions of the amount of skill acquisition. Their analyses indicated a curvilinear relationship between volunteer hours and number of acquired skills such that skill acquisition may reach a level of diminishing returns. Jones (2016) showed that employee skill development was higher for those who attended a greater number of pre-volunteering preparation classes, which strengthened their self-efficacy for skill improvement in areas such as mentorship, motivating others, speaking clearly, and teamwork. Jones also found that employees who practiced specific skills (e.g., communicating performance expectations, giving performance feedback, and public speaking) more during their volunteer experience also reported increased improvement in those skills.

Some studies proposed that an international environment was integral to skill development. Ten studies investigated volunteering in an international environment, where scholars attested that it played a significant role towards capability development because it pushed volunteers outside of their comfort zone (Caligiuri et al., 2013; Pless & Maak, 2008). The use of international contexts was particularly germane to studies that looked to develop cross-cultural, global leadership, and cultural intelligence skills. For example, Caligiuri et al. (2019) and Pless et al. (2012) found that volunteering in a global context enhanced cross-cultural competencies, while Pless and Maak (2008) identified that international volunteer assignments facilitated understanding of complex social issues, tolerance for other ways of life, and developed responsible global leadership skills.

Another condition that enables skill development is the perceived safety of the environment in which to develop skills (Tuffrey, 1997). Volunteer experiences that are designed to develop skills often offer stretch opportunities that require a safe environment to practice new skills (Caligiuri et al., 2013; Bussell & Forbes, 2008). For instance, in Deloitte's IMPACT Day, employees apply and develop their professional expertise in activities such as mentoring, and consulting in a low-risk context. This provides employees with various opportunities to practice skills that are needed in the workplace (Camilleri, 2016).

Giving skills. Whereas volunteers are more likely to develop interpersonal skills, they are more likely to donate job-related technical skills. For instance, Caligiuri et al. (2013) found that employees donated skills in marketing, business development, change management, research and development, project management, supply chain management, IT and data management, and human resources. In another study, one of Pillsbury Company's

volunteer programs consisted of business and school partnerships, where volunteers taught economically underprivileged students work-related concepts (Bartel, 2001). There was some evidence that volunteers donated interpersonal skills too, albeit this arose less frequently. For instance, Vian and colleagues (2007) found that volunteers donated interpersonal and other core business skills. Volunteers provided non-profit managers with encouragement and structure, role modelling the types of leadership skills that were required.

Interconnectedness of giving and gaining skills. So far, this review has bifurcated skill donation and development to make a conceptual clarification, which is important in ways that are detailed in the next section. However, research has evidenced that employees and firms often see them as interconnected. For example, Turner et al. (2021) examined university faculty members who volunteered in an ‘Academic Pediatric Association and Educational Scholars Program’, an initiative that blends volunteerism with learning and development to help clinicians professionally develop. Volunteers highlighted that participation provides them with the opportunity to give back *while* developing new skills. In other examples, employees are matched to projects to give skills, and at the same time, they are encouraged to develop new ones. For instance, employees who participated in Accenture’s development partnership loaned their consulting expertise to the non-profits to give “developing communities and organizations...access to crucial business skills in developing countries that can act as an engine for sustainable growth”, while providing “stretch opportunities” that enabled volunteers to “enjoy a rewarding career break which allows them to develop a wide range of skills while making a real difference where the need is greatest” (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2010: 552). While these dual purposes of skills-based volunteering may resonate with some employees, doing so may pose unique challenges

depending on the motivational profiles of volunteers. This issue is addressed in the subsequent section.

Employee volunteer characteristics

Existing skills. Employee volunteers have the potential to add significant value to non-profits by using their diverse knowledge, skills and abilities. Employees' existing skills influence the types of skills that they can give to non-profits, and gain from their involvement. For instance, a professional painter may donate his skills by painting fences, whereas a management consultant may donate her skills by assisting a non-profit with a business plan. Conversely, employees develop or refine skills in which they need development; a person who lacks empathy may build this capability through mentoring non-profits, or a person who lacks facilitation skills may develop this skill through volunteering to chair non-profit board committees.

The existing skillsets of employees influence features of skills-based volunteering programs in several ways. An identification of existing skills enables firms and non-profits to allocate employees to non-profits that need their specialized skillset (Loosemore & Bridgeman, 2017; Pelozo et al., 2009; Vian et al., 2007). In other cases, employees themselves volunteer for specific projects because they believe their skills can contribute to the cause (Peterson, 2004a; Turner et al., 2021). Skill identification also enables firms to co-create opportunities with non-profits for employees to develop. The leadership development programs that were reviewed earlier showcase examples of how firms partner with non-profits to design volunteering activities that strategically develop skills that the firm deems important, and presumably, these are the same skills in which employees require development (e.g., Bartsch, 2011; Pless & Borecká, 2014; Pless et al., 2011).

Employee volunteer motivation. The literature suggests that employee volunteers are motivated by a mix of altruistic and egoistic motives. Most research that examines volunteer motivation is anchored in Clary et al.'s (1998) functional approach to volunteer motives. In this approach, volunteers are motivated to (1) express their altruistic or humanitarian *values*; (2) seek to *understand* by increasing their knowledge, skills, and competencies; (3) *enhance* their personal self and psychological development; (4) develop and strengthen *social* relationships; (5) *protect* themselves from negative feelings; and/or (6) gain professional skills to enhance one's *career*. There were four quantitative studies that directly examined these motives from samples of employee volunteers (Breitsohl & Ehrig 2017; Nave & do Paço, 2013; Pelozo et al., 2009; Zappala & McClaren 2004). By and large, the values motive is the strongest in each study, followed closely by the understanding motive, in all but one that did not measure the understanding motive (Pelozo et al., 2009). Altruism and the desire to develop new skills also featured in qualitative investigations as important motives to participate in employee volunteering programs (Pelozo & Hassay, 2006; Turner et al., 2021).

Although these twin-motives – altruism and understanding – are the strongest motivations to volunteer (i.e., highest mean values), they are not always related to anticipated outcomes. For instance, Pelozo et al. (2009) found egoistic motives (a combination of understanding, career, and social networks) was significantly related to employee positive attitudes toward volunteering, whereas altruism was not. In another study, Breitsohl and Ehrig (2017) found that values and protective motives were positively related to volunteer participation, whereas enhancement and social motives were not. Interestingly, understanding and career motives were more pronounced for those who did not participate in the volunteering program. Despite the methodological limitations of these single-source,

cross-sectional designs, and questions concerning what can be concluded from asking non-volunteers their motivations to volunteer, these two studies raise the possibility that what motivates employees to volunteer may not be the same factors that lead to their decision to participate, or satisfaction with the volunteering program.

A potential reason for this mixed picture may be due to the exclusive reliance on Clary et al.'s framework of motives, which was designed, and has mostly been studied, in the context of general volunteers, rather than employees. Scholars have argued that in a work-related context, there are likely to be other motivations to volunteer. For instance, Pelozo and Hassay (2006) suggested that employee volunteers might be motivated to be 'good soldiers', or to act as an ambassador of the firm. They reported that employees of an oil company suggested that it was their duty to support their organization, and they were motivated to enhance or change public perception of their employer. They found other manifestations of the 'good soldier', including motivations to be a 'good friend' to work colleagues, to be seen as 'part of the team', and to nourish relationships to increase efficiencies in the workplace (p. 368). Pelozo et al. (2009) found that employees' egoistic motives and motives to help the employer were correlated, suggesting that employees may be motivated to help their employer to receive indirect egoistic benefits, such as skill development.

Turner et al. (2021) found evidence of another motivation to volunteer: to use existing skills. Specifically, they investigated the motives of university faculty members who suggested that they volunteered because they had the requisite skills in a specific area or had a reputation in the community for expertise that was needed. Whereas Clary et al.'s understanding motive captures the desire to gain new knowledge or skills, Turner et al. found

that faculty were more likely to join the volunteering program if they believed that their skills would be valuable.

A final motivation that surfaced in this review was to meet corporate expectations, or in some cases, employees felt forced to volunteer (e.g., Bartel, 2001; Cook & Burchell, 2018; Steimel, 2018). For instance, Bart et al. (2009: 125) noted that although Ford “attempts to ensure that the program is seen as voluntary by not formally surveying or measuring employees about their participation”, several employees still felt compelled to volunteer. Feeling forced to volunteer may arise from other actors or institutions; Loosemore and Bridgeman (2017) found that a number of interviewees felt compelled by their client’s CSR agenda or industry-wide certification initiatives. Whether feeling forced to volunteer leads to negative consequences is, however, debatable. Although there is little research on the outcomes of mandatory volunteering, Zappala and McClaren (2004) found a high degree of felt compulsion to volunteer among a sample of volunteers who worked in an Australian bank, but interestingly, they also found that this did not create feelings of resentment or annoyance that may have arisen due to external pressure.

Motives and giving and gaining from volunteering. Several tensions may arise when motives are overlaid with skills-based volunteering. Take, for instance, whether volunteers want to donate their skills. Some research shows that donating job-specific skills is positively appraised by volunteers because they can clearly see the impact of their volunteering work (Steimel, 2018). However, not all volunteers want to donate their skills, and instead want to volunteer in activities that are entirely outside of their core work (Cook & Burchell, 2018). For example, Steimel (2018: 137) interviewed a volunteer with strong technical IT skills who explained that she wanted to volunteer to make lunches for people who are homeless, yet

when the non-profit learned of her technical skills, her role was diverted. She complained, “If I’m supposed to be in a place to make sandwiches and they find out I can use a spreadsheet, all of a sudden I’m doing spreadsheets, when really all I wanted to do was make sandwiches”.

A second tension may arise for employees who do not want to donate their skills because they believe it would devalue their industry or job role. Volunteering a person’s expertise is seen by some as cheapening their skills. For example, a graphic designer stated: “If someone has an organization and they’re looking around for someone to do design for free and they make that ask, there’s that expectation that what the designer does isn’t really valuable”. This was echoed by a doula, who commented: “There’s a lot of lashback for doing free births. They think it devaluates the industry as a whole” (Steimel, 2018: 140). Volunteers may therefore be hesitant to donate their job-specific skills because it undermines their professional status.

A third tension may arise because volunteering may be at odds with many volunteers’ primary motivation to volunteer, that is, values (Breitsohl & Ehrig 2016; Nave & do Paço, 2013; Pelosa et al., 2009; Zappala & McClaren 2004). The very notion of skills-based volunteering may elicit the perception that it is designed to benefit the firm, employee, or both, in addition to the beneficiary. For many, this may undermine the purpose of volunteering: to give, not to gain. Although some research has shown that individuals tend to have positive responses towards personal development through volunteering (de Gilder et al., 2005), Shantz and Dempsey-Brench (2021) reported preliminary evidence that some volunteers became angry and defensive when they were asked whether they had learned from their volunteering experiences. They found that some volunteers’ expressed moral outrage

characterized by anger directed toward those perceived to violate one's ethical standards (Goodenough, 1997). Volunteers suggested that it was immoral to insinuate that volunteering can be an avenue to skill development, presumably because it conflicted with their primary motivation to volunteer.

Context

Line managers. Research has identified several roles that line managers' play in supporting (or inhibiting) volunteer programs. For instance, line managers are gatekeepers of volunteer programs (Bussell & Forbes, 2008; Vian et al., 2007); they exert informative influence by providing information to encourage volunteering (Hu et al., 2016), or normative influence by pressuring employees to volunteer (Bussell & Forbes, 2008). An additional role that line managers carry out is to role model by volunteering themselves (Bart et al., 2009; Pelozo & Hassay, 2006).

This review suggests that line managers do more than merely encourage (or discourage) employees to volunteer; they also have the capacity to help employees to learn from their volunteering efforts. In their gatekeeping role, for instance, there is some evidence that line managers' decisions to allow employees to volunteer is informed by the extent to which managers anticipate that employees will professionally develop (Bussell & Forbes, 2008). The broader literature on transfer of training suggests that line managers play an important part in helping employees to transfer learning to the workplace (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2019). One way they do so is via goal setting, whereby managers help employees to set goals to develop and use new skills. For instance, Bussell and Forbes (2008) examined volunteering programs for employees in several UK higher education institutions. In one, employees are required to outline their learning objectives, which need to be approved

by their line managers, and in a second, the volunteering activity needs to reflect the learning and development outcomes that are outlined in the institution's appraisal process; employees are asked to document, together with their manager, how the volunteering will positively impact their role at the institution.

Line managers also have the capacity to influence the extent to which employees develop new skills. For instance, line manager attitudes toward volunteering were important for the development of skills in volunteering programs at IBM and HSBC. Gitsham (2012: 305) found that the "extent to which participants felt supported, encouraged, recognized and rewarded was a factor some identified in the outcomes of the learning experience being achieved". Furthermore, Hu et al. (2016) reported a positive correlation between line manager role modelling of volunteering and learning from volunteering, and Geroy et al. (2000) discovered that employees who engage in volunteer programs with high managerial support perceived to gain higher overall rewards from volunteering.

Co-workers. Similar to line managers, co-workers can influence volunteering participation through role modelling, and they can provide informative and normative pressures to volunteer (e.g., de Gilder et al., 2005; Muthuri et al., 2009; Peloza & Hassay, 2006). Research by Hu et al. (2016) revealed the importance of co-worker support by showing that it substitutes for prosocial motivation; in other words, employees do not need to be prosocially motivated to engage in volunteering if their coworkers already volunteer. However, not all research suggests that co-workers positively influence each other to volunteer; in one study, employees preferred to volunteer with those outside of their work group to expand their network (Peloza et al., 2009).

A small collection of studies has found that co-worker volunteering is positively related to learning from volunteering. Hu et al. (2016) found a positive correlation between the two, and in a qualitative study, co-worker's engagement in a skills-based volunteer program facilitated colleague development (Vian et al., 2007). This review also found evidence that co-workers influence skill donation. For instance, Steimel (2018) found that most skills-based volunteers were recruited via their co-workers who were familiar with their skills. As such, co-workers help one another to find volunteering opportunities that enable them to use their skills, and they contribute to one another's development while volunteering together.

Non-profit support. A major driver for non-profits is to access employees' skills. The implication is that they are motivated to secure volunteers who want to donate their professional skills, not necessarily develop new ones. However, many non-profits recognize that firms seek volunteer opportunities for their employees to not only donate skills, but also develop new ones. Non-profits are therefore increasingly seeking deeper engagement with firms to develop skills-based volunteer opportunities to facilitate mutual gain (Cook & Burchell, 2018).

There is some evidence that non-profits can influence employees' learning from volunteering. For instance, beneficiaries shape the extent to which employees believe they are making a positive contribution to the non-profit and when employees believe their volunteering efforts contribute meaningfully to the beneficiary, they are more likely to develop skills (Caligiuri et al., 2013). The quality of the business-non-profit partnership is also important. Non-profits that actively work with businesses to develop long-term

developmental projects may be more likely to provide experiences that lend themselves to employee development (Cook & Burchell, 2018).

Firm outcomes of skills-based volunteering

Firm-level performance. A widely held assumption is that firm-level benefits arise from encouraging employees to volunteer in skills-based activities (Bussell & Forbes, 2008; Geroy et al., 2000). For example, Camilleri (2016) suggested that individual learning from volunteering culminates into organizational learning; as firms nurture their employees' skills via volunteering, firms capture this in the form of greater human capital and financial performance. Furthermore, scholars have commented that volunteering programs can increase the ethical culture of the organization (Pless et al., 2012), and attract new talent (Loosemore & Bridgeman, 2017). However, this review found only two studies that directly examine firm-level outcomes of volunteer programs that are tied to skills. Oware and Mallikarjunappa (2020) investigated 80 firms listed on the Indian stock market and found that firms with volunteering programs that entail employee skill use are associated with greater firm financial performance. Gaarder and McCommon's (1990) qualitative case study of Hershey's partnership with the Accelerated Cocoa Production Project showed that their involvement led Hershey to streamline business operations, increase farm yields, and decrease production costs.

Talent and leadership pipeline. Whereas research on the outcomes at the firm level is scarce, there is plentiful research at the individual level of analysis that may lead to firm benefits. For instance, many of the volunteering activities that are embedded into leadership development or talent management programs are designed to cultivate a pool of global leaders (e.g., Pless & Borecká, 2014; Pless et al., 2011; Vian et al., 2007). For example, after

program completion, participants of PwC's Project Ulysses assumed greater leadership roles within the firm (McCallum et al., 2013). These types of programs also benefitted the firm through new business development. A study that examined volunteering programs across six organizations found that employees who volunteered brought new knowledge to the business, such as information on their supply chains, and country-specific information that could be useful to penetrate developing markets (Pless & Borecká, 2014). Likewise, Muthuri et al. (2009) evidenced that learning from volunteering sparked business development opportunities; volunteers' new insights led the firm to create new financial products tailored to disadvantaged customers.

Employee performance. Research also suggests that learning from volunteering may have positive individual performance outcomes. For instance, Booth et al. (2009) found a positive relationship between employees' skill development from volunteering and perceptions of job success; with each one-unit increase of perceptions of skill acquisition, employees believed that they were 43% more successful at work. De Gilder and colleagues (2005) found that volunteers who positively appraised their company's volunteer program, and who personally developed from it, reported strong levels of performance and attendance at work. In another study, supervisors of employee volunteers reported that volunteers worked harder, were more enthusiastic about their work, more cooperative with others, and paid more attention to detail (Bartel, 2001). Furthermore, employees enrich their teamwork skills through volunteering (e.g., Nave & do Paço, 2013; Turner et al., 2021), which may have implications for firm performance.

Employee attitudes. Research also suggests that learning from volunteering is related to positive job attitudes, such as enhanced work engagement (Peloza & Hassay, 2006;

Zappala & McClaren, 2004), and organizational commitment (Caligiuri et al., 2013; McCallum et al., 2013; Oware & Mallikarjunappa, 2020). Furthermore, volunteering can develop employees' identification with the organization's values (Tuffrey, 1997). For example, Gitsham's (2012) investigation of IBM's 'Corporate Service Corps' showed that volunteering helped some employees understand their organization's sustainability strategy, which motivated them to push the firm's agenda.

Not all research reported a positive link between learning from volunteering and performance. For instance, Hu et al. (2016) reported that the relationship between prosocial motivation and performance was insignificant at high levels of learning from volunteering, and interestingly became negative at low levels of learning. In other words, when prosocially motivated employees fail to learn from volunteering, this study shows that their job performance suffers. Furthermore, Loosemore and Bridgeman (2017) reported evidence that employees did not believe that their experiences would translate into higher job performance. A potential reason for the conflicting findings on the relationship between learning from volunteering, and job performance is the type of skills that employees use while volunteering. Caligiuri and colleagues (2013) showed that when employees used their specialist skills in volunteering, they were more readily able to apply new skills to the business unit, whereas the use of a broader range of skills was more beneficial to the sustainable impact and performance of the non-profit.

Non-profit outcomes of skills-based volunteering

Access to skills. Access to new skills is the most frequently cited benefit of skills-based volunteering from a non-profit perspective (e.g., Bartel, 2001; Camilleri, 2016; Pless et al., 2011). For example, non-profits that engaged with IBM were better equipped to solve

financial management challenges, develop stronger information technology systems, and execute business plans (McCallum et al., 2013). In another study, Belizean farmers gained access to technical, marketing and HR development expertise. Through project participation, farmers developed leadership skills, while gaining in self-confidence (Gaarder & McCommon, 1990).

Sustainable impact. When non-profits create long-term partnerships with businesses, they are more likely to engage in developmental projects and become more involved with firms (Cook & Burchell, 2018). These partnerships lead to sustainable impact that advances the non-profits operations (e.g., Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2010; Pless & Borecká, 2014; Vian et al., 2007). Research shows that when employees were able to use a broad range of professional skills in volunteer projects, it positively related to the sustainability of the project as judged by the non-profit (Caligiuri et al., 2013). In another example, 79% of Pfizer's Global Health Fellows believed they met all or most of the non-profit's technical assistance goals, which in turn helped to make a sustainable impact to the third sector organization, such as increasing the level and efficiency of service (McCallum et al., 2013; Vian et al., 2007). Non-profits reported that volunteers' professional skills helped to expand its networks, formulate strategies, provide training to clinical and research staff, and improve administrative systems. One volunteer tripled the volume of medical tests used to identify HIV infections in one non-profit, while increasing the quality and reliability of testing (Vian et al., 2007).

Partnership development. Non-profits develop new partnerships via skills-based volunteers. Skills-based volunteers often opened their networks to non-profits (Muthuri et al., 2009; Steimel, 2018), and help them develop new partnerships indirectly, by providing

them with the skills, and knowledge to do so. McCallum and colleagues (2013) found that non-profits were better able to build relationships with external stakeholders because of the skills that volunteers donated in operations, staff development, and cross-cultural expertise. Non-profits also gain experience in negotiating and implementing inter-organizational collaborative projects. For example, Gaarder and McCommon (1990) emphasized that the non-profit strengthened their negotiation and partnership skills, which were critical to sustain cocoa development in Belize, even after the project ended.

Future volunteerism. There is some evidence that participation in volunteering programs beget future volunteerism. Research on employee volunteering suggests that employees who volunteer as part of a corporate program are more likely to volunteer in the future (e.g., Caligiuri et al., 2013; Pelozo et al., 2009; Zappala & McClaren, 2004). This may be especially the case if volunteers are using and developing skills while volunteering, research shows that volunteers continue to volunteer after program completion especially when they perceive that they develop skills and competencies (Booth et al., 2009; Caligiuri et al., 2013).

Finally, there is some evidence that employee volunteering may not always advantage non-profits. Baillie Smith and Laurie (2010) noted that employees' professional development often takes precedence over the needs of non-profits. Cook and Burchell (2018) added that volunteering partnerships are resource intensive; they require staff to engage, supervise and train volunteers, and they entail health and safety and risk assessments. This can lead to mission-drift, as non-profit resources are diverted away from core tasks. Especially for smaller non-profits, partnerships can be costly, as firms are often reluctant to pay for volunteering opportunities since they believe they already offer "free resources".

While skills-based volunteering has the potential to be advantageous to non-profits, Cook and Burchell warned that capacity and infrastructure gaps may frustrate the effectiveness of these programs, particularly from a non-profit perspective.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this review was to take stock of research at the intersection of skills and employee volunteering. In doing so, this study makes two contributions to the literature. First, it provides an operational definition of skills-based volunteering. While skills-based volunteering is one of the fastest growing ways in which organizations carry out their CSR strategy (CECP, 2020), there has been little attempt in the scholarly discourse to define it. Definitions are important, especially at nascent stages of research, so that future research can coherently build and extend knowledge (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Second, the review presents a model that explains the key features of skills-based volunteering programs, the factors that influence them, and the firm and non-profit outcomes. The review revealed that skill use and gain are rarely the centerpiece of research questions and study design, and so elaborating a model of skills-based volunteering identifies not only what we know, but also indicates ample areas that require future research. This review provides three suggestions for future research, which are categorized as follows: (1) tensions between employee motives and skills-based volunteering; (2) the role of HR in skills-based volunteering; and (3) firm and non-profit outcomes. Further examination of these issues will broaden our understanding of skills-based volunteering and provide critical information to firms that wish to adopt or manage these programs.

Tensions between employee motives and skills-based volunteering

A considerable number of studies have yielded valuable findings on employee motives to participate in volunteering. However, insights from mainly qualitative studies have shown that several tensions may arise with regard to motives and skills-based volunteering. For instance, skills-based volunteering implies that the employee and/or the firm seek to gain from volunteering through the development of employee skills. This may sit at odds with peoples' primary motivation to volunteer – to give, not to gain. This review found that employee volunteers' primary motivation is altruism (e.g., Breitsohl & Ehrig, 2017; Nave & do Paço, 2013; Zappala & McClaren, 2004), and so although donating skills may resonate with these employees, developing skills to benefit themselves or their firm, may not (Cook & Burchell, 2018). Research has shown that some employees become defensive or morally outraged by the notion that volunteering can help their job, career, or employer (Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021), suggesting that skills-based volunteering is a terrain that firms need to traverse with care. Research has also revealed tensions between skills-based volunteering and the desire to use existing skills while volunteering. Some employees are motivated to donate non-work-related skills (Cook & Burchell, 2018), and others are fearful that donating job-specific skills may cheapen their skills (Steimel, 2018).

There are at least four fruitful ways forward to further our understanding of these tensions. First, future research needs to disentangle giving from gaining skills. The definition provided in this manuscript of skills-based volunteering provides a platform from which scholars can carefully design a set of measures that reflects its facets (Hinkin, 1998). Although this definition suggests that skills-based volunteering is a multidimensional construct, future research should create distinct measures that capture its elements. This is

because information specific to the dimensions may be relevant (Edwards, 2001), such as the distinction between giving and gaining skills, which is expected to have different outcomes, depending on the motivation profile of volunteers.

Second, research should examine interactions among volunteer motives. Although altruism tends to be the strongest motive to volunteer, the understanding motive (i.e., motivation to learn) is a close second. None of the studies that were reviewed examined interactions among motives, which is surprising given that people are often motivated to volunteer for multiple reasons (Clary et al., 1998). Therefore, future research should look to examine overlapping or synergistic motives on employees' responses to skills-based volunteering.

Third, research should consider the conditions under which employees are motivated to give and gain skills. Bingham et al. (2013) suggested that the degree to which the environment contains elements that exert normative pressure on employees to participate in prosocial activities might strengthen motives to volunteer. This review identified three contextual factors (managers, co-workers, and non-profit support), but there are likely to be more. Future research could extend our knowledge of how other work-related factors, such as job design and organizational climate, moderate relationships (Hou et al., 2020; Rodell et al., 2016; Rodell et al., 2017).

Finally, research can build from the burgeoning interest in attribution theory in management (e.g., Martinko & Mackay, 2019), and HR in particular (Hewett et al., 2018; Hewett et al., 2019) to further investigate these tensions. Attributions are common-sense explanations that people make about why they believe an event occurred or why an entity exists in the first place (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1979), which in turn, affect an

individual's expectations, feelings and future behavior. For instance, Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac (2015) found that when employees attributed their employer's volunteering program to public-serving motivations, it undermined the positive effects of employee volunteering programs. Shantz and Dempsey-Brench (2021) found that employees' responses to learning from skills-based volunteering depended on how they interpreted their employers' motives. They discovered that employees who were morally outraged at the thought of gaining from volunteering were, in the main, suspicious of their employer's motives, while those who came to see volunteering as a pathway to skill development believed that their organization held altruistic motivations. Future research should therefore examine attributions of skills-based volunteering programs, in tandem with employee motivations, to further our understanding of the abovementioned tensions.

The role of HR in skills-based volunteering

For some time, scholars have called attention to HR's role in facilitating an organization's CSR strategy (e.g., De Stefano et al., 2018; Gond et al., 2011; Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016), and developing ethical cultures (Bailey & Shantz, 2018; Manroop et al., 2014). Notwithstanding, this review surfaced very little discussion of HR's role in designing and managing volunteering programs, echoing De Stefano et al.'s conclusion that while HR has the professional competencies to enrich a firm's CSR strategy, its role so far has been marginal. This review shows that a starting point for showcasing how HR can contribute to CSR is via skills-based volunteering, which invites research in several key areas.

First, research is needed on *how* HR can collaborate with multiple stakeholders to create value (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). To do so, future research could leverage a recent addition to HR scholarship: the theory of HR co-creation (Hewett & Shantz, 2021).

This theory suggests that HR acts within a network of internal and external stakeholders, and seeks to meet multiple needs simultaneously to optimize value. Skills-based volunteering may meet multiple stakeholder needs. For instance, it may meet senior managers' needs to develop a talent pipeline; employees' needs to find purpose in their work; and community needs via improved non-profit management processes. This theory could also be used to further our understanding of the role of brokers who provide infrastructural support to firms and non-profits to facilitate matching of skills (Cook & Burchell, 2018). Research remains limited on how the firm and its HR representatives can work together with brokers to bridge the gap between mutual learning needs. HR co-creation theory provides a needed theoretical backdrop to understand how these needs are identified, addressed, and satisfied.

Second, HR scholarship can advance our knowledge of what and how employees learn from skills-based volunteering. This review showed that employees were more likely to *give* technical skills and *gain* interpersonal ones. This is important, because interpersonal skills such as leadership, teamwork, and empathy are much harder to engender in a traditional training program (Ashford & DeRue, 2012), and are significantly harder to transfer into practice (Laker & Powell, 2012). This begs the question of whether and how the interpersonal skills that are gained from skills-based volunteering are transferred to the work setting. A long and rich body of knowledge on transfer of training can be adapted to explore this important theoretical and practical question (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Cascio, 2019). For instance, research could examine the relative efficacy of coaching, reflection, and 360-degree feedback, which has so far received scant attention. Alternatively, research could draw from the sensemaking literature (Weick et al., 2005), which has also been overlooked. This is surprising, as sensemaking has been noted as a critical process for

learning, with those who do not intentionally process their experiences, are less likely to learn from them (Haas, 2006).

A third direction for future research is how other HR practices, aside from learning and development, are used to support skills-based volunteering. For instance, other HR practices that can be used to promote volunteering include performance management (Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021), yet we know little about how this practice, or others (e.g., selection, rewards and recognition) facilitate skills-based volunteering. Furthermore, research could examine how the strength of the HR system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) influences employees' desire to continue to develop via volunteering. Bednall and Sanders (2018) found that employees who take part in formal training programs also participate in short and long-term informal learning activities, especially when the HR system is strong. Future research may therefore examine the extent to which skills-based volunteering plays a role in developing a culture of continuous improvement.

Firm and non-profit outcomes

Although it is common parlance that firms and non-profits gain from employee participation in skills-based volunteering (Bussell & Forbes, 2008; Geroy et al., 2000), this review found limited evidence to support this conjecture. This opens up several avenues for future research. First, research may seek to establish whether skills-based volunteering leads to greater firm-level benefits, such as increased company performance, reputational rankings, and employee attraction. Future research should look to understand the implications of designing and implementing strategically aligned volunteer programs, and identify the benefits and costs associated with its enactment.

A second avenue of inquiry is to examine the processes by which individual learning from volunteering culminates into organizational learning. One possibility is that learning moves from the individual to firm level via the discussions that employees have with one another (e.g., Bart et al., 2009; Bartsch, 2011). Social networks play an important role in employees' development (e.g., Seibert et al., 2001), and further research could use social network analysis to explore and compare the network structures of skills-based employee volunteers and non-volunteers. This would allow us to not only understand whether skills-based volunteering programs develop employees through social and learning network connections, but also if they facilitate organizational learning.

Finally, there is a need to address the non-profit perspective, which has been overlooked in most research. This is a critical gap because volunteering programs rely heavily on non-profit support and cooperation (e.g., Austin, 2000; Berger et al., 2004; Liston-Heyes & Liu, 2010), and this review shows that non-profits can shape employees' volunteer experience in different ways. Research on non-profit outcomes is mixed, with some research showing positive outcomes (e.g., Caligiuri et al., 2013), and others indicating downsides, such as increased costs and mission-drift (Cook & Burchell, 2018). The field needs far more research on the up and downsides of skills-based volunteering on the part of the non-profit so that skills-based volunteering is welcomed by the third sector.

Limitations

This systematic review of research at the nexus of employee volunteering and learning is not without its limitations. First, is that I conducted the systematic review on my own, and as such cannot provide inter-rater reliability checks. Despite turning to my supervisor to cross-check the finalized sample, and used other mechanisms such as reference

searches to ensure inclusion of relevant articles, I cannot rule out the possibility that some relevant papers were excluded from the sample. Second, is that this review is limited by the boundaries that I set out in the methods section. For example, the review only included peer-review articles, because these went through a rigorous revision process. Although it was beyond the scope of the study to include grey literature, books and book chapters, and non-peer reviewed articles, there might have been valuable information in these outlets that provide more insights into the topic under investigation. A final limitation is the coverage of databases and exclusion criteria. Although I followed recommendations outlined by Short (2009) and Tranfield et al. (2003), I used several databases and included reference searches, I may have missed some relevant studies due to the exclusion of key terms in the title and/or abstract.

Practical implications

The most significant practical implication of this review is providing a framework for HR managers to consider how to implement and monitor skills-based volunteering. This review concurs with De Stefano et al. (2018: 560) that HR managers should “claim a more active role in those areas of sustainability in which competencies and skills between HRM and CSR overlap and in which synergies and spillovers between the two are possible”. Skills-based volunteering is a clear example of a practical way to do so. HR managers can work together with CSR specialists (Gond et al., 2011) to design volunteering programs that optimize employee skill use and gain, while ensuring that the non-profit partners advance their cause. Recently, Hewett and Shantz (2021) called for HR to co-create solutions to meet multiple internal and external stakeholder needs, and skills-based volunteering appears to be a credible way to do so.

This review should not be interpreted as a ‘check-list’, but instead, can motivate important conversations among HR specialists, CSR personnel, and non-profit organizations. For instance, to what extent is the skills-based program strategic? Does it align with the firm’s mission or CSR strategy? Should volunteering be integrated into leadership development or talent management programs? What are the best ways to ensure that the learning that is gained from volunteering is transferred to the workplace? Is the firm paying sufficient attention to context, such as line manager buy-in, co-worker support, and non-profit involvement? These are just some of the conversation-starter questions that may prompt innovate programs that meet multiple stakeholder needs.

However, cautious steps need to be taken during planning and implementation of any skills-based volunteering program. Some of the evidence that was reviewed shows that employees do not want to donate their job-specific skills, or they feel uncomfortable with the notion of gaining skills to benefit themselves or the company. The messaging of skills-based volunteering therefore needs to be crafted with care so that employees understand that multiple gains, from the perspective of various stakeholders, can be met through their volunteering efforts.

CONCLUSION

As businesses are actively and publicly expanding their role in society, the time is right to shine a light on skills-based volunteering. It may come as no surprise that these programs are increasing in number since they promise to deliver gains to multiple stakeholders simultaneously. The purpose of this review was to take stock of existing knowledge of the intersection of employee skills and volunteering. In doing so, this review offers a definition of skills-based volunteering, and a model that maps the terrain of existing

research. This review provides a needed platform for future research on this important practice.

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Chapter Three: Study Two

**When give-back turns to blowback: Employee responses to learning from skills-based
volunteering programs**

ABSTRACT

Although skills-based volunteering is one of the fastest growing trends in corporate citizenship, we know little about how employees respond to these initiatives. This study analyses data collected from two European financial institutions that blend employee volunteering with learning, including interviews with employee volunteering managers (n=5), focus groups (n=28), and interviews with employee volunteers (n=30). Using attribution theory as a guiding lens, the study offers a theoretical model that explains *how* volunteers respond to skills-based volunteering, and *why*. Findings show that whereas one-third of volunteers expressed anger or defensiveness, and ultimately rejected the notion of learning from volunteering, two-thirds reacted with curiosity, using the interview process as a venue to make sense of what they learned. These two groups of volunteers reported different attributions about why their firm supports volunteering. Whereas the former group was cynical about their firm's motivations, the latter believed that the firm's intentions were altruistic. However, not all of the participants fit neatly into this dichotomy; for a minority, line manager support changed the relationship between attributions and acknowledgement of learning.

Keywords: attribution theory; defensive routines; employee volunteering; moral outrage; sensemaking

INTRODUCTION

Skills-based volunteering is one of the fastest growing channels through which firms engage in corporate citizenship (Delaney, 2020; CECP, 2020). Whereas traditional forms of employee volunteering include activities such as cleaning parks, planting trees, or painting community centers, skills-based volunteering requires volunteers to donate their specialized job-related skills, such as marketing, finance, or human resources (HR), while providing a forum for employees to cultivate new ones to bring back to the workplace (McCallum et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018). Skills-based volunteering is therefore of interest to both HR and corporate social responsibility functions because it entails both giving and gaining skills.

Research at the nexus of employee volunteering and learning suggests that volunteering can develop a host of skills, such as leadership, project management, and communication (e.g., Jones, 2016), and when employees recognize that they have used or developed skills while volunteering, they find their volunteering activities more meaningful (Caligiuri et al., 2013), and feel more successful in their work role (Booth et al., 2009). Yet not all research has painted such a rosy picture (e.g., Cook & Burchell, 2018; Steimel, 2018). For instance, research suggests that employee responses to volunteering depend on the attributions they make about why the firm supports it in the first place, and when employees' motives do not match those of the firm, negative consequences ensue (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015). This is important because the very notion of skills-based volunteering may elicit the perception that it is designed to benefit the firm, employee, or both, rather than solely the beneficiary. Framing volunteering as a way to gain may be at odds with peoples' primary motivation to volunteer, that is, altruism (Shantz et al., 2014). As such, skills-based volunteering may undermine the purpose of volunteering: to give, not to gain.

The mixed messages inherent in skills-based volunteering beckon for research on how employees respond to such initiatives. Therefore this study investigates two European financial institutions that purposefully blended employee volunteering with learning to understand *how* employees respond to skills-based volunteering, and *why*. Findings showed that approximately one-third of volunteers expressed anger or defensiveness, and ultimately rejected the notion that they learned from volunteering. Conversely, two-thirds reacted with curiosity, using the interview process as a venue to make sense of what they learned. The analysis uncovered that these two groups of volunteers made very different attributions about why their firm supports volunteering. Whereas the former group was cynical about the firm's motivations, the latter believed that the firm's intentions were altruistic. However, not all of the participants fit neatly into this pattern. When line manager support for volunteering was present, a minority who rejected learning held altruistic attributions of the firm, and when line manager support was absent, a minority of those who acknowledged learning made egoistic attributions of the firm.

The primary contribution to the literature is a theoretical model that explains how employees respond to their employers' efforts to foster skills-based volunteering, and why they react in that way. This study was initially guided by attribution theory, and although this theory was important in understanding why employees reacted with curiosity, anger or defensiveness, the abductive inquiry undertaken in this study led to the exploration, and integration of alternative literatures on moral outrage (Goodenough, 1997), defensive routines (Argyris, 1985, 1990, 1994), and sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) to explain surprising findings. The result is a first step toward building meaningful theory that explains how employees respond to skills-based volunteering, and the factors that both help and

hinder learning from volunteering.

The second contribution is to research that has leveraged attribution theory to understand employees' responses to volunteering (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015; Rodell & Lynch, 2016). Whereas prior research has shown that negative (positive) attributions of a firm's intent are associated with negative (positive) outcomes (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015), this study reveals that line managers can reverse this effect through their support for volunteering. This contribution is not only theoretically important to the employee volunteering literature, but also to the broader HR attributions literature (e.g., Hewett et al., 2019; Hewett et al., 2018), which has so far largely overlooked the possibility that line managers can shape the relationship between employee attributions of workplace practices and outcomes.

The manuscript proceeds by reviewing evidence on learning from volunteering, followed by attribution theory, and its application to corporate social responsibility (CSR), and skills-based volunteering in particular. This is followed by a description of the method, analysis, and findings. The results are interpreted in the findings and discussion chapters by drawing from the aforementioned alternative theoretical lenses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Skills-based volunteering

Skills-based volunteering programs have two aims: (1) to enable employees to donate their work-related skills to a charitable cause, and (2) to gain new skills to bring back to the workplace (McCallum et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018). Research shows a vast array of knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be developed from employee volunteering. For instance, it enables leadership and team-working skills (e.g., Gordon & Gordon, 2017;

McCallum et al., 2013; Vian et al., 2007); improves professional and technical abilities, such as communication, organizational, and project management skills (Booth et al., 2009; Jones, 2016; Peterson, 2004); broadens perspectives through increasing empathy and humility (e.g., Cook & Burchell, 2018; Vian et al., 2007); and when conducted in global environments, it increases cross-cultural competencies (Caligiuri et al., 2019; Pless et al., 2012).

A second focus of research has examined antecedents of learning from employee volunteering. Clary et al. (1998) asserted that some individuals are motivated to volunteer if they believed it to have a functional value towards their learning, development and/or career. In the context of employee volunteering, Caligiuri et al. (2013) found that when individuals sense that they can acquire skills that aid their professional role, they find volunteering more valuable and are more likely to sustain participation. Grant (2012) proposed that employee volunteering might be used as a pathway for employees to develop their career, especially when their current job does not fulfill their needs. In support of this, Muthuri and colleagues (2009) found that employees were motivated to volunteer to develop skills, and expand their professional network, which contributed to sustained volunteer participation because it created social capital that they could leverage for career development.

Aside from employee motivations, research has also shown that organizational practices increase participation in skills-based volunteering (Alfes et al., 2017). Lough and Turner (2017) found that employees who were provided with support, training, and recognition for participation were more likely to engage in skills-based volunteering. Research has also emphasized the nature of volunteering work; Caligiuri et al. (2019) found that contextual novelty, project meaningfulness, and social support influenced the development of cross-cultural skills. Another factor is the amount of time volunteers spent

practicing skills while volunteering. Those who dedicate more time volunteering reported greater improvements in those skills (Jones, 2016), and perception of skill development (Booth et al., 2009).

Research has also examined the outcomes of learning from employee volunteering. Learning is positively associated with favorable perceptions of volunteers' employers, including enhanced organizational commitment (McCallum et al., 2013), pride and loyalty (Vian et al., 2007). There are also performance improvements: those who learn from volunteering report greater perceptions of job success (Booth et al., 2009); are rated by their work supervisors as more confident, able to operate in uncertain contexts, and overcome logistical challenges and ambiguity (Vian et al., 2007); and when employees do not learn from their volunteering experiences, it distracts from their job performance (Hu et al., 2016). Learning from volunteering benefits the charity too; research shows that employees who learn end up strengthening relationships with beneficiaries of their volunteering activities (Caligiuri et al., 2013; McCallum et al., 2013).

The literature that has been reviewed so far paints a rosy picture of skills-based volunteering. However, there are reasons to believe that skills-based volunteering may not always lead to positive outcomes. Cook and Burchell (2018) noted that employee volunteers are typically motivated to engage in volunteering for altruistic motives, and they warned that negative consequences could ensue if employees fail to see an alignment between their motives and those of their employer. Evidence for this can be gleaned from research that shows that when employees attribute their firm's motivations to public-serving motives, there is a negative relationship between perceptions of company support for volunteering and affective commitment (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015). Since attributions may play

an important role in understanding how employees respond to skills-based volunteering, this study now turns to reviewing this theory and supporting research.

Attribution theory

Attribution theory explains that individuals construct common sense explanations of others' actions to comprehend, control, and predict events (Heider, 1958). Individuals respond to others' actions depending on why they believe the action occurred, regardless of the veracity of their interpretation (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1979). People are more likely to make attributions of an action when it is surprising, or out of character (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1979). Employees are likely to make attributions of a firm's prosocial activities, such as their CSR activities, because they are out of sync with most firms' profit-maximization motives (Vlachos et al., 2017).

Research has consistently found that when employees believe that a firm engages in CSR for altruistic, intrinsic, or values-driven reasons, employees respond favorably. Employees who believe that their firm enacts CSR-related activities for the aforementioned reasons express greater trust (Vlachos et al., 2010), job satisfaction (Vlachos et al., 2013), organizational identification (McShane & Cunningham, 2012), affective commitment, and person-organization fit (Donia et al., 2017); furthermore, they enact fewer acts of workplace deviance (Ahmad et al., 2017), and are more likely to advocate on behalf of the firm (Vlachos et al., 2017). Egoistic attributions, on the other hand, including motives for firm gain and impression management, are associated with less favorable outcomes, such as reduced organizational trust (Vlachos et al., 2010), employee perceptions of firm reputation (De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012), affective commitment, person-organization fit (Donia et al., 2017), and increased workplace deviance (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Attribution theory may be particularly germane in the context of skills-based volunteering because the potential for motive misalignment is clear. Whereas most people are motivated to volunteer for altruistic reasons (Cook & Burchell, 2018; Shantz et al., 2014), skills-based volunteering implies that at least one motivation is that the firm, employee or both benefits from volunteering through learning. This may lead to negative consequences because individuals respond negatively to others who engage in an altruistic act for self-serving reasons. For instance, when employees attributed colleagues' motivation to participate in employee volunteering as altruistic, they credited colleagues, leading to greater employee support and allocation of resources to support volunteering. On the other hand, colleagues were stigmatized when employees attributed their motives for volunteering to impression management; the more time colleagues spent volunteering, the more they were seen as self-righteous (Rodell & Lynch, 2016).

This study investigates how employees respond to skills-based volunteering, and why employees respond the way they do, using attribution theory as an initial theoretical guide. Like most qualitative research, some of the findings were unexpected. Therefore this study integrates supplementary theories, including moral outrage (Goodenough, 1997), defensive routines (Argyris, 1985, 1990, 1994), and sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) in the findings section, and further discusses their integration in the theoretical model in the discussion chapter.

METHODS

Research context and data sources

Organizations that specifically blended their employee volunteering programs with learning and development initiatives were contacted. Two organizations, both in the financial

services sector in Europe, agreed to participate in this research. Qualitative data was collected via managers of employee volunteering programs (n=5), six focus groups of employee volunteers (n=28), and interviews with employee volunteers (n=30) over a one-year time period. For the focus groups, and interviews the following selection criteria was imposed: employees must have engaged in a company-sponsored volunteering activity within the last 12 months, and employees were to be from a range of professions, and seniority levels. Characteristics of the sample are found in Table 1.

Interviews with program managers provided contextual data. The interviews covered information on the make-up, and structure of skills-based volunteering programs available to employees, the organization's motivation to support volunteering, advantages and disadvantages of the programs, whether and how the organization measures the program's impact, and internal communication methods of volunteering opportunities and shared experiences (see appendix 1 for full interview guides).

Six focus groups with 28 active employee volunteers were conducted. Respondents had either completed at least one employee volunteering program within the last 12 months, or were currently engaged in a volunteering activity. Employees engaged in a variety of volunteering activities, such as mentorship of new business start-ups, committee or advisory board members of non-profits, trainers of technical skills, such as accountancy and IT, and event planners. Focus groups are useful when exploring relatively new topics (Cowtons & Downs, 2015), and were used to gain preliminary understanding of employees' impressions and experiences of skills-based volunteering. The inquiry was particularly helpful in the initial phase of research to help identify contextually sensitive and relevant questions to probe active employee volunteers in the upcoming stages of data collection (Barbour, 2005).

Focus group participants were asked their motivation to engage in volunteering, their perception of why the firm supports volunteering, their experience of volunteering, and whether there are any challenges to participate. Sample questions included: ‘Why did you choose the volunteering activity that you did, or are doing?’, ‘why do you think that the organization encourages you to volunteer?’, and ‘are there challenges that people face around here in becoming involved in volunteering?’ Focus group data were transcribed. The analysis focused on unearthing the context of volunteering to help shape interview questions for the next phase of data collection. Multiple perceptions were identified as to why employees believe their firm facilitates volunteering, where learning and development was a reoccurring theme.

The main source of data derived from the interviews; 30 semi-structured interviews with employee volunteers were conducted (21 face-to-face and the remaining telephone interviews). With the permission of participants, interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Interviewees were asked to discuss their experience of volunteering, their thoughts on learning through volunteering, and perspectives towards whether volunteering influences their professional role, with questions including: ‘Can you tell me about the volunteer initiative you participate in?’ and ‘does employee volunteering have any influence on your working life? If so, how? Can you give me some examples?’

Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Braun and Clarke’s six-stage process, data were first familiarized, and then initial codes were generated to categorize the data into meaningful groups. Each transcript had a varying degree of initial

codes, and each code contained more. However, Braun and Clarke (2012) stressed the importance of inclusivity; data were therefore coded for as many potential themes that seemed significant. Doing so was particularly salient for this study as some of the findings were surprising, which resulted in taking an abductive turn.

Abduction is a process that individuals' use when mental models cannot explain observed events (Hansen, 2008). Therefore, abductive theorizing is often used when an unexpected phenomenon is poorly understood by existing literatures (Saetre & Van de Ven, 2021). There are several suggested overlapping, non-linear steps for disciplined abduction, which include observing and confirming anomalies, and creating and assessing plausible explanations, individually and with others (Saetre and Van de Ven, 2021). As such, the author engaged in in-depth discussions with colleagues, attended conferences to gain insights, and returned to the literature to make sense of findings. Through this iterative process, literature on moral outrage (Goodenough, 1997), defensive routines (Argyris, 1985, 1990, 1994), and sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) were used to help inform coding.

Once coded, codes were combined to create candidate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), while ensuring they were internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous (Patton, 1990). Visualizations of the data were created to capture the relationships among data codes and themes. Nine candidate themes were identified: (1) Altruistic attributions towards the firm; (2) egoistic attributions towards the firm; (3) employee motives; (4) sensemaking of learning; (5) anti-learning; (6) defensiveness; (7) anger; (8) volunteering and job links; and (9) types volunteering activities. The entire data set was again re-read and data within candidate themes were reviewed to ensure that all data had been coded appropriately. This ensured candidate themes accurately represented the data set.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Interviews with managers of employee volunteering						
Participant	Firm	Gender	Firm tenure (years)	EV tenure (years)	Job role	Volunteer beneficiary
1	1	M	12	-	Responsible business team	-
2	1	F	-	-	Responsible business team	-
3	2	F	<1	-	Corporate affairs	-
4	2	F	<1	-	Corporate affairs	-
5	2	F	12	-	HR managers	-
Focus groups						
Participant	Firm	Gender	Firm tenure (years)	EV tenure (years)	Job role	Volunteer beneficiary
1	1	F	42	-	Private lending consultant	Community council
2	1	F	29	3	Private lending analyst	Athletics club
3	1	F	9	9	Quality engineer	Coding club
4	1	F	38	6	Private lending analyst	Charity to support disabled adults
5	1	F	21	10	Project manager	Local school
6	1	F	<1	<1	Talent acquisitions manager	Local playgroup
7	1	F	29	2	Assistant risk manager	Local community charity
8	2	F	23	23	Private banking relationship manager	Organizations own education development program
9	2	F	12	12	HR manager	Charity to support vulnerable children
10	2	F	2.5	2.5	LEAP HR consultant	Charity to support disabled children
11	2	M	29	29	HR project manager	Local bank
12	2	M	12	12	Operational analyst	Organizations own education development program
13	2	F	6	6	Business manager	Charity to support disabled adults
14	2	F	10	10	Head of customer care	Charity to support disabled adults
15	2	F	17	17	Conduct assurance manager	Medical care charity

16	2	F	11	10	Business analyst	International child poverty alleviation charity
17	2	M	15	15	Senior manager	In-home care and respite support
18	2	F	22	5	Business manager	Charity to up-skill the unemployed
19	2	F	8	5	Wholesale risk portfolio manager	Local development council
20	2	M	18	15	Head of business development	International child poverty alleviation charity
21	2	F	13	5	Head of functions – assurance	Education development charity
22	2	F	10	10	Risk manager	Charity supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities
23	2	M	17	17	Head of strategic remediation	Crisis support charity
24	2	F	4	4	Communications manager	Charity alleviating homelessness
25	2	M	20	20	Business analyst	Charity to support disabled adults
26	2	M	11	11	HR business partner	Charity supporting sick children
27	2	M	7	17	Conduct oversight team manager	Organizations own education development program
28	2	F	-	-	Risk strategy and transformation	Animal welfare charity

Interviews with employee volunteers

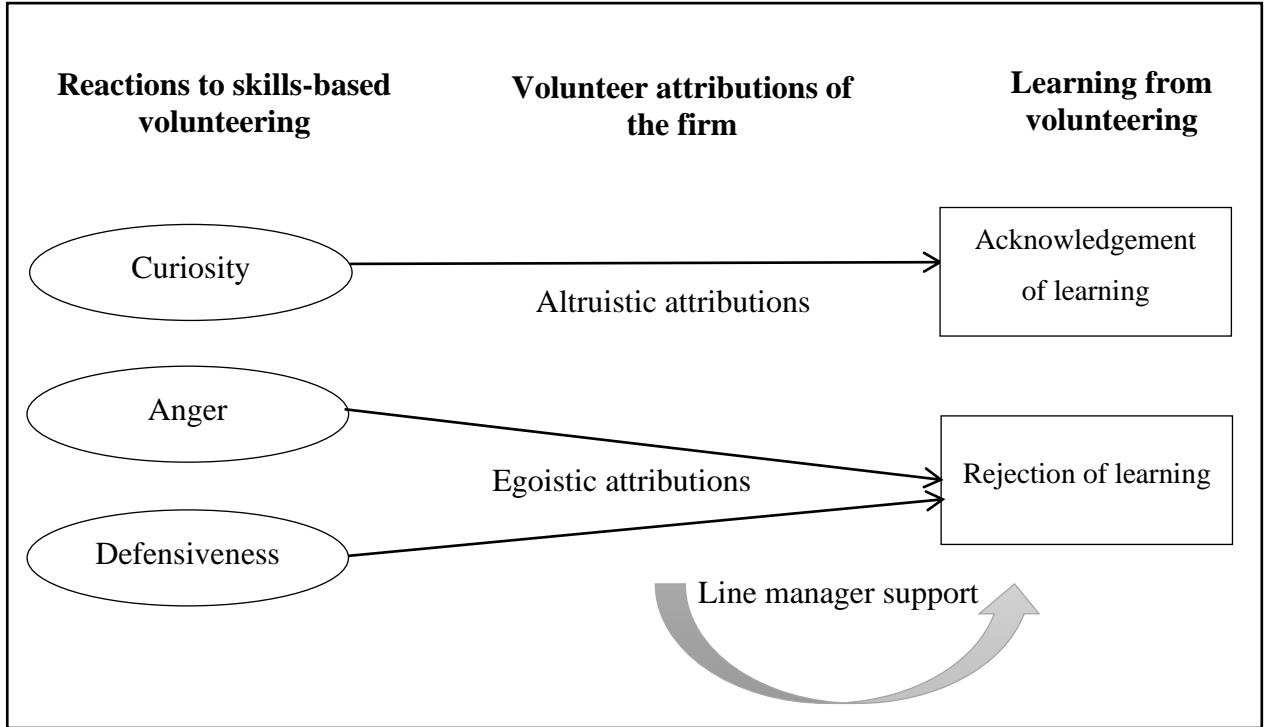
Participant	Firm	Gender	Firm tenure (years)	EV tenure (years)	Job role	Volunteer beneficiary
1	1	M	22	5	Project manager	Local food bank
2	1	F	7	6	Bereavement call consultant	Local school
3	1	F	10	<1	Pensions administrator	Local school
4	1	F	2.6	1.5	Customer advisor	Charity supporting sick children
5	1	F	6.5	6.5	Claims administrator	Local school
6	1	M	4.5	4.5	Claims administrator	Local palliative care hospice
7	1	F	8	<1	Assistant business manager	Sexual health charity
8	1	F	19	5	Complaint reporting	Children's hospice charity
9	1	M	9	9	Actuary	Mental health charity
10	1	M	7	7	Culture and responsible business	Education development charity
11	1	F	31	3	Lending manager	Breast cancer support charity
12	1	F	22	>20	Actuarial manager	Local school

13	1	M	17	10	Business analyst	Local cub scouts
14	1	M	14	8	Team product owner	Charity to support disabled adults
15	1	F	16	8	Dealer support advisor	Cancer care hospital
16	1	M	9	-	Frontline manager	Local palliative care hospice
17	1	F	23	>10	Team manager	City hospice
18	1	F	27	>20	Senior manager	City hospice
19	2	M	18	15	Head of business development	Child poverty alleviation charity
20	2	M	15	15	HR business partner	School to support disabled children
21	2	F	10	10	Head of functions – assurance	Poverty alleviation charity
22	1	M	15	5	Technical specialist	Local cub scouts
23	1	M	15	15	Risk manager	Education development charity
24	1	M	5	5	Operational resilience manager	Local hospital
25	1	M	19	1	Trainer	Mentoring a local social enterprise
26	1	F	6	4	Senior manager	Enterprise mentoring scheme
27	1	F	18.5	5	Training manager	Environmental charity
28	1	F	25	4-5	Business manager	Local food bank
29	1	M	15	8	Business design manager	Children’s panel
30	1	F	25	12	Director of financial crime	Mental health charity

Note: EV= employee volunteering

Next, memos were written to develop the overall “story” of each theme in response to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 92). This led to the identification of meaningful variations within two candidate themes in particular: altruistic and egoistic attributions of the firm. To cross-check variation, NVivo’s cross tab query tool was leveraged to check the spread of coding across the cases. This led to the identification of a subgroup that indicated the need to apply the comparative case method to investigate how and under what condition(s) responses differed. The comparative case study method systematically compares two or more data points with the purpose to understand variation between them (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). The process of case comparisons produced a new candidate theme, namely, line manager support, which explained variation for a subgroup of the participants. Through an iterative process of memo-writing, discussions, model-drawing, and re-reading the data, five themes, with some containing subthemes, were discovered: (1) rejection of learning, (1a) anger, (1b) defensiveness, (2) acknowledgement of learning, (2a) curiosity, (3) egoistic attributions, (4) altruistic attributions, and (5) line manager support. These themes and subthemes are depicted in a theoretical model in Figure 1, and their linkages are elaborated in the findings section.

Figure 1: How and why do employees respond to their employer’s skills-based volunteering initiatives?



FINDINGS

Rejection of learning

Approximately one-third of employees expressed hostility, or became defensive when the interview addressed learning from volunteering. They either became irritated by the notion that volunteering could be a source of profit for either themselves or the firm, or they psychologically withdrew from the interview. Regardless of whether they became angry or withdrawn, the result was a rejection of the notion that volunteering provides an opportunity to learn.

Anger. Some volunteers displayed moral outrage, characterized by anger, disgust, or frustration directed toward those perceived to violate one’s ethical standards (Goodenough, 1997). Volunteers suggested that it was immoral to insinuate that volunteering can be an

avenue to skill development. For instance, when asked whether he felt that he had learned from volunteering, Mark¹ retorted in a sharp tone: “Okay, I’m going to throw that back at you...how would *you* answer that question?” Employees interrogated how anyone could consider that their volunteering was motivated by anything other than to help others. Janet forcefully argued that, “for me, it’s about putting into the community; it’s not enough to say, ‘well, I am going to put into the community if I get something back out of it.’” These volunteers implied that their motivation to volunteer was primarily for altruistic reasons, and any other motive for volunteering was deemed as morally contaminated. Many expressed their frustration during the interview; for example, Scott snapped: “You don’t volunteer for the benefits for you” and another sarcastically stated, “I wouldn’t want the work that I am doing at a charity to be used as... ‘look at me I am so virtuous, give me some credit.’”

These employees recognized the difference between giving and gaining skills. Whereas they were satisfied with the notion of donating skills, they became incensed by the idea of developing new ones. Janet explained: “It is not about developing me as a person for the benefit of [the organization], it is about using the skills [the organization] has given me to pay back into the community.” Whereas prior definitions of skills-based volunteering conflate giving and gaining skills, some volunteers differentiated between them. These volunteers continuously reinforced that personal gain “wasn’t the purpose behind” their engagement, and that volunteering did not lend itself to development: “I am happy to help the charity, but other than that, no...I don’t feel I have ever picked anything up from it”. In response to a probe about giving versus gaining skills, Tom, who volunteered at an organization that helped new immigrant women prepare for the local job market, said, “You

¹ Names have been anonymised.

obviously take yourself and the skills and knowledge you have...but essentially, [I] treat them separately”.

Defensive. Others responded using defensive routines, characterized by actions or responses designed to avoid threat (Argyris, 1990; Senge, 1990). Defensive routines prevent learning because they inhibit reflection, stop conversations short, and deflect attention from a perceived attack (Argyris, 1985). Defensive routines took on many forms. For instance, “yeah, that is interesting”, was a reoccurring defensive routine. Defensive routines were often accompanied by body language that signaled defensiveness, including crossed arms, leaning back, and looking away (Nierenberg & Calero, 1971). Some respondents made repeated comments such as, “hmm interesting,” to avoid responding, and/or divert the interview elsewhere. This and other guises of defensive routines appeared, such as “ah-hah,” “right okay,” “it could be a good idea,” and other blanket replies were used to fill in the blank spaces of the conversation, display indifference, and ultimately made probing the topic under discussion difficult.

Acknowledgement of learning

Curiosity. The remaining two-thirds of interviewees responded to questions about learning from volunteering with curiosity. The majority expressed that they had never connected volunteering with learning opportunities before. As the interviews progressed, employees began to recognize what they had learned. Reverting to the literature, research on sensemaking was found to be helpful. Sensemaking involves reflection, rationalization, and connecting the dots (Weick et al., 2005), and is critical for learning; research shows that people who do not deliberately process their experiences are much less likely to learn from them (Haas, 2006). Some employees commented that the interview process aided reflection.

For instance, Mary said, “I think that just talking to you what I am realizing is that we are doing this volunteering and most people participating probably aren’t understanding what they are gaining from it, including myself.”

During the interview, these respondents were more readily able to articulate how and what they learned, finding that instead of learning hard, technical skills, volunteers gained softer skills, such as leadership, resilience and teambuilding, and others spoke of harder skills such as facilitation, and stakeholder management. Although it was identified that conflating giving and gaining skills is problematic because some volunteers welcomed the former, but rejected the latter, it can be seen here that conflating the two oversimplifies the practice for a different reason: volunteers described that they donated technical skills, but gained softer skills. For instance, Dom, who organized Excel training days for local charities, stated, “we probably give technical skills, [but] we gained soft skills and awareness.” Dom explained that through his skill-based volunteering experience he and colleagues were “using our work skills...and actually applying them,” and he separately spoke of the skills he gained, such as coaching and relationship building. Ali, a chair of a charity committee that worked with disabled adults likewise said, “I take a lot of the stuff that I do in work and I apply it to the charity, so it is very much skills-based.” He stated that he used “an element of coaching”, and that “learning [through volunteering] gives you more confidence in yourself, but also gives you more confidence in the value of your abilities as well”. Anne, through her mentoring work distinguished giving HR and business skills, such as “business...and succession planning” that also provided her with a “management development opportunity”.

Research emphasizes that sensemaking not only enables learning, but also prompts individuals to act differently in the future (Weick et al., 2005). Consistent with this, some

volunteers began to consider volunteering in ways they had not considered before: “I quite like the idea of seeing if there is anything else I can do, and other areas I can support.” Some came to the conclusion that they wanted to engage in different types of volunteer activities to maximize their learning. For instance, Liz, who volunteers as a mentor to a local start-up explained that she is “thinking about next year [for] something that enables us to use our skill set a little bit more to help people.” Volunteers made sense of the benefits that they can reap from skills-based volunteering; one volunteer suggested that that he would seek “volunteering that fits in with what I want to give and gain.”

Attributions of skills-based volunteering

Given the above conflicting responses, the analysis was then focused on understanding why these differences may exist. The analysis revealed that volunteers’ attributions regarding why they believed their firm supports volunteering were, for the most part, directly related to whether they acknowledged or rejected that learning arose from volunteering.

Egoistic attributions of the firm’s intent. As noted earlier, employees who responded negatively to learning from volunteering clearly evoked their altruistic motives for volunteering. For instance, Scott continually reiterated his altruistic motives, proclaiming, “I don’t really care about the benefits to me”. Scott, and employees like him, were suspicious of their firm’s motivations for facilitating employee volunteering, believing that it morally conflicted with their altruistic intentions. This led employees to attribute their employer’s motives to self-serving or egoistic reasons. Scott continued, “volunteering is I suppose a bit like [company name] looking good”; Patrick attributed the firm’s motivations for skills-

based learning to performance-driven strategic goals, and Connie attributed her employer's motives to a "ticking a box" exercise.

Altruistic attributions of the firm's intent. Those who acknowledged learning were just as adamant that their own motivations were altruistic. However, they also believed that their organization shared the same motivation. Simon commented on the match he saw between his own motives, and those of the firm: "One of our core values is making a difference together, and obviously doing a...volunteering activity resonates with that". Employees like Dianne praised their employer "as a good place to work," due to its culture, values, and ethics, and Ellie added: "It's about values, it's about doing the right thing... 'it's not what you do, it's how you do it.'" Dom felt an alignment between his motivations to volunteer and his organization's motives, and stated that he has a "[genuine]...sense of respect" for their firm, which resulted in a "sense of pride...well done [company name] and kudos for letting this happen". He expressed why he believed his organization supports volunteering ('as a good thing to do'), saying: "There has been a lot more recognition of the value of volunteering, [the organization] have put it out there as a good thing to do," and "it is the ability of [company name] to allow us to go out and give to the community, I think that is the thing that has stuck with me".

Line manager support

In most cases, the analysis produced a one-to-one relationship between altruistic/egoistic attributions and acknowledgement/rejection of learning. However, not all volunteers followed this pattern. Leveraging a comparative case study method (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999), it was discovered that, for a minority, line managers interrupted this pattern.

When line managers failed to support volunteering, those who acknowledged learning from volunteering believed that their firm held egoistic motivations. For instance, although Ken, a trustee of a local food bank, eagerly shared that he had developed communication skills, confidence, and empathy, he exclaimed that the “senior leadership team...don’t practice what they preach”; he shared that neither senior leaders nor line managers engaged in volunteering themselves. He explained that “the senior grading person doesn’t turn up,” and attributed the firm’s motivation to impression management motives, where “everybody goes, ‘oh, look at [company name] aren’t they great.’”

Conversely, a minority of volunteers who rejected learning from volunteering made positive attributions of the firm when their line manager supported their volunteering. For example, Max became angry in response to questions about whether he had learned from his volunteer role as a mentor to a start-up business, yet he also explained how vital his manager was in his decision to volunteer: “I took advice internally actually from the head of my office, [who] actually mentors me”. Although Max was initially hostile to the notion of learning from volunteering, he attributed altruistic intentions to his employer: “Sometimes when you work for large organizations... there is an impression that lip service is being paid. But having done this for years...you actually realize that the organization’s heart is actually in this”.

DISCUSSION

These findings provide rich and distinctive new insights to the employee volunteering literature. Although research on the affective and behavioral work-related outcomes of volunteering have brought the field a long way (Alfes et al., 2017; Rodell et al., 2016), there are few studies that have examined the nexus of learning and volunteering (e.g., Jones, 2016;

Booth et al., 2009; Peterson, 2004), and fewer still that have homed in on skills-based volunteering programs in particular (e.g., Cook & Burchell, 2018; McCallum et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018). Research that focuses on skills-based volunteering is important because it is one of the fastest growing ways that firms deliver on their CSR agenda (Delaney, 2020; CECP, 2020), and developing an understanding of employees' reactions to it is critical to realizing its full benefits.

The first contribution to the literature is building a theoretical model that explains volunteers' responses to their employer's skills-based volunteering program. The study found that employees' initial responses were characterized by either curiosity, anger, or defensiveness. Respondents who were curious made sense of their learning through the interview process, ultimately finding that they had gained valuable skills. Those who were angry or defensive, on the other hand, rejected the notion that learning could arise from volunteering, by either expressing moral outrage, or using defensive routines to deflect attention away from the topic. It was also explained why volunteers responded so differently: employees who acknowledged learning attributed their employer's motivations to altruism, whereas those who rejected learning believed their employer's intent was self-serving. Although this pattern was evident across most of the data, it also found that in a minority of cases, line managers can disrupt it. Employees who acknowledged learning held egotistical motives of their firm when their line managers were unsupportive, and employees who rejected learning held altruistic motives of their firm when their line managers were supportive. This is the first study, to the author's knowledge, to develop a model that explains how employees respond to skills-based volunteering, and why they react that way.

A second contribution is to research that has leveraged attribution theory to explain employees' responses to CSR (e.g., De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012; McShane & Cunningham, 2012; Vlachos et al., 2017), and employee volunteering programs (Gatignon-Turnau, & Mignonac, 2015; Rodell & Lynch, 2016) in particular. Whereas prior research has focused on employee responses to holding either egoistic or altruistic attributions of their firms' intent, this study deploys attribution theory to explain the relationship between employee responses to skills-based volunteering, and their acknowledgement or rejection of learning. The findings are consistent with Weiner's (1985) attributional theory that suggests that emotions precede attributions, which then have psychological and behavioral consequences. The data showed that emotions such as curiosity, anger, and defensiveness led to acceptance/rejection of learning and one of the underlying mechanisms is the attributions that employees make about their firm's intent. Therefore this study contributes to this research by showing that attributions may underpin the relationship between emotions and psychological outcomes. Furthermore, the study introduces the important role of emotions in this process, which has so far been overlooked in research that leverages attribution theory to understand employee responses to their firm's CSR or employee volunteering programs.

This research began by using attribution theory as a theoretical lens, but as the analyses progressed, there was a need to explore alternative literatures to explain some surprising findings. For instance, this research turned to theory and evidence on moral outrage that explains that when a moral principle or standard is violated, people become angry (Goodenough, 1997; Thomas et al., 2009). Findings in this study are consistent with moral outrage theory because the volunteers who became angry were morally offended by the suggestion that volunteering was a venue for learning, or in their minds, when

volunteering was a source of gain. Although it is possible that these volunteers had learned from volunteering, but refused to acknowledge it is unlikely because “when individuals experience more extreme negative emotions such as anxiety or anger, their attention is focused not on learning from experience but on how the experience threatens their identity and self-esteem” (Ashford & DeRue, 2012: 151). Research on moral outrage in organizational settings is sparse, and has focused on employee reactions to corporate irresponsibility (e.g., Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Cronin et al., 2012; Romani et al., 2013). The application of this theory presents a contribution to this research because it shows that moral outrage can arise not only when firms behave irresponsibly, but also in response to employee volunteering, a form of CSR that is widely accepted as a positive workplace initiative (Caligiuri et al., 2013; Cook & Burchell, 2018).

While some volunteers who rejected learning expressed anger, others became defensive. Those who responded defensively tended to have shorter interviews, exhibited defensive body language, and ultimately cut the conversation short, making the topic under discussion, undiscussable. Argyris’s (1985) ‘defensive routines’ was found to be particularly apt to explain this. Defensive routines are designed to avoid threat or embarrassment (Argyris, 1990; Senge, 1990), and prevent individuals from entering into genuine communication (Yang et al., 2018). Importantly, Argyris recognized that defensive routines are not only likely to be employed when individuals have cynical perceptions of the other party, but also that they inhibit learning (Argyris, 1990, 1994). Specifically, he stated that defensive routines are “a recipe for ineffective learning. We might even call it a recipe for anti-learning” (Argyris, 1994: 80). Although research has examined defensive routines at the

organizational level (e.g., Noonan, 2008), this study empirically demonstrates that defensive routines are tied up with cynical attributions, and that the outcome is a rejection of learning.

Approximately two-thirds of respondents acknowledged that they had learned from volunteering. Interestingly, the vast majority did not naturally recognize this on their own. This was surprising because prior survey-based research has demonstrated a relationship between skill development and volunteering (e.g., Booth et al., 2009; Jones, 2016; Peterson, 2004). This insight arose because data was collected through conversations with participants where many used the interview process to connect abstract experiences with the concrete, making tacit knowledge more usable (Weick et al., 2005). Literature on sensemaking was leveraged to understand the ‘black box’ between volunteering and learning. These findings are consistent with research that shows that learning is more likely to be realized when people stop, reflect, and make sense of their experiences (Ashford & De Rue, 2012; Haas, 2006). It was also found that sensemaking in the interviews prompted volunteers to “springboard into action” (Weick et al., 2005: 409). Once individuals had made sense of their learning through volunteering, they engaged in future-oriented sensemaking processes (Gephart et al., 2010) to establish ways of giving and gaining skills that they had not considered before.

Research on how employees come to understand how and what they learned through volunteering experiences is sparse. Pless et al. (2012) examined PwC’s employee volunteering program that used coaching, feedback, yoga, and meditation that triggered reflection and resulted in improved empathy and compassion. Likewise, Bartsch (2011) found that managers who were provided with a coach were better able to recognize how to apply their learning from volunteering experiences to their own workplace. Theory on sensemaking is therefore a promising avenue for further research to provide a more fine-

grained understanding of how volunteers can transfer, and deploy learning to other environments.

Another key element of the theoretical model is the role of line managers, which has been largely overlooked in research on attributions of CSR and volunteering. Although prior research has found that charismatic leadership informs the attributions that employees make of their firm's CSR activities (Vlachos et al., 2013), this study shows that line manager support can alter the relationship between firm attributions and acknowledgement of learning. The findings imply that the relationships found in prior research (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015) may be reversed by line managers' behavior. This finding may also be of interest to research that broadly speaks to HR attributions, which has so far largely overlooked the role of line managers (Hewett et al., 2019; Hewett et al., 2018). Future research should therefore continue to explore the role of line managers in both helping and hindering learning from volunteering.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be considered in the context of its contributions. First, the organization's representatives invited employees to participate, and as such I was not privy to how many volunteers declined the invitation, raising the possibility of self-selection bias. Further, respondents were asked to reflect on their past experiences, thereby re-telling memories of events. Although participants were asked to recount recent volunteering experiences, it is difficult to completely mitigate retrospective influences in reflective accounts. Furthermore, the data were collected at one point in time, inhibiting the ability to make causal inferences. Future research may therefore ask respondents to journal about volunteering experiences as they happen over time. Finally, this research examined

one outcome of attributions: acknowledgement of learning. Future research should examine both the short- and long-term outcomes of employee attributions of their employer's skills-based volunteering programs.

Practical implications

While the findings support the value of employee volunteering for learning – two-thirds of interviewees ultimately acknowledged learning – it also highlights some of the potential downsides. This should not be taken to indicate that skills-based volunteering is not worthwhile, but instead shows that steps need to be taken to mitigate the potential downsides. Foremost, firms and line managers need to clarify and articulate why the firm supports skills-based volunteering in the first place. They need to emphasize that skills-based volunteering can simultaneously meet multiple goals: it can enable employees to engage in charitable giving, while developing their own skills (Cook & Burchell, 2018). But merely espousing the value of volunteering is not enough; senior and line managers need to ‘walk the talk’ to ensure that employees attribute skills-based learning as intended.

This research has also identified the importance of providing opportunities for employees to reflect on their volunteering experiences. Interviewees described the interview as a venue for sensemaking, which helped them to identify and articulate skill development. In order to maximize learning gains, firms should organize sensemaking sessions to provide the time and space for employees to reflect (Ashford & De Rue, 2012). This research found that some employees left the interview feeling a greater sense of personal and organizational pride, a deeper appreciation for their firm, and with a new determination to increase their development through volunteering.

CONCLUSION

Skills-based volunteering offers an intriguing promise: employees donate their skills to benefit others, while developing new ones along the way. For approximately two-thirds of respondents, skills-based volunteering largely delivered on this promise. However, the remaining volunteers responded to skills-based volunteering with either disdain or defensiveness, rejecting the notion that learning can arise from volunteering. Drawing on abductive insights that blend theory and research on attributions (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1979), moral outrage (Goodenough, 1997), defensive routines (Argyris, 1985, 1990, 1994), and sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005), this study explains how employees respond to their employers' efforts to facilitate volunteering, and why they react in these ways.

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Chapter Four: Study Three

**An investigation of MBA students' skill donation in service-learning projects and its
influence on student outcomes**

ABSTRACT

Service-learning projects are designed to enable students to develop new skills, while producing socially responsible graduates. Although studies have demonstrated learning and employability outcomes that arise from these projects, little is known about the effect of different types of skills on these outcomes. This is important in the context of MBA programs where students bring with them a host of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) from previous education and work-related experiences (pre-MBA KSAs), yet during their studies, also acquire new ones (MBA-acquired KSAs). Using interview data (n=25) from MBA students in a European Business School, this study showed that those who donated MBA-acquired KSAs developed new technical skills, and reported enhanced employability. Conversely, those who donated pre-MBA KSAs contributed directly to project success by translating their skills into a new environment, and indirectly by supporting other less skilled members of their group. Regardless of the types of skills donated, students refined their interpersonal skills, believed that their KSAs had a positive impact on the social enterprise, and developed a socially responsible mindset.

Keywords: learning and development; MBA curriculum; service-learning projects; skills-based volunteering

INTRODUCTION

For some time, MBA programs have been criticized for ignoring soft skills, social responsibility, and business ethics (e.g., Christensen et al., 2007; Hühn, 2014; Navarro, 2008). In fact, one study found that MBA students are more selfish *after* they completed their studies than before (Krishnan, 2008), and evidence suggests that MBA programs have inadvertently contributed to the emergence of management hubris (Sadler-Smith & Cojuharenco, 2021). However, like many entities in the business community in recent years, many MBA programs have purposefully made a social turn, where teaching now embraces sustainability, ethics, and community (Jack, 2020). As a result, numerous MBA programs today include service-learning projects, which are a form of experiential learning that build students' knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) while concurrently contributing to society (Block & Bartkus, 2019). Central to these projects are partnered beneficiaries who offer students an opportunity to solve a real-world business challenge in the context of a social enterprise or non-profit organization. These projects often involve teams of students because the scope or scale is too large to complete individually (Papamarcos, 2005).

Take, for instance, an MBA student called Chris. Chris has an undergraduate degree in business, and six years of experience in a marketing role. The course leader of the service-learning project must decide to which project to allocate Chris. One of the projects requires the development of a marketing plan for a non-profit that fosters at-risk youth to grow and sell organic produce to local restaurants and supermarkets. On the one hand, educators have argued that the course leader has a moral obligation to assign Chris to this non-profit, because Chris is best positioned to make a positive impact (e.g., DiPadova-Stocks, 2005; Godfrey et al., 2005; Papamarcos, 2005). On the other hand, the purpose of an MBA program is to foster

student learning and development, and so others have discouraged the direct application of students' previous professional business skills so that students gain new ones as part of their education (Wittmer, 2004). In this way, students should be assigned to tasks in which they have little prior practical experience so that they can develop skills and increase their employability. This creates a dilemma for course leaders on how best to assign students to service-learning projects.

Research on service-learning has so far overlooked the role of pre-existing skills on student outcomes, and therefore provides little guidance to educators who face quandaries such as this. However, a cognate area of research, that is, skills-based volunteering, has shown several ways in which pre-existing skills may influence skill donation and development in organizational contexts (e.g., Caligiuri et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018; Turner et al., 2021). This study borrows insights from the skills-based volunteering literature to help understand the role of pre-existing KSAs on student outcomes that arise from service-learning participation.

The research question that guided this study is: *How do student outcomes differ in service-learning projects when students donate pre-MBA versus MBA-acquired KSAs?* The findings from a qualitative comparative case study shows that those who used MBA-acquired KSAs developed new technical skills, and believed that the project enhanced their employability. Conversely, those who donated pre-MBA KSAs enhanced project success directly through the application of their expertise, and indirectly, by helping their team members' KSA development. Irrespective of the skills donated, students refined their interpersonal skills, recognized the impact their KSAs had on the social enterprise, and changed their mindset to be more socially responsible.

These findings offer three distinct contributions to the service-learning literature. First, it zooms in on an under-studied antecedent of service-learning outcomes: pre-existing skills. Theory and research on skills-based volunteering is leveraged to understand the effect of pre-existing skills on student outcomes, and shows, for the first time, that the use of established versus newly acquired KSAs influences student outcomes. Second, this study provides an explanation for inconsistent findings about the impact of service-learning projects on employability: whereas some research has found the service-learning enhances student employability (e.g., Marques, 2016; McLaughlin, 2010; Seider et al., 2011), others have not (Gelmon et al., 1998; Toncar et al., 2006). The findings reported here suggest that the types of skills that students donate matters. Students who use MBA-acquired KSAs report enhanced employability, whereas those who use pre-existing KSAs do not. Third, research has rarely examined interactions among students within service-learning teams, and none have looked at the role of collaborative learning. This is a critical gap because service-learning projects tend to be built around student teams who work together to complete projects. This study shows that pre-MBA KSA donation can result in collaborative learning, which in turn facilitates positive team member KSA development outcomes. Finally, this study offers important practical guidance to course leaders of service-learning projects regarding how to assign students to projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service-learning

Business schools, and MBA programs in particular, are increasingly offering service-based learning projects to facilitate experiential learning and to give back to the community (e.g., Sahatjian et al., 2021; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2021; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Research on

service-learning has recently grown, with several review papers on this practice (e.g., Celio et al., 2011; Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012). These reviews have noted several streams of research, each of which is summarized here.

First, research has examined how best to design projects to optimize positive outcomes. Research has investigated modular structure and instructional design (e.g., Larson & Drexler, 2010; McCarthy & Tucker, 2002; O'Brien et al., 2017), and guidelines for educators to follow when designing service-learning projects abound (e.g., Dumas, 2002; Kenworthy-U'Ren & Peterson, 2005; Papamarcos, 2005). Godfrey et al.'s (2005) framework is the most accepted, and suggests that successful service-learning experiences are underpinned by the '3R's' – reality, reflection, and reciprocity. The authors advocate that service-learning experiences should first be based in reality and connect students to real-world challenges. Second, service-learning projects should include a defined reflective component. Last, they should foster reciprocity between the students and partnered beneficiaries, and projects should be grounded in partnerships. Of these three elements, reflection has garnered the most attention (e.g., Eyler, 2002; Madsen, 2004; Wickham, 2018). Research has found that written and oral reflective activities enhance students' ability to complete a team-based client project (Wickham, 2018), and reflection leads to deeper cognitive development (Yorio & Ye, 2012). Other research shows that voluntary participation is an important design feature as it significantly influences development outcomes; those who chose to participate in service-learning gained higher levels of cognitive development (Yorio & Ye, 2012).

A second stream of research has examined the benefits of service-learning for the business school and wider university. For example, Boyle (2004, 2007) discovered that

service-learning enables business schools to give back positively to society by supporting the community, while simultaneously developing students' awareness of community needs. Other studies have shown that service-learning bolsters the university's reputation (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007), enhances their legitimacy (Nikolova & Anderson, 2017), and helps to cultivate university and community ties (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2008).

Third, research has investigated the outcomes that arise for partner organizations (e.g., Block & Bartkus, 2019; Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2008; Nikolova & Anderson, 2017). This is important because studies show that service-learning projects would be unsustainable if partners were unable to receive value or benefit from them (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2008; Kolenko et al., 1996). Given this, research has evidenced that service-learning can either provide direct or indirect value to partner organizations (Block & Bartkus, 2019). Direct value provides partners with specific outcomes that are linked to the project's deliverables, and tends to arise when partners implement team recommendations, and when teams create a solution that is different to what the partner would have likely achieved on their own. On the other hand, indirect value is not explicitly associated with the project's outcomes or solutions, but arises from interactions with students and the university (Block & Bartkus, 2019). Partner satisfaction with project results has shown to lead to sustained relationships. Nikolova and Anderson (2017) found that over 90% of their partner organizations had high satisfaction with their student team's work, and many applied for follow-up projects. The authors identified three key benefits that arose from engagement: (1) partners appreciated the access to independent and quality advice; (2) partner organizations appreciated the efficiency and clarity of the engagement process, which was especially important for clients with limited resources; and (3) partners believed that the students' work provided useful and

valuable outcomes. Last, studies have shown that clients of service-learning projects also develop through the experience. D'Arlach and colleagues (2009) found that through the service-learning project, clients changed the view of themselves and of social challenges.

The final, and most significant body of research has examined student outcomes that ensue from service-learning projects. These outcomes are learning and employability. Various reviews (e.g., Eyler et al., 2001) and meta-analyses (e.g., Celio et al., 2011; Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012) have outlined the student outcomes that can arise from service-learning. For example, Eyler and colleagues' (2001) review found that students gain four positive outcomes: social awareness, personal efficacy and identity, discipline mastery, and career development. Conway et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis found that service-learning creates positive changes in academic, social, personal, and citizenship outcomes, whereas Celio and colleagues (2011) meta-analysis found students gained outcomes in civic engagement, attitudes toward the self, attitudes towards the university and learning, academic performance, and social skills. With the exception of career development, the abovementioned outcomes have been categorized as student learning outcomes. For instance, the most recent meta-analysis by Yorio and Ye (2012) categorized student learning outcomes as: (1) *understanding social issues* – an individual's frame of reference, which directs decision-making regarding complex social problems (e.g., interpersonal skills, ethical and moral decision making, and understanding the needs of the community); (2) *personal insights* – development in the student's perception of the self (e.g., identity, self-efficacy, and career aspirations); and (3) *cognitive development* – a person's skill and task development, and academic success (e.g., management skill development, student grade point average, and course performance; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Cognitive development

represents the learning that follows from the application of skills as outlined by Kolenko and colleagues (1996; Yorio & Ye, 2012). The meta-analysis also found that student outcomes increase because of service-learning participation, with understanding social issues being the most studied learning outcome, and personal insights the least (Yorio & Ye, 2012).

The other reported student outcome is employability, or career development outcomes. Research has shown that service-learning not only helps students to develop learning outcomes that are relevant to their courses, but also that students can apply skills to situations that extend beyond the classroom (Salimbene et al., 2005). For instance, McLaughlin (2010) found that students perceived service-learning to augment their career track (e.g., using the experience in interviews and curriculum vitae building). Nikolova and Anderson (2017) discovered that students perceived service-learning to help in job attainment, and Keen and Keen (1998) found that it helped students' career development process. Other studies have evidenced that service-learning influences students' career choice (Marques, 2016; Seider et al., 2011), or career confirmation (McClam et al., 2008). For example, Marques (2016) found that students who engaged in service-learning redirected their careers in more socially focused directions. Despite the mainly positive career outcomes that have been found, others have found the opposite. Gelmon et al. (1998) discovered that students did not perceive service-learning to help them to clarify their career goals, and Toncar et al. (2006) found that students did not believe service-learning helps in career preparation.

Although research has demonstrated that students can attain learning and employability outcomes from participating in service-learning projects, scholarship has yet to unearth how pre-existing KSAs influence these outcomes. The only exception is a study

by Nikolova and Anderson (2017). They found that conflict arose when team members had different levels of KSAs. Student team members who had more knowledge took on greater workloads, and those who were less experienced were reliant on others to deliver the tasks. Whereas Nikolova and Anderson (2017) focused on the mix of skills within the teams, no research has examined whether different outcomes arise between pre-MBA KSAs and newly acquired ones.

Skills-based volunteering

Whereas the literature on service-learning has all but ignored the role of pre-existing skills, research on skills-based volunteering shows four ways that employees' pre-existing skills can influence the program design, participant motivations and outcomes received. First, it can influence the program's design. Research has shown examples of volunteering programs that are co-created by the firm and non-profit to optimize learning and development (e.g., Pless et al., 2011; 2012; Pless & Borecká, 2014). For instance, Pfizer's Global Health Fellows program was co-created with non-profit partners to ensure that the learning needs of participants were met (Vian et al., 2007). Second, existing skills can be used to match employees to the needs of non-profits (e.g., Loosemore & Bridgeman, 2017; Pelozo et al., 2009; Vian et al., 2007). For example, IBM fuses IT and HR resources to match employees to volunteer activities that require specific skills and expertise to make a contribution to charitable cause (McCallum et al., 2013). Third, existing skills can be a source of motivation for employees to volunteer in situations where they believe their skills will be useful (Peterson, 2004; Turner et al., 2021). For instance, Turner et al. (2021) found that employees were more inclined to volunteer and continue volunteering if they believed they had the required skillsets to complete the tasks, and were more likely to approach rather than avoid

an activity if they had the confidence that they will perform it satisfactorily. A final stream of research has looked at the different outcomes that arise from employee volunteers donating specific existing skills, and shows that the types of skills donated matter. For example, Caligiuri and colleagues (2013) found that when employee volunteers donated job-specific skills, they were more capable to apply new skills to the business unit, whereas, the donation of broader skillsets was more beneficial to the performance and sustainable impact of the non-profit organization.

The skills-based volunteering literature may be particularly insightful, as it shows that pre-existing skills can be used to help design activities to gain positive outcomes, and that the types of skills donated are important. Different stakeholders receive different outcomes depending on the types of skills given. Therefore, against this backdrop, this study sought to understand whether the donation of pre-MBA or MBA-acquired KSAs lead to differentiated learning, or employability outcomes, giving rise to the research question: *How do student outcomes differ in service-learning projects when students donate pre-MBA versus MBA-acquired KSAs?*

METHOD

Research context and data sources

Data were obtained through 25 semi-structured interviews with MBA students (n=7 part-time; n=18 fulltime) in a European Business School. Students had completed a four to eight-week service-learning project, whereby they worked in teams with a partner organization with a social purpose to combat a business challenge. The course was compulsory for part-time students and an elective for full-time students. Students worked in newly formed teams of five-to-seven and were asked to apply business skills to help advance

the organization. Students were randomly assigned to teams and projects. At the beginning of the project, students were introduced to the project and key concepts about social entrepreneurship. Students availed of drop-in clinics with course leaders and peer panels throughout the project to gain feedback. Students also participated in two team-coaching sessions: one pre- and one post-project completion. The first session facilitated introductions, identified leadership and professional development goals, and developed a team charter. The second session drew out the learning gained from the project at an individual, team, organizational (client), and societal level.

Data was collected from March to July 2021, and adhered to ethical requirements of Trinity Business School. Data collection stopped when data reached pragmatic saturation (Low, 2019), which is when data were able to respond to the goals of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). With the respondents' permission, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were asked to discuss, explain, and describe their experience of the service-learning project. Sample interview questions include: "Could you describe the role you played in the project?", "can you describe what your learning experience was like from the social enterprise project?", and probing questions, such as "what were the tasks you had to do?", "were the tasks/skills the same sort of things you would do in your day job?" and "what other things do you think you picked up from the experience?", were used to understand more about skill donation and student outcomes (see appendix 2 for full interview guide). Characteristics of the sample are displayed in Table 1.

This study originally set out to investigate the role of coaching in service-learning projects to understand its influence on the learning process. However, after data collection and analysis, it was discovered that the coaching sessions were used to make sense of team

dynamics, rather than the team's learning from the social enterprise project itself. However, it became apparent that there was a variation between the types of skills donated and the skills gained, leading this study to change its focus, as explained in the introduction.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the research topic is relatively unexplored, an inductive and latent approach was taken. Codes and themes were driven by what was found in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were thoroughly read and re-read, which was followed by the generation of initial codes that helped to systematically organize data into meaningful groups.

Data were coded inclusively, coding for as many potential themes or patterns that seemed interesting or salient (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Next, codes were collated to create ten candidate themes. All candidate themes were internally homogenous and externally heterogeneous (Patton, 1990). Candidate themes were: (1) pre-MBA KSA donation, (2) existing skills transfer, (3) MBA-acquired KSA donation, (4) technical skill development, (5) interpersonal skill development, (6) recognize the impact of skills to charitable causes, (7) changed mindset, (8) identification of skills, (9) confidence, and (10) facilitating team learning. Memos and thematic maps were used to visualize relationships among and between data and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process resulted in the identification of two variations within the data set between those who donated pre-MBA KSAs, and those who did not. As such, the comparative case method was applied to examine the differences between the two groups. The comparative case study method compares two or more data

Table 1: Characteristics of interviewee sample

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Current/ previous job to MBA	Full-time or part- time MBA	KSAs given	Project beneficiary	Project scope
1	M	American	Head of business intelligence	Part-time	Pre-MBA	Affordable housing and elderly companionship	Business analysis and operational excellence recommendations
2	F	Irish	Medical sales representative	Part-time	MBA-acquired	Affordable housing and elderly companionship	Business analysis and operational excellence recommendations
3	M	Irish	Marketing account director	Part-time	Pre-MBA	Carbon offsetting and international aid/education	Marketing plan
4	F	Irish	Real estate consultant	Part-time	Pre-MBA	Fitness for the elderly	Business case summary and implementation plan
5	F	Irish	CEO	Part-time	Pre-MBA	Outdoor adventure therapy	Consumer analysis
6	F	Irish	Head of service	Part-time	MBA-acquired	Community early childcare services	Feasibility analysis
7	M	Nigerian	CEO	Part-time	MBA-acquired	Employment and reintegration of people with convictions into society	Exploration and development of mentorship program
8	F	American	Communications manager	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Home-grow food	Expansion/scaling project to a new market

9	M	Indian	Sales manager	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Employment of people with convictions into society	Feasibility analysis
10	F	Singaporean	Hospitality manager	Full-time	MBA-acquired	Sports and mental health	Marketing plan and business strategy to pitch to investors
11	F	American	Senior consultant	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Training and employment for young adults with Down Syndrome	Business and financial plan
12	M	---	Operations managers	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Employment of people with convictions into society	Feasibility analysis
13	M	Indian	Engineer	Full-time	MBA-acquired	Training and employment for young adults with Down Syndrome	Business and financial plan
14	F	American	Vice president of marketing and communications	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Employment of people with convictions into society	Feasibility analysis
15	F	American	Business project manager	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Sports and mental health	Marketing plan and business strategy to pitch to investors
16	F	Irish	Occupational therapist	Full-time	MBA-acquired	Home-grow food	Expansion/scaling project to a new market
17	M	American	Marketing	Full-time	MBA-acquired	Home-grow food	Expansion/scaling project to a new market

18	F	Irish	Pharmacist	Full-time	MBA-acquired	Training and employment for young adults with Down Syndrome	Business and financial plan
19	F	Singaporean	Talent acquisition head	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Home-grow food	Expansion/scaling project to a new market
20	F	Indian	Business development	Full-time	---	Sports and mental health	Marketing plan and business strategy to pitch to investors
21	F	---	Senior manager	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Sports and mental health	Marketing plan and business strategy to pitch to investors
22	M	American	International government relations	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Sports and mental health	Marketing plan and business strategy to pitch to investors
23	M	Irish	Barrister	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Employment of people with convictions into society	Feasibility analysis
24	F	Irish	CEO	Full-time	MBA-acquired	Employment of people with convictions into society	Feasibility analysis
25	F	Irish	CEO	Full-time	Pre-MBA	Home-grow food	Expansion/scaling project to a new market

points to understand variation between them (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). Through this iterative process of visualizing the data, memo-writing, re-reading the data and in-depth discussions, four final themes, with some containing sub-themes were unearthed: (1) Pre-MBA KSA donation, (1a) translation of KSAs, (1b) enhanced project performance, (1c) facilitate team members KSA development, (2) MBA-acquired KSA donation, (2a) technical skill development, (2b) recognition and confidence in one's own KSA development, (2c) enhance employability, (3) interpersonal skill development, and (4) positive impact of KSAs on the social enterprise and developed a more socially responsible mindset. Table 2 displays supportive quotes for themes and subthemes.

FINDINGS

Pre-MBA KSA donation

Those who reported that they used their pre-MBA KSAs donated expertise in areas such as marketing, report writing, and communications. For example, interviewee 1 was the head of business intelligence for a technology company. He worked on a service-learning project that required a business analysis report, and said: "I was tasked with the operational and I picked that component just because my background is around technology and...I did a full assessment in a text doc on the processes and work flows...so that was a big one to do, looking for different technology, who are the people paying, data governance, all that, all those functions, those were the [things] that I jumped on." In another example, interviewee 15, a business project manager, explained how she took on the role of project lead within her team, which was similar to her role prior to the MBA:

Table 2: Supportive quotes

Theme/subtheme	Supportive quote
Pre-MBA KSA donation	“[My team] asked me to advise actually on the legalities of composting plants, so there was an element of research there...I suppose we identified maybe six core areas that we needed to touch on. We [tried] to allocate those as best within the group where people may have had knowledge. Obviously, it made sense for me to do the legal stuff, because I have a background in that...I think as well, a lot of my work is paper-based. I’d write a lot of opinions. A lot of it is drafting pleadings. I’d say only 20% of my job is court work, if even the majority of it is paperwork. Again, that was one of the reasons I was probably allocated to do the reports because it’s something I’m very comfortable with. Whereas in a group of six people from different backgrounds, a lot of them actually, are very adverse to writing, funny enough, which never dawned on me, but I can understand why, but I’m just so used to it, that I was happy enough to do that role as well” (interviewee 23).
Translation of KSAs	“It’s interesting right, when you are working for a multinational usually you have departments or teams that do these kind of things, so even though it is part of a day-to-day, it was different in this scenario and the difference is that I had to kind of really roll up my sleeves and look for all alternatives because whatever [the] recommendation was, [it was] coming from me, [and] it was likely that they were going to take it...so it was a different type of purpose and responsibility that we came for, the things that I had to do” (interviewee 1).
Enhanced project performance	“I knew where to look for these things definitely if I didn’t have the background that I have, I wouldn’t have been able to accomplish it in that amount of time” (interviewee 1).
Facilitate team members KSA development	“I think they were able to use me as like, ‘Okay, would this make sense if we do this or that?’ More as a sounding board of how do we facilitate it?” (Interviewee 21).
MBA-acquired KSA donation	“I did all of the project management for this project, so all of the file setups, the timelines, the meeting minutes, et cetera, all of that was done-- I took that out from the very beginning. I’d done that in other projects as well, but I hadn’t really done that to that extent prior to the MBA. This was a time where I had a very high-performing team. Everyone was super sound, super-efficient, really smart. I got a chance to see what doing project management for a team that was super slick was like, because maybe some of my teams before would’ve been maybe quite clashy, or a bit all over the place, so project management felt a bit like, ‘Shit, am I really good at this?’ Whereas with these guys, it was like, ‘Oh, super.’ Everything was recorded and flowing very, very-- Exactly as it should” (interviewee 24).
Technical skill development	Interviewee 17: “Public speaking is always difficult for me. It was more challenging over here because the roles were less defined”

	Interviewer: “To understand that, public speaking is...a skill that you’re less comfortable with, but you wanted to flex?”
	Interviewee 17: “Yes, absolutely...I think my presenting skills are a bit better.”
Recognition and confidence in one’s own KSAs	“I was doing the similar activities in the strategy company project. I generally feel that if we keep doing on things again and again, it increases the confidence, the clarity” (interviewee 13).
Enhance employability	“I enjoy what I do but it’s not quite challenging enough either, so I look to supplement it through these types of initiatives...and ultimately I will probably get more serious and try to get into a role that gives me all of that together” (interviewee 2).
Interpersonal skill development	“I had to really tell myself to be a bit more patient. It’s more of that interpersonal interaction within team that I discovered myself that ‘Okay, you know what, everyone has different priorities, everyone has different view, everyone has-’ I think more of that soft skills or rather the interaction part and the teamwork part” (interviewee 19).
Positive impact of KSAs on the social enterprise and developed a more socially responsible mindset	“It just helps [you] to understand that you’ve acquired so much skills...and that someone whose life could literally be altered if you would look in their direction, and use some of the skills you have to help move them along. That’s one of the things I think the [service-learning project] does” (interviewee 7).

Interviewer: Describe to me the role that you played within your team.

Interviewee 15: I was the project lead...as a project leader, I just made sure we were organized. We made sure we knew what our approach was. We were getting all the information to [the module leaders] that we needed to get to them. We were getting all the information to [the social enterprise contact] that he had been asking for. Just keeping the project on track and making sure we got everything done and [trying] to make sure that everyone was participating to an appropriate level, which most people did...

Interviewer: Were those skills similar or different to what you would have done in your previous role?

Interviewee 15: Similar.

Interviewer: How were they similar? ...

Interviewee 15: As a business manager, a lot of planning and implementation falls upon me. We implement a strategy or we plan for something...I feel like I tend to fall into that role because it's hard for me to see it being done by someone who doesn't want to be doing it and it comes very naturally to me. It almost doesn't even feel like a job. It just feels natural to be stepping into that role to be planning and preparing and playing that like project manager.

Translation of KSAs. Those who donated their pre-MBA professional KSAs explained that while they did not acquire new technical skills, they did learn through reapplying their existing KSAs to a novel context outside of their work domain. For example, interviewee 11, who donated her project management and storytelling skills, which were similar to her job as senior consultant prior to the MBA said: "Yes, I learned, but...more

through reapplication...in terms of did I learn a new...hard skill...that's where I would say no." It was here that some interviewees noted the importance of taking their pre-MBA KSAs, and shaping them to suit a non-profit perspective. For instance, interviewee 19, a talent acquisition head who used storyboarding and data synthesizing skills, which were "all based on my past working experience", said: "In terms of skill sets, we are tapping on our strengths...making sure that we are able to translate [the] commercial [into] the social enterprise aspect, that is something really new for me. Because we want to make sure that we are not commercializing the whole entire story and that is quite a challenging balance to have."

Enhanced project performance. The donation of pre-MBA KSAs was seen in some cases as paramount to the success of the project, with some saying that without their existing KSAs, they would not have been able to complete the project. For example, interviewee 14 said: "I knew where to look for these things, definitely if I didn't have the background that I have, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish it in that amount of time." In fact, interviewee 14, and others noted that their KSAs enabled the group be more efficient: "That was another way that we created efficiency. If I had to learn supply chain and absorb what [social enterprise name] supply chain could be for this project that would have been a huge hurdle. Similarly, I had a project management background, and I can do timelines in my sleep, and so that made sense for me to be on that side of things".

Facilitate team members' KSA development. Participants also used their pre-MBA KSAs to help guide team members to create realistic solutions. For instance, interviewee 8, who prior to the MBA was a communications manager at a mental health non-profit used her report writing skills, and said: "I...ended up doing a lot of the writing as well. Obviously

coming from a communications background...I really took the lead on our final report and final write-up. I was the one who did all the editing...tracked the deadlines...and then made sure that it all made sense as a central piece document.” She explained that her professional expertise became valuable to the group setting, and that she was used as a ‘sounding board’, saying: “I was the only one in our group...who had a non-profit or a social enterprise background. I was...there as a living feedback mechanism of sorts of someone who could really play that role of being...that voice of reason...in the group. Those are the...main roles...writing, and then that...almost voice of God role of using my background and using my knowledge of the field.” In cases where participants aided peers’ KSA development, team members corroborated this. For instance, interviewee 16, who donated MBA-acquired KSAs, commented about interviewee 8: “I was lucky. I actually had a girl in my group who...had a nonprofit background. I learned a lot from her...I would come with these ideas and then she would bring us down and explain, ‘no, it’s more about scaling to social mission, not about getting more profits.’ I suppose that’s what I learned to try and change the mindset.”

In another example, interviewee 21, a senior manager at a tech scale start-up donated her design thinking skills. However, the respondent described that instead of using her professional KSAs in a job-related way by facilitating the design thinking session, she instead participated, saying: “I’ve worked in design thinking workshop facilitation before in previous roles...[but] I ended up not facilitating it...I was participating with [the social enterprise].” She explained that adapting the skill was more beneficial for the project: “Me being a participant along with a couple of other people from the group...instead of facilitating probably helped having experience facilitating because you know what type of ideas need to

come out of it, even though I wouldn't have the knowledge that [the social enterprise] had, and you want to tap into the internal knowledge. [There's] no way I can have it about the organization, but you can herd [them] in the right direction by being a participator in that.”

MBA-acquired KSA donation

Contrary to those who donated their pre-MBA professional KSAs, some students loaned KSAs that were unrelated to their professional role prior to the MBA. In these cases, students used KSAs that they had acquired along their MBA journey, such as financial literacy and planning, strategy, and marketing skills. As shown in the following excerpt, interviewee 16 explained how she undertook a different role to her profession prior to the MBA as an occupational therapist, and instead flexed project management skills developed throughout the MBA:

Interviewer: Would you be able to describe to me the role that you played within your team?

Interviewee 16: I was the assistant project manager just to help [my teammate] out throughout the project...

Interviewer: Were those tasks or activities that you engaged in similar or different to what you would have done in your professional role previously to the MBA?

Interviewee 16: They were quite different actually, yes. I suppose because my previous role, I would have been hands-on therapy with patients, so it was quite different, but I suppose it would have been similar to roles that I had done throughout the MBA...

Interviewer: Could you describe what kind of skills they were from your college application that you put in?

Interviewee 16: I suppose in terms of the project management role, it would have required a lot of forward thinking because we only had four weeks for the project, so it was quite a sprint. A lot of forward-thinking, a lot of like setting clear plans.

Technical skill development. Unlike those who donated their pre-MBA KSAs, those who used MBA-acquired KSAs developed technical skills, such as public speaking and marketing skills. For example, interviewee 13, an engineer, whose project scope was to create a business and financial plan, explained how he applied his financial skills gained on the MBA to his project to consolidate the skill. The interviewer and he discussed:

Interviewee 13: I knew that there [was] going to be a business plan or there [was] going to be a financial plan involved. I genuinely wanted to explore that side of the learning's because that's why I came to the MBA. That's where I don't have any knowledge...

Interviewer: How did your learning experience align with those expectations?

Interviewee 13: I luckily fell into the financial thing. That's what I liked. I got that opportunity. I didn't want it to come into anybody's way because I knew that there are a few colleagues of mine who are good at it. In this group, probably there was one who already had a lot of tasks, so they couldn't pick it up.

Alongside developing and expanding the technical skills that they applied to the project, interviewees also explained how they developed other technical skills, which at

times were unplanned. Interviewee 10, whose team was tasked with creating a marketing plan and business strategy, said that cultivating a new skill in design thinking prompted the development of another technical skill, facilitation. She explained: “Facilitating is a new skill that I would never have thought I would have wanted to develop but I had to-- Because I designed the design thinking process, I couldn’t be the one that was [participating] because while I was designing it, I was already thinking of answers to some of the processes. I had to shut up and facilitate discussions instead of actually getting involved in that. That’s not a place that I’ve ever seen myself in professionally, because I love being part of the participatory process. Facilitating was definitely something that I had to force myself to learn and to develop that skill.”

Recognition and confidence in one’s own KSAs. By using freshly gained KSAs, students recognized that the MBA had equipped them with the necessary KSAs to accomplish the project. For example, interviewee 18 acknowledged that she had acquired business planning skills, and said: “When I started doing the social enterprise project, I remember talking to a friend of mine and I was telling her, I don’t know how I’m going to do this project because...the whole phrase of ‘develop a business plan’ really overwhelmed me. It’s just something that as a pharmacist I’d never had to do before...Going towards the end of the MBA I have been equipped with the skills I needed to do it. I just didn’t realize it...I feel like coming out of the social enterprise project, I feel a lot more comfortable...I definitely feel like I have the skills...That’s now a skill that I have going into like a small company or a small social enterprise and helping them develop a business plan.” It was here that interviewees expressed how the service-learning project had provided a venue to practice, consolidate, and refine skills learned in the classroom, which ultimately resulted in

newfound confidence. For instance, interviewee 17, a senior services consultant who offered his MBA-related skills said: “I think that my confidence has built...the fear of it diminishes the more you practice.”

Enhanced employability. Some students saw the use of MBA-acquired KSAs as one way to enhance their employability, as many sought to change job roles after finishing the MBA. Some explained that by using these newly gained KSAs, they could use the project as an example on their curriculum vitae (CV) or in interviews. Interviewee 10, a hospitality manager, who expressed a desire to transition in to a consultancy role said: “That’s something that you cannot only speak about in an interview, that’s potentially something that you could even show on your CV, or show other employers that, ‘this is what I proposed on his website,’ or, ‘this is what I proposed and this is how he’s actioned the proposal.’”

Interpersonal skill development

Regardless of whether individuals donated their pre-MBA or MBA-acquired KSAs, all interviewees claimed to have developed interpersonal skills, such as emotional intelligence, and leadership skills. For example, interviewee 2 described: “The learning experience is a lot to do with the skills that you develop, both the technical skills, the hard skills but also in refining your soft skills, particularly with regard to perspective taking, interpersonal development.”

The most reported interpersonal skill was teamwork, with two-thirds of participants claiming to hone their team-working skills: “The soft skills are probably worked on and improved from working in a group” (interviewee 23). Team-working skills were developed in different ways. First, some interviewees saw team-work skills as enabling them to understand their role in a team, which consolidated learning that they wanted to gain from

the MBA: “I think this entire experience...has played in really learning about myself and where I fit within a team and group work and I guess it’s kind of circular, right. I’ve learned a lot through my professional experience and then coming here, either affirmed some of what I thought I was good at and then also it taught me what I don’t like to do, which was precisely...what I wanted out of the MBA” (interviewee 11). Second, some believed their team skills developed as they were better able to manage the “interpersonal challenges of a new team” (interviewee 21).

Some interviewees reported to use the experience to ‘push’ themselves, which in turn helped them to develop interpersonal skills, such as leadership and people management. For example, interviewee 25, a public relations and project manager in the entertainment industry, described using the social enterprise project to “really step into a leadership role.” Working on a project to expand the beneficiary’s products to an international market, the interviewee explained how the experience enabled her to leverage new interpersonal skills: “For this one, I really was the leader of the project...I had to really learn a lot about myself in terms of my people management skills...[being] really aware of managing relationships was a big part of it.” Other interpersonal skills developed from the project, included empathy, coping with ambiguity, and active listening skills.

Positive impact of KSAs on the social enterprise and development of a more socially responsible mindset

Both groups believed their KSAs created a positive impact on their partner organization. For instance, interviewee 3 said: “In the social enterprise project, if done well, and if done right, the submission that you’ve made will be read, used and implemented and will have an impact. If you can do that while you’re studying, that’s just...fantastic...I would

have been doing a project like this, so it's great that someone else gets to benefit from it...you can have an impact on another person's business...for the positive." This was echoed by interviewee 24: "If you're smart and...really good at what you do, why not use that for someone who's trying to do something better? You can use your skills so many different ways. Why not use it somewhere where someone's doing something that's going to make an impact?"

The service-learning project also caused some interviewees to change their mindset to be more socially responsible and to recognize that organizations can create a positive impact on society *while* making profits: "It definitely did open my eyes to the fact that you could do something good for society and still be focused on having a profit come out of that" (interviewee 10). In another example, interviewee 16 said: "It challenges your mindset towards things...really knuckling down on that social mission, it really does challenge your mindset and forces you to think in a different way...Not everything in life is about shareholder wealth...We'll sometimes get wrapped up into that kind of mindset, so I thought it was just really beneficial...It really does change your perspective on things. When you see all these social enterprises all the hard work that they're doing, [I] just find it was so admirable and just really interesting...I definitely walked away with a different kind of mindset towards social enterprises and a better understanding as well. It's really admirable what they're doing."

DISCUSSION

These findings provide new insights to the service-learning literature. Although past research has evidenced that students gain a range of outcomes from participating in these types of experiences, there remains little knowledge on whether the types of skills donated

(e.g., pre-MBA or MBA-acquired) influences student outcomes. As such, this study offers several contributions to the service-learning literature. The main contribution of this work is a theoretical model that explains how student outcomes differ when students donate pre-MBA or MBA-acquired KSAs in service-learning projects (see Figure 1). At the center of the model lies the student learning outcomes gained from partaking in the social enterprise project. A comparative case analysis evidenced that those who donated MBA-acquired KSAs gained new technical skills, and reported enhanced employability. On the other hand, those who donated pre-MBA KSAs directly aided project success by translating their skills into a new context, and indirectly contributed to the project's success by supporting other less experienced or less-skilled team members. Irrespective of the types of KSAs given, students cultivated interpersonal skills, believed that their KSAs had a positive impact on the partnered organization, and developed a more socially responsible mindset, which is consistent with extant research.

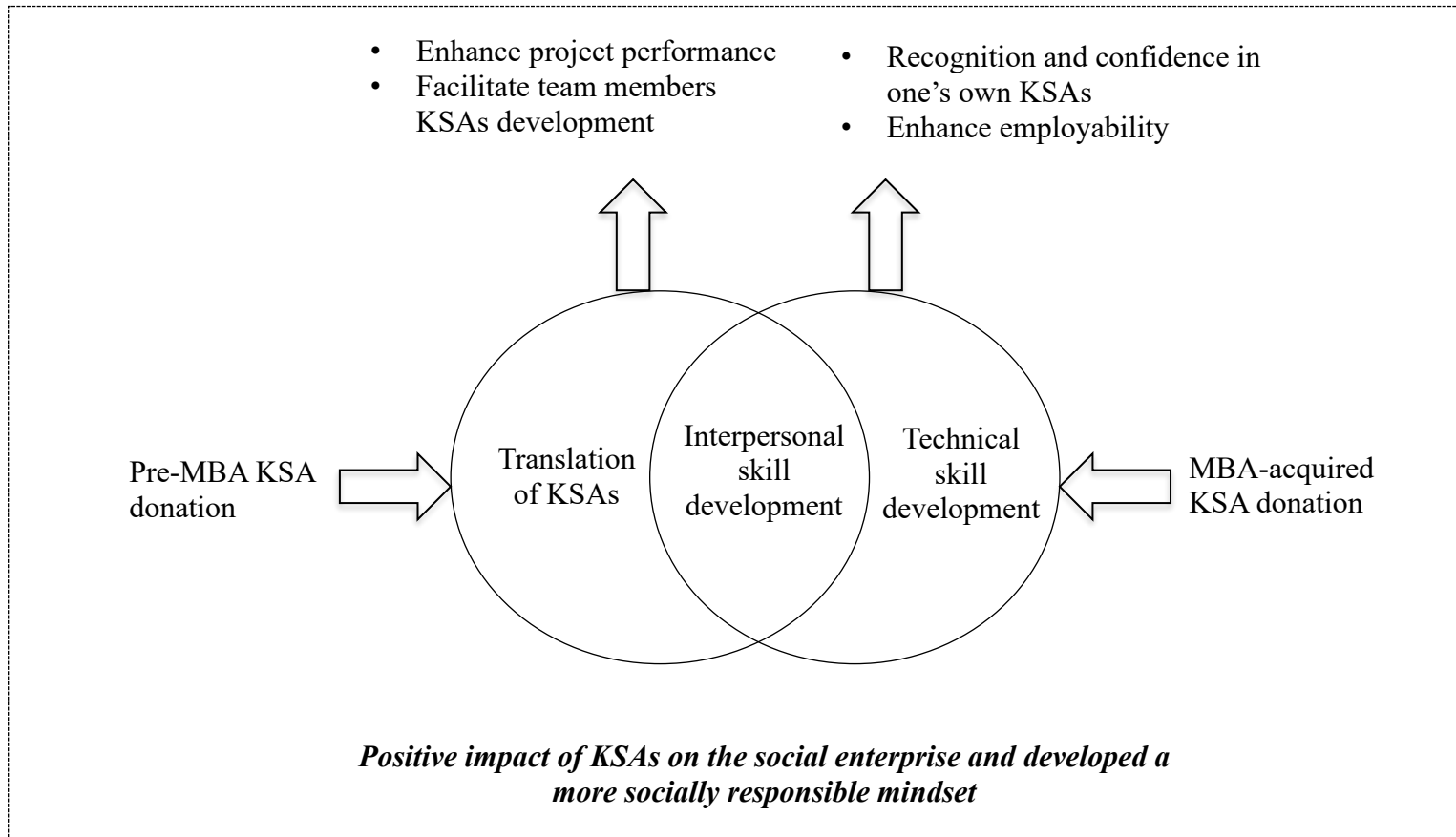
Second, this study offers an explanation for inconsistent findings about the influence of service-learning projects on employability. Thus far, service-learning research has provided mixed evidence as to whether service-learning aids student employability. For instance, some studies have shown that service-learning augment students' career tracks (McLaughlin, 2010), facilitates job attainment (Nikolova & Anderson, 2017), and influence students' career choices (Marques, 2016; Seider et al., 2011). Conversely, other studies have shown that service-learning has no effect on students' career goals (Gelmon et al., 1998), or career preparation (Toncar et al., 2006). Existing research fails to explain why these differences occur. The findings reported in this study suggest that the types of skills donated

by students, matter. Students who use MBA-acquired KSAs claimed that it enhanced employability, while those who donated pre-MBA skills did not.

Third, this study shows that the types of KSAs donated by students are important. Along with finding that the types of KSAs donated leads to different learning outcomes (e.g., KSA translation versus new technical skill development), it also shows that the types of KSAs given results in different perceptions towards project success and employability outcomes. Those who used their pre-MBA KSAs perceived them to enhance the performance of the project, whereas those who donated MBA-acquired KSAs perceived them to enhance their employability. These findings are consistent with research in skills-based volunteering, which has found that when employee volunteers donate specialist skills, they were better able to apply newly gained skills to the business unit, whereas the donation of broader skillsets was more beneficial to the performance and sustainable impact of the organization (Caligiuri et al., 2013). In this way, when student volunteers used MBA-acquired KSAs, such as marketing, finance, or project management, they perceived these to be more beneficial for their employability, and therefore, may be seen as more beneficial to the business unit. On the other hand, student volunteers who used their pre-MBA KSAs perceived their skills to enhance the project's success, and as such aided the non-profit organization.

A final contribution is the facilitation of team members' KSAs, which has largely been overlooked in service-learning research. This is surprising given that service-learning projects tend to be built around student teams who work together to complete the project. To the author's knowledge, only one paper has investigated interactions among team members' KSAs, and found that an imbalance of KSAs creates conflict. Those with more experience

Figure 1: Theoretical model



take on greater workloads, whereas those with less experience rely on others to complete the task (Nikolova & Anderson, 2017). However, this study found the opposite; those who donated their pre-MBA KSAs helped to develop their team members' KSAs. As such, this study shows that pre-MBA KSA donation can result in collaborative learning. Collaborative learning facilitates the “sharing of information in relationships...that promotes new growth in each participant regardless of whether in the role of ‘instructor’ or ‘learner’” (Jackson & MacIsaac, 1994: 24). Collaborative learning enables students to enhance KSAs by working together with peers with complementary skillsets or with those who are more capable or knowledgeable (Razmerita et al., 2013).

Future research should explore why this might be the case. A potential explanation lies with team diversity. Research has shown that gender and nationality diversity in teams results in greater group-level cognitive benefits (Curşeu & Platt, 2013). It may be that the team diversity experienced in the service-learning project enabled students to share different insights and experiences, which may have played an influential role in enabling greater learning for both peers and the team as a whole. The second explanation sits with team trust and psychological safety. Research has shown that trust among team members is important. For example, research shows that when there are higher levels of trust, individuals are more likely to collaborate (Haythornthwaite, 2006), and psychological safety is crucial to collaborative learning (Van den Bossche et al., 2006). Within this study, student teams engaged in two team-coaching sessions, and the first session aimed to facilitate introductions, identify goals, and create a team charter. It is plausible that these sessions helped to develop trust and psychological safety among team members, which in turn fostered a collaborative learning environment that enabled team members KSA development.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, this study relied on students' perceptions only. This may be problematic because although students believed that their projects were helpful to the non-profit, the non-profit may not agree with this assessment. Future research should therefore seek the views of the non-profit in ascertaining the performance of student groups. Understanding this is important as there is a paucity of studies that investigate the beneficiary's perspective (Block & Bartkus, 2019), and none have examined whether the types of skills donated influences the partnered beneficiaries in different ways. Therefore, future research should seek to investigate, from a non-profit perspective, whether partners of service-learning projects gain more from groups who donate their pre-MBA KSAs, as opposed to groups who are using KSAs gained on the MBA for the first time.

A further limitation is that the model is likely underspecified, and there may be other factors that influence student learning outcomes. For example, research has shown that the level of reflection students engaged in influences cognitive development (Yorio & Ye, 2012), and also increases employability-related outcomes (Wickham, 2018), which might influence or moderate the relationship between the types of skills given and gained. As such, the relationship between skill donation and student learning outcomes is likely more complex. Therefore, additional qualitative work is needed to provide additional insights. Quantitative work might also be apt in more precisely probing the causal relationships between students' skill donation and student learning outcomes.

Additionally, data were cross-sectional, and as such only provides a specific perception toward skill donation and student outcomes at one-given time. However, it is possible that overtime there might be more similarity between the two groups. For example,

it is possible that those who donated pre-MBA skills with time also identify new, technical skills that were attained through the experience. Additionally, as there were no follow-up interviews, I was unable to establish long-term outcomes. While interviewees reported to either translate existing KSAs into new environments or develop new, technical skills, it is unknown whether these changes lasted, or changed overtime. Further research should engage in a longitudinal study design to investigate participants' learning and employability outcomes beyond the duration of the course. For instance, research has shown that recruiters make inferences on a candidate's KSAs based on their CV, and that when candidates include more extracurricular activities such as volunteering they are more likely to be recommended for the job (Chen et al., 2011). Therefore, future research in service-learning may also wish to build upon extant research to examine the effectiveness of including service-learning projects on a CV in job attainment. For example, did the development of new skills in fact lead to new employment?

This study interviewed students in a program where the service-learning project was an elective, and mandatory. Although research finds that voluntary participation leads to greater student learning outcomes (e.g., cognitive development; Yorio & Ye, 2012), the comparative cases analysis did not find a meaningful variation in learning outcomes between those who self-selected, and those who were required to engage in the service-learning project. A potential reason for this is that students were invited to participate in this research, which raises the possibility of self-selection bias. Future research may seek to understand what motivates students to engage in these types of projects, and assess whether and how these motivations are fulfilled during the project experience, and the implications this has on outcomes.

A final limitation is that although this research reached pragmatic saturation (Low, 2019), whereby the data were able to respond to the goals of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021), the sample size is too small to generalize the findings. Further, the study only sampled one service-learning module. As such, future research may wish to examine other service-learning project modules within the MBA, and other business school curricula, to generalize the findings that this study offers.

Practical implications

This research was driven by a practical question: should students be assigned to service-learning projects that require their pre-MBA KSAs, or should educators purposefully allocate students to ‘stretch’ their newfound MBA-acquired KSAs? Addressing this question is important, because there is an on-going debate within service-learning literature as to whether students should be assigned to projects where their existing KSAs can make a positive impact (DiPadova-Stocks, 2005; Godfrey et al., 2005), or whether students should be assigned to projects that discourage the direct application of their previous professional KSAs to gain new ones (Wittmer, 2004). This study helps course leaders to address this question by homing in on the importance of module goals. For example, some business schools are starting to include external community engagement as a part of their strategy to create engaged citizens (Falk, 2012). For instance, Trinity College Dublin’s 2020-2025 strategic plan named ‘community and connection’, is underpinned by the ethos that “in an increasingly interdependent world, we need to work together more intensely and in new ways to address the formidable challenges facing us” (Trinity College Dublin, 2020: 10). Service-learning projects are one natural way in which external community engagement can be attained (e.g., Nikolova & Anderson, 2017; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2021). Therefore, this

study shows that if the goal of service-learning projects is to align with university strategy that seeks to outreach to the wider community, course leaders should assign students who have existing job-related KSAs to the project, as they are best positioned to make a positive impact to external partners. Similarly, if the purpose of the module is to facilitate collaborative, group learning, then module leaders should also assign students with pre-MBA KSAs to projects that require their skills. On the other hand, this study found that when students used MBA-acquired KSAs, they perceived these to help enhance their employability. Research has shown that one role of the MBA is to facilitate career progression (Simpson et al., 2005; Rubin & Diedorff, 2013). As such, if the module is designed to help students to develop new KSAs to help facilitate a career change, then course leaders should assign students to projects in which they have little to no prior practical experience, so that they can flex KSAs acquired on the MBA.

CONCLUSION

Service-learning immerses students into real-life environments, and encourages them to acquire new knowledge, and cultivate professional skills while simultaneously giving back to society (Block & Bartkus, 2019). The findings show that the types of skills that MBA students donate is associated with different student outcomes. Those who donated MBA-acquired KSAs developed technical skills, and perceived them to enhance employability. Conversely, those who used pre-MBA KSAs translated them into a new context, which directly aided project success, and indirectly supported team members with less-skills or experience. Irrespective of the skills given, both groups reported to refine their interpersonal skills, believed their KSAs had a positive impact on the social enterprise, and changed their mindset to be more socially responsible. This has implications for theory and practice, as

MBA programs are increasingly interested in developing meaningful courses that prepare our leaders for today and tomorrow, while simultaneously making a positive impact on the community.

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Chapter Five: General Discussion

Skills-based volunteering is one of the fastest ways in which organizations are engaging in corporate citizenship (Delaney, 2020; CECP, 2020), which begs for research into this understudied workplace practice. To glean insights into skills-based volunteering, this thesis describes three studies. The first study zooms in on learning in the context of employee volunteering to offer a definition of skills-based volunteering, establish what is known, highlight what is still unknown, and provide a path for future research. Some of the future research avenues were addressed in the following two studies. Study two empirically investigated employees' responses to learning from skills-based volunteering, and found that while the majority of volunteers recognized skills that were gained, a minority became angry or defensive toward the concept of learning from volunteering. Finally, the third study examined the role of skill giving and gaining in the context of service-based learning in higher education, and found that the types of skills (pre-MBA versus MBA-acquired KSAs) given by MBA students resulted in different student outcomes. This chapter takes the three studies and integrates the findings to explicate the contributions that this thesis brings to the employee volunteering and service-learning literatures. It also outlines the general limitations of this thesis, offers suggestions for future research, and discusses the implications of the findings for practice.

Contributions to employee volunteering literature

The first contribution of this thesis is that it provides the field with a definition of skills-based volunteering. This is important because despite organizations' growing interest in skills-based volunteering (CECP, 2020), there has been little scholarly attempt to define it. This thesis asserts that skills-based volunteering contains four unique elements: (1) it must be strategically oriented, (2) it requires the donation of job-related skills, (3) it involves the

development of skills, and (4) the external non-profit requires the skillsets offered by volunteers.

By establishing a clear definition, this thesis helps the field in at least three ways. First, it distinguishes the features that set skills-based volunteering apart from other forms of volunteering. Doing so is critical, because it provides management scholars with clear language to communicate ideas, and ensures that concepts are not used to represent different phenomena (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Second, clear definitions that unpack a construct's unique elements at the early stages of research phenomena enables theory to progress (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Third, it can help scholars to develop a set of measures that represent the features that make up skills-based volunteering (Hinkin, 1998). Although this thesis provides a starting point for establishing the elements that delineate skills-based volunteering from other forms of volunteering, there are likely to be other unique factors. The field should continue to refine and build upon the definition offered in this thesis.

A second contribution is that this thesis disentangles *giving* from *gaining* skills. Previous research focuses on employee donation of skills or skill development, and many writers confound the two (McCallum et al., 2013; Steimel, 2018). However, this thesis shows that disentangling *giving* from *gaining* skills is significant for two reasons. First, skill giving versus gaining can lead to different outcomes. For example, study two showed that when volunteers were asked about skill giving and gaining, many were content to give skills, but some became angry or defensive toward gaining new skills. Second, the types of skills typically gained and given are different. For instance, study three showed that students tend to give technical skills (e.g., financial, marketing, or project management skills), but develop interpersonal ones (e.g., teamwork, leadership, and empathy). Although this finding is

consistent with prior research (e.g., Cook & Burchell, 2018; Jones, 2016; Peterson, 2004), this distinction has yet to fully inform research on skills-based volunteering. Therefore, this thesis is a first step in showcasing the differences between the two concepts, and the different outcomes that may arise.

A final contribution is that this thesis shows the influential role of line managers on employee learning. Although line managers play a fundamental role in shaping how employees perceive their work and their organization (Eisenberger et al., 2002), research in employee volunteering has paid little attention to the role of line managers. Building upon this gap, this thesis offers contributions to the literature in two ways. First, it showed that line managers may influence employees' ability to learn from volunteering. For example, study one found that line managers may approve employee volunteering activities based on the extent to which they believe employees will develop professionally (Bussell & Forbes, 2008); they facilitate employees' transfer of learning to the organization through goal setting (Bussell & Forbes, 2008); and line managers attitudes or role modelling behaviors toward volunteering influences the degree to which employees learn (Geroy et al., 2000; Gitsham, 2012; Hu et al., 2016). Second, it showed that line managers may influence employees' views of the organization's volunteering program, which has been overlooked in prior research. Study two showed that line managers play an instrumental role in altering employees' attributions of why the firm engages in skills-based volunteering, which in turn may prompt volunteers to either acknowledge or reject learning from volunteering. Therefore, this thesis evidences that line managers do more than just encourage or discourage employees to engage in skills-based volunteering, but that they also influence employees learning, and the perceptions that employees hold toward their organization's motivations to engage in skills-

based volunteering.

Contributions to service-learning literature

Service-learning research has overlooked a crucial antecedent of service-learning outcomes: students' pre-existing skills. However, research in employee volunteering suggests that pre-existing skills are important. Study one unearthed that volunteers' prior skills influence the features that make-up skills-based volunteering in several ways: they help shape the program's design (e.g., Pless et al., 2011; 2012; Pless & Borecká, 2014); can be matched to the needs of the non-profit (e.g., Loosemore & Bridgeman, 2017; Pelozo et al., 2009; Vian et al., 2007); and different outcomes are obtained when employee volunteers donate specific existing skills (Caligiuri et al., 2013). As such, skills-based volunteering theory and research provided useful insights into how pre-existing KSAs influenced the outcomes attained by students. Study three found that the types of KSAs donated led to different perceptions of project success and employability outcomes. Students who used their pre-MBA KSAs believed that these skills contributed to project success, while those who used MBA-acquired KSAs believed that it increased their employability. These findings are consistent with research in skills-based volunteering, which has shown that when employee volunteers use specialist skills, they were better able to use freshly gained skills in the business unit, whereas the donation of broader skills proved to be more valuable to the non-profit organization (Caligiuri et al., 2013). Therefore, the use of MBA-acquired KSAs were seen as more valuable for their employability, and subsequently more useful to prospective businesses. Conversely, when students donated their pre-MBA KSAs, they were seen to facilitate project success, and as such helped the non-profit. Therefore, this thesis shows the relevance of skills-based volunteering research on service-learning, and shows that when

students donate pre-MBA KSAs, it leads to different outcomes compared to when students use their MBA-acquired KSAs.

The risks associated with skills-based volunteering

Although this thesis presents insights into the key features of skills-based volunteering, the factors that influence it, and employees' reactions to it, there are still aspects that require further investigation. Skills-based volunteering promises 'wins' to all stakeholders involved (Caligiuri et al., 2013). However, the findings unearthed in this thesis suggest that these 'wins' might not always be a guaranteed outcome of skills-based volunteering. For example, although skills-based volunteering is stated as a welcomed venue for employee volunteers to develop new skills (Booth et al., 2009; Jones, 2016; Peterson, 2004a), I found that some volunteers became angry or defensive toward the notion of learning from volunteering, and consequently rejected learning. The risks associated with skills-based volunteering therefore require further scrutiny. Doing so is important, so that a more balanced and refined understanding of the concept is provided. In what follows, I outline some of the potential risks that may be associated with skills-based volunteering for non-profit organizations, firms, employee volunteers, and the wider society.

Non-profit organizations

Whereas some evidence suggests that non-profits benefit from skills-based volunteering (Cook & Burchell, 2018), there are likely to be costs that may not always outweigh the gains (Roza et al., 2017). For example, non-profits are subjected to transaction costs (Roza et al., 2017), such as, diverting key resources from organizational tasks to administrative duties to set up volunteering activities, and experience costs in supervising and training volunteers (Cook & Burchell, 2018). If the costs of skills-based volunteering

outweigh the benefits (e.g., access to new business skills), non-profits may decide to cease participation in skills-based volunteering. This might lead to the non-profit losing access to: 1) new recruits and future volunteerism (Caligiuri et al., 2013; Pelozo et al., 2009; Zappala & McLaren, 2004); 2) key resources (McCallum et al., 2013; Muthuri et al., 2009; Pless et al., 2011); 3) future company support (Cook & Burchell, 2018); and 4) spreading awareness of its social mission (Muthuri et al., 2009).

A second risk to non-profits is that they may be subjected to reputational damage through skills-based volunteering partnerships. Non-profits that engage in employee volunteer programs are fearful of the reputational damages that could ensue (Roza et al., 2017), because partnering with a firm with a negative reputation can harm the non-profits brand valuation (Heller & Reitsema, 2010). This is problematic, as non-profits are more vulnerable to reputational damage as compared to their corporate partners (Wymer & Samu, 2003).

Firms

A potential risk of skills-based volunteering to the firm is the loss of talent. Employee volunteering has been noted as a valuable method in employee retention and organizational commitment (de Gilder et al., 2005; Pelozo & Hassay, 2006). However, research on employee volunteer motivations has shown that some volunteer to enhance their career (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Grant, 2012; Pelozo et al., 2009), which may educate employees on new career opportunities and goals (Wilson & Musick, 2003). Therefore, if employees are motivated by career development, this may lead to talent loss, with employees acquiring valuable skills and contacts while volunteering that can be used elsewhere.

A final risk is that firms may suffer negative outcomes if employees make egoistic attributions of the firm's motives to engage in skills-based volunteering. Employee volunteers actualize volunteer programs (Muthuri et al., 2009), and therefore their support of the initiative is paramount to its success. Skills-based volunteering implies the firm, the employee or both will gain, which might lead to an incongruence between many of the motivations that employees hold to volunteer in the first place (Cook & Burchell, 2018). For example, if volunteers main motivator to engage in skills-based volunteering is altruism, this might cause tensions against their motivations: to give, not to gain. This thesis shows that employees who respond negatively (e.g., with anger or defensiveness) to the notion of learning from volunteering can have psychological and behavioral consequences (e.g., the rejection of learning and attributing egoistic motives to the firm's intent in engaging in skills-based volunteering). These outcomes have implications to the organization because employees can either embrace or derail corporate programs (Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021). Therefore, if employees' motivations to engage in skills-based volunteering are incongruent with the firm's, it may result in the destruction of future skills-based volunteering activities, which then creates significant financial costs for the firm (Muthuri et al., 2009).

Employee volunteers

The risks of skills-based volunteering applies to employee volunteers, too. First, skills-based volunteering might pose a higher risk to some professions compared to others. Steimel (2018) found that medical and law professionals who undertook skills-based volunteering activities carried higher potential risks for engagement. For instance, these professions experienced liability or malpractice issues from skills-based volunteering

activities, which could have serious implications on their career and professional reputation. As such, while some professions may reap the benefits associated with skills-based volunteering, such as skill development, others may be subjected to greater risks, and are less likely to participate.

Another risk to employee volunteers is that they may experience perceived role overload from their skills-based volunteering activities, which may lead to knock-on consequences in their professional and personal lives. Perceived role overload is when employees have numerous roles within their work domain, and believe that they lack the required resources to meet the demands of each role (Brown et al., 2005; Jensen et al., 2013). Research has shown that employee volunteering can leave volunteers feeling stressed and depleted of personal resources (Rodell, 2013), distract employees' time and energy from the pursuit of work goals (Rodell, 2013; Rodell & Lynch, 2016), and that when employee volunteers experience perceived role overload it can increase work-family conflict (Zhang et al., 2021).

Last, skills-based volunteering may create tensions between employee volunteers and non-volunteers. For instance, some research has alluded to the idea that employee volunteering might cause non-volunteers to suffer from the absence of their colleagues who participate in volunteer programs because the same quantity of work has to be completed with less people (de Gilder et al., 2005). Although research on colleagues' reactions to employee volunteering is sparse (Rodell et al., 2016), employee volunteer engagement might cause conflicts between volunteers and non-volunteers, which may spill over into the workplace.

Society

A risk to society is the commercialization of the third sector. Some research has noted a steady shift toward non-profits becoming more commercial in character. For example, non-profits need to win contracts, and pursue alternative funding sources (Baines et al., 2011; Purkis, 2012). The commercialization of the third sector may be problematic for society, as it runs the risk of undermining the sector's authenticity and ability to meet the need of the communities it serves (Baines et al., 2011; Purkis, 2012).

A second risk is that skills-based volunteering may target some society groups more than others. For example, studies have shown that employee volunteering partnerships are linked to existing non-profit connections, and that employee volunteering can limit its potential reach because it concentrates on the "usual suspects" (Cook & Burchell, 2018: 176). As such, skills-based volunteering may result in the further marginalization of some community groups within society.

A final risk to society is that the quality of the services provided by non-profits to its beneficiaries might be affected. Studies have shown that employee volunteers might not meet the level of quality required by the non-profit organization (Roza et al., 2017), and that employee volunteer aid in certain contexts (e.g., mental or physical health services) can create more damage than help, due to the possible limitations of their skills and capacity for participation (Samuel et al., 2016; Roza et al., 2017). For example, although skills-based volunteering states that employee volunteers should donate their business-related skills, they might not have the soft skills needed to translate them into the non-profit context (Samuel et al., 2016).

General limitations and future research

Despite the contributions that this thesis brings, it is not without limitations. Study specific limitations have been discussed in their corresponding chapters. However, there are limitations that transcend the thesis, which may open up new avenues for future research.

First, the data used in studies two and three were taken from one source, giving rise to two potential limitations. First, data were self-reported, and therefore might have been subject to bias and/or deliberate distortion (Borgatti & Carboni, 2007; Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). For instance, some respondents in study two may have said that they had learned new skills because they felt that this was expected of them; since I did not collect data from other sources, I am unable to corroborate the findings. The second limitation is that other voices are ignored when single-sourced methods are used. For instance, this thesis outlined that the perspective of the non-profit and the firm have been overlooked. There is value in attaining the non-profit and firm perspective in skills-based volunteering research, for moral and pragmatic reasons (e.g., skills-based volunteering produces a cost for both stakeholders). Therefore, future research should look to include multi-sourced research designs so that observations can be assessed across various data sources.

A second limitation across this thesis is that data were collected at one point in time. This is problematic because causal inferences cannot be drawn from cross-sectional data (Cummings, 2017). In other words, this thesis presents models that illustrate links and patterns among constructs, however, because this research is cross-sectional, it is unable to support causal claims. For example, I cannot be certain that the results would be different if a different time point had been selected, and I cannot account for what happened pre- or post-data collection (Cummings, 2017). Therefore, future research should employ longitudinal,

or experimental research methods to enable causal inferences. A further limitation that arose from the cross-sectional design of the two empirical studies reported here, is that I asked participants to reflect on their past experiences. In doing so, respondents engaged in a process of re-telling memories of an event. Despite asking respondents to recount their most recent volunteering or service-learning experience, it is difficult to completely mitigate retrospective influences. Future research may therefore wish to ask participants to keep reflective journals or logs about their volunteering experiences, to make sense of the experience as it evolves over time.

A third limitation is that while this thesis suggests that learning and skill development may be attained by employees, it fails to show if this transfers to the organization. A well-established body of knowledge on transfer of training could be used to examine this salient theoretical and practical question (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Cascio, 2019). Future research may investigate whether and how learning is transferred, the factors that facilitates and inhibits transfer, and what implications this has on individual's performance at work over time.

A final limitation is that although this thesis provides a definition of skills-based volunteering, there are likely to be other types of volunteering. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations connected employees to non-profit organizations through virtual volunteering (CECP, 2021; Grensing-Pophal, 2020; Humbad, 2021). Virtual volunteering may be another form of skills-based volunteering; future research should seek to categorize additional forms of skills-based volunteering and examine how these different types may influence the outcomes and reactions of employee volunteers.

Practical implications

This thesis provides several practical implications to organizations that use skills-based volunteering. First, the definition offers guidance to practitioners who implement skills-based volunteering programs. This definition may provide practitioners with a starting point on what elements to include when designing, and managing these types of activities.

Second, the messaging of skills-based volunteering should be crafted with care to balance the needs of individuals who do not wish to donate job-related skills or feel uncomfortable with the notion of gaining skills that benefit the firm or themselves. Firms that craft and deliver skills-based volunteering programs need to clearly explicate why they engage in skills-based volunteering in the first place, and articulate that multiple, concurrent benefits can be met. This is important, as this thesis found that the attributions that employees have about why their firm engages in skills-based volunteering plays an influential role in how they respond to learning.

Last, this thesis provides practical implications to educators who implement service-learning projects. MBA students bring with them a wealth of pre-existing KSAs from previous work or education-related experiences, but they also develop new ones as part of their education. This leaves module leaders with a practical question regarding how best to assign students to service-learning projects. Answering this question is important because educators offer mixed advice; whereas some advocate that module leaders have a moral obligation to assign students with pre-existing KSAs to projects to which they are best able to make a positive contribution (e.g., DiPadova-Stocks, 2005; Godfrey et al., 2005; Papamarcos, 2005), others discourage the direct application of students' previous professional business KSAs, so that they can gain new ones through their education

(Wittmer, 2004). This thesis shows that the types of skills that students donate result in different student outcomes, which can then be used to make informed decisions about how to allocate students to projects. For example, if the goal of the course is to foster collaborative learning, then module leaders should assign students with pre-existing professional KSAs to projects that require them. Conversely, if the module's goal is to increase students' employability, then module leaders should assign students to projects in which they have little practical experience, so that they can develop new KSAs attained throughout the MBA.

CONCLUSION

At a time when organizations are increasingly responding to corporate citizenship through skills-based volunteering programs (CECP, 2020), this thesis offers three studies that shine a spotlight onto this workplace practice. The first study describes the results of a systematic literature review to provide a definition of skills-based volunteering, and a theoretical model to guide future research. Study two examines employee volunteers' responses to skills-based volunteering, and shows that although some may be content to gain skills from volunteering, others may become angry or defensive. Finally, study three focuses on service-based learning in higher education, and shows that the types of skills given leads to different student outcomes. This thesis brings contributions to theory and practice and highlights the role of learning from volunteering.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Chapter three (study two) interview guides

Round 1 - Preliminary interview questions with managers

Part 1: Background information

- 1.1 Tell me about the origins of employee volunteering in [company name]
- Probe: Where does employee volunteering sit in the organization?
 - Probe: How does employee volunteering fit in with strategy, vision and mission?
 - Probe: How close are top management to it (including CEO)?
- 1.2 How many days per annum can employees volunteer?
- Probe: Are these paid?
 - Probe: Can you get more if they are unpaid?
 - Probe: If so, what is the process?
 - Probe: Do different employees approach this in different ways?
- 1.3 How do you select their charity partners?
- Probe: Do you use brokers?
 - Probe: What criteria do you look for?
 - Probe: How often do you change partners?
 - Probe: Are employees involved in this decision?
- 1.4 How many people are engaging in employee volunteering?
- Probe: What is the percentage breakdown (business function, level) of employees partaking in volunteering?
- 1.5 You have many volunteering initiatives, which are the most popular?
- Probe: Why do you think that it's the most popular?
- 1.6 How do employees find out what about volunteering opportunities?
- Probe: Can employees set up volunteering initiatives by themselves?
 - Probe: If they do, what are the incentives for them to tell you about it?

Part 2: Motivations

- 2.1 What are your beliefs in the banks intentions in facilitating employee volunteering among employees?
- 2.2 What made [company name] move towards skills-based volunteering?
- Probe: Do you skill match employees to volunteering activities/opportunities
- 2.3 What are the skills that [company name] want their employees to develop?
-

Part 3: Advantages and disadvantages

- 3.1 What do you see as the main benefits for [company name] are in engaging in volunteering?
-

3.2 What do you see as the main disadvantages for [company name] by engaging in volunteering?

- Probe: Are there any operational implications?
 - Probe: Cultural implications?
-

Part 4: Measurement

4.1 Do you track volunteering efforts of employees?

- Probe: How do you do this?
- Probe: Do employees need to log volunteer hours?
- Probe: If so, how do they log this?

4.2 Could I see an example of the professional development plan/performance appraisal where it mentions volunteering involvements?

- Probe: Do you know how many people use volunteering to develop themselves professionally?

4.2 Do you measure the response rate of employees who engage in volunteer, if so what is it?

Part 5: Communication

5.1 Do volunteers get the opportunity to share their volunteering experiences with colleagues within the workplace? And how often does this happen?

Part 6: Wrap up questions

6.1 Is there anything that you would like to add that you think is important for me to know in understanding the context of [company name] employee volunteering scheme?

Round 2 – focus groups interview guide

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 We're going to do a round robin to get to know each other! Could you introduce yourself and in no more than two sentences, what was the last volunteering experience you had?

Part 2: Reactions toward latest employee volunteering activity

2.1 How did it go?

- Probe: Why was it great?
- Probe: Was there anything that was disappointing?

2.2 Are there any differing views to this?

Part 3: Employee motivations

3.1 What were your motivations to start volunteering?

- Probe: Why did you choose the volunteering activity that you did or are doing?
- Probe: In your opinion have you achieved what you wanted to so far?

3.2 Come back to if time permits:

- Probe: Have these motivations changed since starting?
-

Part 4: Perceptions on firm motivations

4.1 Why do you think that the bank encourages you to volunteer?

- Probe: Do you think that the bank's motivation has changed overtime?
-

Part 5: Volunteer experiences

5.1 Have you ever been in a volunteering situation where you felt out of your depth?

Can anyone share an experience about that?

- Probe: How did you overcome this? Did you learn anything about yourself?
 - Probe: Does anybody have an example of putting a skill they learnt in volunteering into your workplace?
 - Probe: How easy was it? What steps did you take to transfer the skill?
 - Probe: Did anybody notice?
 - Probe: Do you get recognition for bringing in new skills learnt from volunteering?
-

Part 6: Challenges from volunteering

6.1 What are the challenges that people face around here in becoming involved in volunteering?

- Probe: Has anyone got any stories about these challenges?
 - Probe: What do you think of the volunteer approval process?
 - Probe: Why is it good/hard to use?
-

Part 7: Communicating volunteering involvement

7.1 Do you tell anyone that you volunteer?

- Probe: Outside/inside of the Bank?
- Probe: Who/why?

7.2 What's the impact of telling people?

Part 8: Wrap up questions

8.1 Is there anything that we have missed in our discussion today that might give us a better understanding of volunteering here at [company name]?

8.2 Out of all the things we have talked about, what do you feel is the most important?

Round 3 – interview guide for employee volunteers

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Can you tell me about the volunteer initiative that you participate in? (Team-based/individual, skills/physical).

- Probe: How did it go?
- Probe: What do/did you like about it?
- Probe: What do/did you not like about it?
- Probe: Why did you decide to take on this volunteer role? What do you get out of it?
- Probe: Would you do it again? (If one time)
- Probe: Would you recommend it to others? Why?

1.2 How long have you been engaging in employee volunteering?

Part 2: Learning and development

2.1 I have been speaking to people within [company name] and they have been saying lately that they want to, or they are trying to encourage employees to put volunteering as part of their Personal Development Plan (PDP), to either evidence that they have achieved a goal or to set a goal that they will achieve through volunteering, is this something that you do?

-
- Probe: (If yes) Who suggested this? (You/manager/colleague?)
 - Probe: Was the objective or goal achieved?
 - Probe: Can you tell me about it?
 - Probe: (If no) why not?
 - Probe: Knowing about it now, would you use your volunteering as part of your PDP?
 - Probe: (If yes) What would your learning goals or objectives be?

2.2 If I was to say to you giving or gaining of skills in volunteering, which one resonates with you more?

2.3 Have you ever gone into a volunteering experience that you were like “I am so out of my depth, I have no clue what to do right now”.

- Probe: If so, what did you learn about yourself, or did you even learn?

Part 3: Transfer

3.1 Does your manager know that you volunteer? Do your colleagues?

- Probe: So how does it come up in conversation with your manager?
- Probe: Do you know if your managers or colleagues volunteer too?

3.2 Has employee volunteering helped you improve in your job role?

- Probe: Have you ever been encouraged/ had the chance to practice skills/abilities/knowledge into your everyday job?

3.3 Does employee volunteering have any influence on your working life? If so, how? Can you give me some examples?

- Probe: Does your volunteer work detract from your ability to get work done?
- Probe: Does your workload allow you to try out new things that you’ve learned from volunteering?
- Probe: Does employee volunteering influence you in your personal life? If so, how? Can you give me examples?

3.4 Is there anything getting in the way from your volunteering?

- Probe: So the skills that you’re using in volunteering are they the same as what you use at work?
- Probe: (If no) how does that sit with you?
- Probe: Would you like to use those skills elsewhere? (If yes, where, why?)

Interview guide for managers of employee volunteers

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Do you engage in employee volunteering?

- Probe: What do you volunteer in?
- Probe: Would you recommend it?
- Probe: Why?

1.2 Do you encourage your employees to volunteer?

- Probe: If so, why?
 - Probe: What benefits do you think it brings?
-

1.3 How long has your employee been involved in employee volunteering?

Part 2: Learning and development

2.1 Does your employee use employee volunteering in their PDP?

- Probe: Who encouraged the use of this?
- Probe: Have you found it beneficial for employee development? Do you have an example?
- Probe: Have you seen any changes in your employees' development since partaking in employee volunteering? Can you give me some examples of this?
- Probe: Were these developments what you expected? Why?
- Probe: How did you notice the development in your employee?
- Probe: Has volunteering hindered your employee's ability to perform in their work role?

2.2 Would you recommend using employee volunteering as a way for your employees to develop?

- Probe: If so, why?
-

Part 3: Transfer

3.1 How openly is employee volunteering talked about within your team?

- Probe: So how does it come up in conversation with your employee?

3.2 Has employee volunteering helped your employee to improve in their job role?

- Probe: Does your employee's volunteer work detract from their ability to get work done? Does it get in the way of their work?
- Probe: Does your employee's workload allow your employee to try out new things that they've learned from volunteering?
- Probe: Do you encourage/ enable employees to practice skills/abilities/knowledge into their everyday job?

3.3 Are there any barriers getting in your employees way in their volunteering?

Appendix 2: Chapter four (study three) interview guide

Part 1: Introduction/warm up questions

1.1 Thank you for giving me some of your time today. To start, can you give me an introduction about yourself?

1.2 So you started social enterprise project (SEP) in January/May, was this your first experience working with a social enterprise?

- Probe: What did you know about social entrepreneurship before?

1.3 Can you give me a brief, two-minute overview of what the project involved?

Part 2: Learning

2.1 I'm keen to understand more about your experience of SEP, could you describe the role you played in the project?

- Probe: What were the tasks/things you had to do?
- Probe: What skills did that require?
- Probe: Were the tasks/skills the same sort of things you would do in your day job?
- Probe: How were they different/similar?
- Probe: Was that a new skill you developed?
- Probe: What other things do you think you picked up from the experience?
- Probe: What role, if any, did SEP have on your professional role?

2.2 Can you describe what your learning experience was like from SEP?

- Probe: [If participants suggest they learned things that were unexpected] Why do you think that was unexpected/surprising?
- Probe: How did your learning experience align with your learning expectations from the project?

2.3 How did taking part in SEP make you feel?

Part 3: Role of coaching

3.1 There was an opportunity to attend two coaching sessions. Did you avail of that?

- Probe: Check if went to both
- Probe: What were you hoping to gain from them/ or learn?

3.2 Can you tell me about the first coaching session?

- Probe: Could you explain to me the role the first coaching session played in your SEP learning experience?
- Probe: Did you learn anything from your team members during that session?
- Probe: How did you feel about that?

3.3 I wonder if we can now turn to the second coaching session. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

- Probe: Could you explain to me the role the second coaching experience had on your SEP learning experience?
 - Probe: What were the learning outcomes for you?
 - Probe: Did you learn anything from your team members during that session?
-

-
- Probe: How did you feel about that?
 - Probe: What else can you share about the coaching session?

3.4 Overall how would you describe the coaching experience within SEP?

- Probe: What impact did it have on you?
- Probe: You say you recognized 'XXX' – what do you think led to that?

Part 4: Wrap up questions

4.1 Would you recommend SEP to others?

- Probe: Why or why not?

4.2 Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about SEP that we haven't discussed?

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