



SURVEY ON THE ATTITUDES AND PRIORITIES OF VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS VIS-À-VIS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN EUROPE

Summary of Conclusions and Final Remarks

The quantity of responses received is fairly small (11). Consequently, in the calculation of averages and the citing of trends across countries or regions, the margin of error is quite large. In this context, we have tried not only highlight some of the main responses received however complement this with our knowledge of the countries and volunteer centres in question to give a more accurate overall picture.

For the purposes of this survey, Europe has been divided into the following regions:

- Northern Europe (Ireland, UK, Norway, Finland and Germany);
- Southern Europe (France, Belgium, Spain);
- Central and Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Romania and including the contribution from Israel).

In the first instance however, it must be highlighted that overwhelmingly, volunteer centres across all regions of Europe feel that businesses have an important role to play in the local community (97%). 28% believe that employee engagement is the most effective way in which they can contribute to local communities. However, it was clear that many organisations felt that this must be complemented with other forms of community involvement such as financial donations, sharing of office space (such as conference facilities for example) and resources (such as computers, faxes and photocopiers) as well as sponsoring. Currently, only 12% of member organisations' income comes from businesses whereas some 50% comes from a combination of Government and Foundation grants. In this context, it comes as no real surprise that the majority of volunteer centres feel that businesses do not currently take seriously their responsibilities with regards local communities (78%). Interestingly however, the 15% that argued that yes, companies do take seriously their responsibilities with regards local communities, all respondents were of Northern European origin, with the United Kingdom featuring particularly strongly. Nevertheless, half of all respondents feel that companies are improving in this regard.

In terms of current levels of involvement of volunteer centres in employee engagement, we see that just over half are not currently involved. Of those that are involved, 50% have been involved for over 5 years, 17% between 2 and 5 years and 33% less than 2 years. Principal activities include:

- Provision of information;
- Research and publications on this subject;
- Awareness raising;
- Brokerage;
- Development of and participation in employee engagement projects.

In terms of the benefits that volunteer centres feel they obtain from such activities, over three quarters of responses covered three areas: better relations with businesses; diversity in volunteer centres' work and innovation in volunteer centres' work. However, work in this area is not considered more important than work in other areas. Notwithstanding, those organisations that are currently not involved in this area claimed overwhelmingly to be interested in the subject, they just feel that they are not competent (40%). 0% of respondents said they were not interested at all. When asked to explain such interest, responses given included that:

- It increases the number of people volunteering;
- It is a subject that is increasingly fashionable;
- It improves social cohesion;
- It helps us to obtain money from the corporate sector;
- It creates links between different economies;
- Interested to learn about experiences elsewhere in Europe.

Overall, volunteer centres identified the lack of capacity of NGOs and community organisations as the principal obstacle to the development of employee engagement in their countries or regions (21%). This was followed by a lack of interest of both NGOs and businesses (16% respectively) and a lack of general awareness of employee engagement and the opportunities that it offers (15%). Clearly then, there is a distinct need to build the capacities of grassroots community organisations on the issue of employee engagement: national and/or regional volunteer centres could play a key role here in trying to raise awareness among such organisations of employee engagement as well as providing helpful information, training and/or publications. Indeed, information campaigns, seminars, catalogues of case-studies were all identified as important means of overcoming obstacles to developing employee engagement. In addition, the development of strong national legislation on corporate social responsibility was cited as an important factor, as well as cross-sectoral, equal partnership between economic actors and actors within the social economy.

When asked where they saw employee engagement in two years' time, respondents gave a variety of interesting and perhaps predictable answers to this question. They believed that there would be a stronger focus on information technologies within employee engagement activities. There would also be better relations between companies and a more diverse array of community organisations, as well as better support for employee volunteers themselves. Finally, they expressed a wish to for enhanced cooperation at a transnational level on this subject. This indicates that countries, whatever their levels of engagement or expertise in this area are keen to learn from each others' experiences and to cooperate on transnational projects. Again, at European level, CEV could play a key role in this regard bringing together actors at various levels from different countries to share practices and policies in this area. Furthermore, European Union funding would seem the most appropriate body to support this financially given that such activities would bring a distinct added value to national level activities.

Such responses would also seem to support a subsequent question on the role for CEV as an organisation within this debate. 88% of respondents said that they saw an important role for the organisation in relation to employee engagement. They viewed CEV as brining added value to three distinct areas in particular:

- Help in establishing contacts with companies. This response requires some analysis. Perhaps because of CEV's distinctly "European" nature, members feel that it is better placed to make contacts with international or European companies on their behalf;
- Transnational projects;
- Seminars.

This was closely followed by the "development of materials".

Clearly then, CEV's distinct added value is seen via its ability to convene a large number of organisations over different geographical areas within Europe to facilitate exchanges of experiences in this domain. This applies equally to organisations just "starting out" in this field and those who already have many experiences, and who might find it useful to reflect on challenges and share approaches to particular issues with colleagues abroad.

The above synthesis however gives only a broad view of some of the main responses received. We were indeed able to identify several regional tendencies and attitudes that we felt worthwhile highlighting and commenting upon.

Conclusions and Comments: Northern Europe

From our survey, it seems that within three of five countries within Northern Europe, employee engagement is relatively well-developed (Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom and Germany). Indeed, the United Kingdom has been working in this field for over 5 years and the volunteer centres there feel they already possess the necessary skills and competences to further develop employee engagement. Ireland has also been involved in this field for over 5 years and Germany between 2 and 5 years.

However, it must be noted that while we may consider these three countries more active than others in relation to employee engagement according to our survey results, the volunteer centres within Scandinavia seem not to be involved at all (Norway and Finland). In addition, German responses indicated that while employee engagement is developing within the country, it nevertheless remains weak and underdeveloped overall, and organisations are not sure whether they have the capacities to develop it further. They also feel that in general terms, there is a lack of interest in employee

engagement on the part of companies. In the Republic of Ireland, in the same vein, a lack of capacities on the part of community organisations is identified as a key obstacle as well as a lack of interest of companies.

Nevertheless, four of the five volunteer centres that responded within this region claimed that businesses are indeed more socially responsible than five years ago, and that among businesses there is a greater social awareness. This combined with tax incentives and other advantages to become involved makes the climate more favourable to the further development of employee engagement within the region.

Conclusions and Comments: Southern Europe

While it was noted earlier that half of all respondents feel that companies over the past five years are improving in terms of taking seriously their responsibilities with regards local communities, it should be noted that if we break the results down even further into region of Europe, the volunteer centres of Southern Europe argued overwhelmingly that companies are not improving in this field (almost 70%). This stands in stark contrast to the feelings expressed by the volunteer centres in Northern Europe. In addition, the volunteer centres of this region are less involved in employee engagement. Indeed, only the volunteer centre in France said that it has been involved to some degree in the past and feels that it is sufficiently experienced in employee engagement not to need further training in this area. All other respondents from the region said they were very interested but not competent.

However, it was also pointed out that, in the case of France certainly, there are large numbers of Foundations which contribute actively to the civil society sector at home and internationally. Because of this historical “Foundation tradition”, companies are less motivated to contribute associations.

In addition, we must be aware that within some volunteer centres and at grassroots level within the region, there is a feeling that employee engagement does not constitute “real”, “true” or “authentic” volunteering. Its further development is therefore not desirable for the sector. Such sentiments can in part be put down to differences in historical traditions and definitions of voluntary activities (for example, whom is involved, in which sector areas, for what motivations and length of time) but there are also other reasons. Some respondents viewed employee engagement as simply a public relations exercise for companies, with no real concern for the immediate environment. The desire of companies to become involved in one-day or short-term media grabbing activities confirms this perspective. In addition, it is felt that employee engagement goes against the very nature of volunteering. Volunteering is, by its very nature, a spontaneous activity which evolves according to a changing environment and changing needs. Volunteers are often the first to identify a need and gaps in service provision and the first to respond. Instead, companies decide in which activities it is appropriate for employees to become involved according to corporate objectives which in turn favours the development of only some forms of voluntary activity.

In this context, there are clearly some issues to resolve. The first is that companies must be made aware that communities need long-term structural partnerships, which include donations, resource-sharing and the contributions of employees as volunteers. Such long-term partnerships are instrumental to help build healthy, sustainable communities, which benefit not only community residents but businesses also in the form of enhanced reputation, better-motivated employees, better relations with local residents and a harmonious, stable community in which to operate.

Secondly, it is sometimes true (and the perception often is) that companies decide that their interests and corporate objectives are best served by employees’ engagement in a particular activity such as, for example the rehabilitation of a local land area or mentoring activities. If employee engagement is therefore simply employer or corporate driven, it will give rise to feelings such as those outlined above. Instead, employees need to be allowed to take the initiative to become involved in ways which interest them, (bar of course requests for time-off to volunteer for a racist organisation for example) and appropriate support structures put in place to assist this. While some could argue that this is asking an awful lot, there are indeed many examples of employee led volunteering across Europe, which demonstrate that it can be done. Cataloguing and disseminating such case-studies may help to dissipate negative perceptions of employee engagement, and in particular case-studies of long-term structural partnerships and employee-led involvement.

Finally, it was argued that governments need to make it more attractive for companies to become involved in the form of, for example fiscal advantages.

Conclusions and Comments: Central and Eastern Europe (including the contribution from Israel)

It is encouraging that over 30% of organisations in this region feel that companies are improving in the field of corporate social responsibility. This figure is higher than that for Southern Europe. However, perhaps there are reasons for this.

It was pointed out clearly within the survey that corruption within Central and Eastern Europe among businesses and government agencies is endemic. Indeed, it was cited to be one of the most important obstacles to overcome with respect to developing employee engagement. Improvements in this area would therefore be highly visible and would help to explain feelings that businesses are indeed moving in the right direction. Nevertheless, in relation to employee engagement it was argued very clearly that, “how can we expect employees to devote precious time to community activities as employee volunteers when they see that their employers are some of the most corrupt and successful people in the country?” Key here therefore is government reform of corporate law and practices in order to try to stamp out corruption and give employees motivations to give time to local communities.

Furthermore, employee engagement in Central and Eastern Europe cannot be understood in isolation of a consideration of the region’s recent political history and the distinct relationship that communism “enjoyed” with volunteering. During the former communist regimes, volunteering was very much a “compulsory” or “forced” activity (it was therefore not “voluntary” at all). Citizens were very much obliged to volunteer for the good of the State, and compliance viewed as being servile to the regime. With the fall of communism in the region (circa 1989), civil society organisations began to emerge, the volunteer effort a key driver in these nascent organisations in countries with limited economic resources. Despite this however, this contribution has largely not been considered as “volunteering” and volunteering continues to be viewed with great suspicion and mistrust. While the volunteer centres are working hard to overcome this and much headway has been made, in particular among young people who identify less with the countries’ recent political past, there remains much to be done. In this context, attempts to develop employee engagement could be viewed as companies aiming to control the social engagement of their employees. Furthermore, many citizens believe strongly that the State should be the principal actor in many fields of social action, not volunteers. An additional complication is that many people work very hard and have more than one job to make ends meet. Attempts to develop employee engagement within the region must therefore be sensitive to these views and realities. Employee engagement should not be developed for employee engagement’s sake: it should have a clear purpose.

Nevertheless, it is true that two of the three respondents from the region are strongly involved in trying to develop employee engagement within their countries. They have less than 2 years involvement: it is therefore very new and overwhelmingly, they feel they do not have the capacities to develop employee engagement within their regions. They are keen to benefit from further training in this area.

An interesting and brief comparative analysis of regions as a whole shows that while in the countries of North and South Europe, there are demands for long-term structural partnerships with communities as opposed one-day head-line grabbing activities, in Central and Eastern Europe, any involvement is considered positive and one-off, high profile activities are also welcome and considered ways of introducing companies to the opportunities that potentially exist. Of course, employee engagement will evolve and develop over time as needs change and debates and concepts on corporate social responsibility also evolve and continue. It is interesting however to highlight however longer-term developments in this field.

Finally, with respect to the question on how CEV could best add value to national level employee engagement activities, the responses received from the Central and Eastern European region were particularly interesting. It was felt that, the prestigious “international” image of CEV could help organisations establish links with the government and large companies, which they would not ordinarily be able to do so.

Final word

All in all, from an analysis of results it appears that overwhelmingly, volunteer centres across all regions of Europe are interested in employee engagement. Key obstacles to their involvement however include small numbers of paid personnel and heavy workloads which makes it difficult for them to prioritise work and training in this area.

These comments and reflections constitute only preliminary thinking on this subject. Of course, CEV welcomes all comments and contributions to this report. Please send them to the address below.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope that you have found this report useful and interesting.

Gail Hurley and Dominique Monti,
Brussels 4 May 2004

number of volunteers.....

Question 6.

Source of income (please tick all that apply):

- European Union
 - Central government
 - Regional/Local government
 - Foundation(s)
 - Corporate
 - Membership fees
 - Other (please state).....
-

Section Two: Employee Engagement: Specific Details

A: YOUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS BUSINESSES

Question 1.

Do you believe business has an important role to play in local communities?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Question 2.

Do you believe that employee engagement is the most effective way businesses can support local communities?

- Yes (go to **question 4**)
- No (go to **question 3**)
- Don't know

Question 3.

If you answered **no** to question 2, what else do you think businesses could do to effectively support local communities?.....

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Question 4.

Do you believe businesses currently take their responsibilities towards local communities seriously?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Any additional comments.....

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Question 5.

Do you believe businesses are helping employees engage more effectively in local communities than five years ago?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Additional comments.....

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B: YOUR ORGANANISATION

Question 6.

Is your organisation currently involved in employee engagement?

- Yes (please go to **question 7**)
- No (please go to **question 16**)

Question 7.

If yes, for how long?

- More than five years
- Between two and five years
- Less than two years

Question 8.

What is your role in employee engagement? (please tick all that apply)

- Leadership
- Information
- Research and/or publications
- Training (of organisations and/or businesses) (please specify which).....
-
- Development of employee engagement programmes/projects
- Participation in employee engagement programmes/projects
- Brokerage
- Awareness-raising of employee engagement
- Other (please give details).....
-

Question 9.

What benefit(s) do you believe your organisation gains from involvement in employee engagement? (please tick all that apply)

- Improved understanding of, and relations with, businesses
- Improved understanding of, and relations with, local communities
- Diversity in our work
- Innovation in our work
- None of the above
- Other (please give details).....
-
-

If **none** of the above, why not?.....

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Question 10.

What importance would you give employee engagement activity in relation to the other activities of your organisation?

- Employee engagement is one of the most important activities of our organisation
- About the same as our other activities
- Less important than our other activities

Additional comments.....

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Question 11.

Do you believe you already have all the skills you need to develop employee engagement activities?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Question 12.

What do you feel is the greatest obstacle to developing more employee engagement? (Please rank in order of importance: 1 = most important 5 = least important)

- Lack of NGO interest

- Lack of NGO capacity
 - Lack of business interest
 - Lack of business capacity
 - Lack of employee interest
 - Lack of enabling environment
 - Lack of awareness of employee engagement
 - Other (please give details).....
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Question 13.

How can this be overcome?.....

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Question 14.

How do you expect the nature and scope of your employee engagement to change over the coming two years? For example, greater emphasis on involving smaller businesses and organisations, more emphasis on employee engagement and information technology (ICT), greater emphasis on awareness-raising and building support for employee engagement, greater emphasis on training, international element etc. etc (please give as much detail as you can).....

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Question 15.

What, in your view is missing from, and is needed in, current employee engagement initiatives (at local, national and international level)?.....

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For those organisations that are not involved in employee engagement activity:

Question 16.

If you are not involved in any form of employee engagement activity, why not?

- Don't know much/anything about it, but would like to learn more
 - Don't know much/anything about it, and am not interested in learning more
 - I know about it, but am not interested
 - I know about it and am interested, but we don't have the skills and /or resources to become involved
 - I know about it and am interested but it is not a priority for our organisation
 - Other (please give details).....
-
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Question 17.

If you are interested in learning more about employee engagement, why?.....

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Question 18.

If you are not interested in learning more about employee engagement, why not? (tick all those that apply)

- I don't believe employee engagement is all that important or relevant
- I do not think it will benefit our organisation in any way
- We are involved in other activities that are more important than employee engagement
(please give details of these activities).....
.....
.....
- Other (please give details).....
.....

Section Three: Employee Engagement and the European Volunteer Centre

Question 1.

Do you see an important role for CEV in employee engagement?

- Yes (please go to **question 2**)
- No (please go to **question 3**)

Question 2.

What role do you see as important for CEV to play in employee engagement? (please rank in order of importance: 1 = most important 5 = least important)

- Seminars on employee engagement
- Published material on employee engagement
- Information on employee engagement from around Europe
- Advocacy/campaigning on employee engagement within the E.U. institutions
- Employee engagement programmes/projects
- Making contacts with businesses interested in employee engagement, and putting them in touch with members
- None of the above
- Other (please give details).....

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Question 3.

If you **do not** see a role for CEV in employee engagement, why not? (please give as much detail as you can).....

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Question 4.

For those organisations that **are** already involved in employee engagement, in what ways can CEV add the most value to your employee engagement activities at local/national level?.....

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Final question: any additional comments.....

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The completed questionnaire may be returned by email to cev@cev.be by fax to: +32 2 514 59 89, by post to: CEV, Rue de la Science 10, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium

Thank you for your input.