



Psychological and Behavioural Science

Employee-supported Volunteering

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**PB403 Psychology of Economic Life Summative coursework
May 2022**

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1. Introduction

Altruistic behaviour is a widespread practice in the UK, often in the form of volunteering. Reports state that, overall, people are likely to volunteer - with 62% of respondents (approximately 28 million people in England) having volunteered in any way in the last 12 months, and 41% (approximately 19 million people in England) at least once a month (Community Life Survey, 2021). As an extension of such tradition, employee-supported volunteering (ESV) has become a wonderful opportunity for companies to offer value to their people and their communities, increase their legitimacy, and improve their reputation (Leval & Prejer, 2013).

ESV serves as a type of workplace initiative whereby companies provide support to their employees to volunteer in their local areas. Employees are encouraged to volunteer in charities either of their own preference or nominated by their employers during their normal working hours (paid time) (Rodell et al., 2016). During this time, employees contribute their expertise to help their local community in their field of interest. Additionally, employees have the freedom to choose from various activities, approaches, philosophies, and management structures. For example, activities such as team projects, individual mentoring, and skill-based volunteering (Olovson, 2015).

Increasingly, organisations have opted to incorporate employee volunteering (ESV) within their structure and more specifically within their corporate social responsibility strategies, with 23% of the private organisations having reported to have a volunteering scheme (Curtis, 2015). The motives for such involvement are having an impact that can range from instrumental (competitive advantage), to relational (legitimacy through identity building and connection with the community) and moral (company's culture improvement) (Olovson, 2013). In addition, employees have expressed in surveys that they would be interested in being supported by their companies to volunteer more, with younger candidates stressing that they would in fact favour companies that integrate such practice (McGarvey et al, 2019).

Additionally, volunteering has a significant impact on local communities: participation increases the economic value of the goods and services produced by volunteers, strengthens the social tissue and helps social causes to achieve their mission through collective action (Rüdiger, 2015). Furthermore, this positively impacts individuals by improving their self-perception and self-esteem, aiding development of friendships and relationships and developing a greater sense of purpose.

Nevertheless, employee participation in ESV is not a given: the London Benchmarking Group worked out that the actual engagement in employee volunteering is just 14.3% (Milham, 2020). When this happens, businesses often opt out of these initiatives, letting go of the benefits that could be created when ESV is done strategically. Hence, our essay aims to strengthen the design of corporate employee volunteering programmes and resultantly boost engagement and impact by analysing volunteering as transactions that occur on platforms.

To do so, first, we evaluate corporate volunteering using relevant tools and theories and present our insights and findings. By applying Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Psychological Contracts (PC) we delve into the nature of exchanges that are established between the employer, employee and the NGO when a company incorporates ESV. Second, we leverage activity theory to depict the journey of volunteers to identify potential stages for interventions. Further, utilising

Lalhou's (2017) Installation Theory, we address the deficits in such schemes and present solutions to improve the effectiveness of implementing a volunteering strategy in the company.

2. Context

ESV occurs as cross-sector cooperation between actors that have different functions, motives and resources. We chose to prioritise the company (employers) and its employees as the primary stakeholders and the NGOs as the external stakeholder. This follows Brzustewicz et al. (2021) framework where companies and employees act as the driving force of ESV, and NGOs are the beneficiaries of these programmes. For a comprehensive understanding of our stakeholders, we deep-dive into each group.

2.1. Employees

ESV is an extremely strong strategic initiative to increase employee motivation and improve corporate culture. When focusing on talent, management is one of the most challenging tasks (Aziri, 2011). A manager's role requires influencing, inspiring, inciting, and communicating with their staff, though each employee is unique, making this role additionally difficult and increasing the likelihood of disengagement. This phenomenon is usually triggered by feeling a lack of autonomy, interest, motivation, and satisfaction in the workplace (Gagné et al., 2010).

Alternatively, disengagement can also be explained as alienation at work. This is a frequent problem faced by employees. Alienation is described as a feeling of low job satisfaction, affective commitment, and demotivation in the workplace (Marx, 1964). This is often the result of boring repetitive work tasks and the perception of having an authoritarian management (Zeffane, 1993). Often, alienated staff see their work as useless and endure reduced well-being when their job does not allow them to develop/acquire new skills, abilities, and capacities (Banai and Reisel, 2007; Korman et al., 1981).

Disengaged employees uncouple themselves from their jobs and withdraw both cognitively and emotionally which can also produce toxic work environments affecting the overall corporate culture. This could lead to a decline in performance and productivity, which subsequently has a knock-on effect on the organisation's success (Hochchild, 1983). Employee volunteering is one solution that has proven to be successful in countering this problem (Boccalandro, 2018).

ESV could help engage employees in the workplace as it provides opportunities to shine in areas that they might not be able to show in their normal job. According to a report issued by McKinsey back in 2020, companies that implemented an employee volunteering programme have successfully increased employee satisfaction and productivity, resulting in a four times more engaged workforce. Incorporating employee volunteering can strengthen the employer's brand, attracting talented candidates and offering an opportunity to upskill/reskill the existing workforce. Moreover, volunteering can help peers connect in spaces different from the workplace increasing team building and a sense of belonging. (Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT Survey, 2007)

Indeed, Alaya, an existing employee volunteering platform, found that employees working in companies which have employee volunteering systems report five times higher levels of well-being in the workplace (Mascaro, 2021). This is due to creating the belief that they are "performing good deeds" by helping other people, which in turn enhances their self-confidence, self-esteem, and overall life satisfaction. Overall, this leads to an increase in job satisfaction, which has a strong association with employee engagement and performance (Bin, 2015).

2.2 Employers

Companies involved in these programmes have extended the nature of volunteering itself, moving the mechanisms from a simple ‘gift of time’ to a **social reciprocal relationship** (where each party expects something in return) between the volunteers and the volunteer organisations (Muthuri et al., 2009). Since companies have started to acknowledge the potential benefits that ESV brings and its potency in enhancing organisational commitment, the motives of becoming involved have evolved from a historic philanthropic activity to a **mutual beneficial exchange** (Dreesbach-Bundy and Scheck, 2017). The old-fashioned way of building a company’s corporate social responsibility through giving out donations to charities has now expanded and extended to include more time and human resources.

2.3. NGOs/ Volunteering partner

In the case of NGOs, a strong partnership using ESV provides talent and human capital when needed. ESV sets to support these non-profit organisations in their pursuit of giving aid and support for further development across the breadth of pertinent social issues they tackle. However, as stated in Hudson’s (2002) paper, NGOs often face a lack of expertise within the organisation, leading to failures in the preliminary stages of executing their vision. Employee volunteering serves as a good means to match skilled workers to these organisations and improve their daily operations (Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT Survey, 2007). Thus, if partnered well, non-profits will benefit massively from the proposed employee volunteer programmes.

3. Literature Review

Fulfilling our stakeholder’s needs relies on establishing a relationship between the three entities. Hence, it is imperative to study the psychological phenomena that explain volunteering as a behaviour, as an exchange and the relationships it can create. Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains relationships through a theoretical foundation of understanding why interaction between parties occurs and how it is maintained through the creation of exchange platforms. Psychological contracts then fall under SET, focusing on the relationships of our primary stakeholders within the organizational setting.

3.1.Social Exchange Theory

The decision to volunteer is explained either through altruistic motivation or rational choice analysis (Lee & Brudney, 2009). The former focuses on moral and social values, placing the focus on the individual’s subjective meaning of volunteering (Allison et al., 2002), which varies significantly between cultural norms (VanTil, 1988). These characteristics make it complex to explain volunteering behaviour within this framework, and therefore the majority of research has focused on the rational choice theory. According to this neoclassical economic approach, there are various benefits and costs of volunteering. Social exchange theory (SET), which is the framework we have used to analyse ESV, is based on the premise that the relationship between groups is based on the costs and rewards for all involved (Homans, 1961). In the case of volunteering, the relationship is usually between the volunteer and the NGO or charity, nevertheless, in our context it also includes the employer, creating a three-way relationship.

SET states that the exchange of either tangible or intangible assets is carried out when the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs for all involved (Homans, 1961) because all costs are perceived as opportunity costs (Brown, 1999). The assets exchanged, according to resource theory are love, status, information, money, goods, and services (Fao & Fao, 1980).

In table 1, we illustrate the most predominant perceived costs and benefits (tangible and intangible) of volunteering :

Stakeholder	Assets	Costs	Benefits	Motives
Employees	Time, talent, energy, certain skills.	Time, energy, emotional commitment	Skills improvement and acquisition, social networking (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999) employability, sense of purpose at work, self-confidence, self-esteem, and overall life satisfaction	Affiliation Status Prestige
Companies	Infrastructure, social capital, economic resources, know-how	Management time, economic resources, increasing workload for the department that manages it	Employee satisfaction, engagement and productivity (Lea, 2020,) (Jones et al, 2014) Strengthen employer brand, attract talented candidates to upskill/reskill the existing workforce (Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT Survey, 2007).	Status, reputation
NGO's	Volunteering opportunities, trust from the community	Management time and resources (workload)	Match skilled workers to these organisations and improve their daily operations (Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT Survey, 2007).	Prestige

Table 1: Cost-benefit analysis for stakeholders

As per our stakeholder analysis in Table 1, it is evident that the benefits of participating in ESV are greater than the costs. Most existing platforms designed to support ESV present this as the main argument to convince businesses to integrate this practice. Therefore, in a context where each stakeholder has a unique journey, goals and motives, a platform for them to interact and exchange value would be pivotal. However, if the assets being exchanged through these dynamics aren't congruent to the motives of each stakeholder, it discourages their intent to remain in such an exchange. Furthermore, the roll-out of ESV systems often presents challenges that translate into additional costs that were not perceived or accounted for initially.

Hence, the benefits of corporate volunteering need to be made salient. The establishment of a platform that leverages heteromorphic reciprocity (each side of the relationship has a different asset and perceives different benefits) is needed (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Doing so could resultantly create a relationship that transcends one-off transactions and increases the reciprocation loop that accommodates for possible failures (Gouldner, 1960).

3.2. Psychological Contracts

While there are economic advantages for companies to adopt ESV, there are various social components to building such a culture. Formal contracts are, therefore, not necessarily the most appropriate way to analyse the transaction thoroughly (Blau, 1964). Rather, social exchanges rely upon norms, gratitude and trust to generate future relational obligations. Social exchanges also “do not have an exact price in terms of a single quantitative medium of exchange” (Blau, 1964 p. 94), creating an equilibrium of continuous exchanges within the relationship. These relational obligations are implicitly understood and believed, embodied in a psychological contract that all entities in the relationship hold.

Psychological contract (PC) literature has tended to focus on the obligation of employer and employee in exchanging resources within the organizational relationship. Rousseau (1995, p. 9) defined PC as “individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization”. With a distinction between transactional and relational PC, along the same lines that social exchanges (relational PC) differ from economic exchanges (transactional PC) through focus, time frame, stability, scope and tangibility (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2010). Transactional PC takes the economic currency perspective, where relational PC exchanges use socioemotional currency. Volunteering is outside of the economic currency framework, as no monetary value is exchanged, rather a majority of the transactions are of intangible assets such as goodwill and social connections (Nichols, 2013).

Volunteering has an informal nature with no written contract and a focus on intangible assets, again highlighting it as a relational exchange (Hager & Renfro, 2020). Rousseau (1990) observed that when one side of the exchange uses relational obligations the other side does best by matching it with relational obligations. Hence, as volunteering is a relational exchange all entities involved in a volunteering relationship should remain in a relational PC, avoiding association with transactional PC and monetary exchanges. Furthermore, PC for volunteering initiatives are preferable to formal contracts as the former are quickly adaptable through constant calculations of the relationship (Hager & Renfro, 2020).

As an illustration, PC around working hours in a workplace provides an insight for thinking of volunteering through a similar format. Employees have a certain minimum number of working hours necessary, though the employee understands that extra hours may be necessary to get work done. In exchange, they receive recognition and potential promotion from the employer. Similarly, if the employee needs to finish the workday early for personal reasons there is a mutual understanding that this will not hinder work’s output. This flexibility of working hours is useful for volunteering initiatives, as mandatory volunteering generates a crowd out effect where intrinsic motivation and satisfaction of volunteering diminishes (McCarty et al., 2018).

Therefore, to aid in increasing engagement to ESV systems, we leverage the understanding of how to create and change a PC. An important factor is ‘when’ a PC is created, Hoyer and Kappelides's (2021) research found that the initial recruitment stage is the most important time of PC formation. After this, certain adjustments are then made in the initial few months of starting through gathering social information from more experienced employees (Thomas & Anderson, 1998). After the formation of the PC, they become difficult to change, hence the importance of knowledge of PCs early in the relationship (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). Lower managers should take special note as they appear as more influential in the development of PC with employees than senior managers as the former gain an understanding of the employees' uniqueness

(Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2010). Preserving this established PC is essential as a breach of PC, where an obligation is not fulfilled (Morrison & Robinson, 1997), has multiple knock-on effects such as decreased job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Zhao et al., 2007).

4. **Analysis**

While various organisations build systems to support volunteering, they experience high drop-offs or an overall lack of return on the programs/ platforms (Perez et al., 2014). We see that to encourage volunteering via ESV, appealing to an employee's altruistic tendencies may not be sufficient and there is a need to additionally make the benefits to each stakeholder salient and create strong psychological contracts. To further understand the reason for low or no engagement with volunteering, we analysed an employee's journey to successful volunteering through ESV by applying two main frameworks:

1. Activity theory: to identify potential stages for interventions
2. Installation theory: to study the gaps in the layers that determine these actions

Activity theory served as the preliminary framework, supplemented with more detailed concepts for each installation layer from installation theory. The analysis provided a strong foundation to give recommendations and therefore, design solutions. To this end, the frameworks were applied to an ideal employee journey to conceptualise interventions that reinforce existing platforms or structures.

4.1. Activity Theory (AT):

Russian psychologists Vygotsky, Rubinshtein and Leont'ev primarily developed activity theory in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s (Kamanga et al., 2019). According to Vygotsky (1978), mediated actions have three elements: the subject, the tool and the object. The subject is the person engaged in the activity; the activity is mediated by tools to achieve a certain object. The goal of the subject is to conduct the activity to reach the object (Kamanga et al., 2019; Nardi, 1978). In other words, we perceive the world through the filter of our motives and goals, such that they define our activities. Therefore, activity theory provides a useful framework to analyse the motives, goals and subgoals. We focused our analyses on the activity of the employee such that we can isolate moments of drop-offs from the journey. Supported by insights from the report by Mcgarvey et al. (2019), these identified tasks were used to further design appropriate interventions.

This facilitated identifying five key stages that ensure the success of volunteering programs: onboarding (supported by PC theory), booking your volunteering hours, volunteering, post volunteering and experiencing impact. The five phases have different psychological mechanisms underpinning the decision of continuing or stopping to volunteer via the organisation. We see that a lack of alignment to the sub-goals of the employee at each stage would potentially lead to drop-offs. For example, while perusing suitable volunteering opportunities, an employee would likely look for an activity that aligns with their location, time commitments, capability etc. More than half of the volunteers find opportunities that make use of existing skills or experience appealing (Mcgarvey et al., 2019).

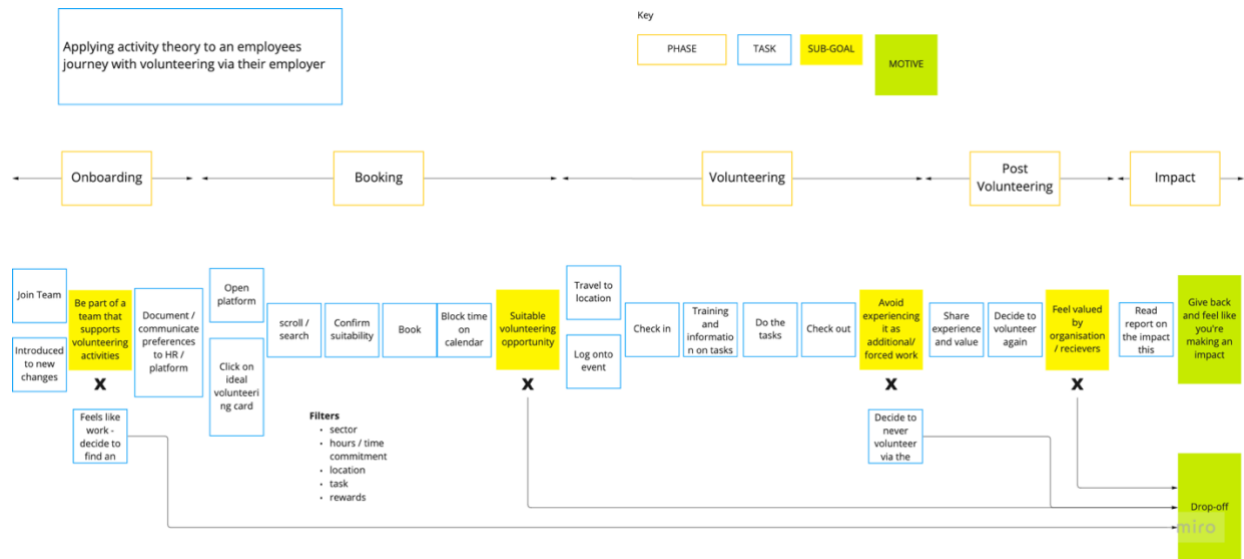


Fig. 1 – Applying AT to an employee's journey with ESV

4.2. Installation Theory (IT):

Installation theory states that there are three determinants of action: material context (physical affordances), embodied competencies and social regulation (Lahlou, 2017). The installations act as scaffolding to activities. Each layer provides an understanding of the gaps the employee experiences and practical solutions can be derived to overcome these identified gaps.

Fig. 2 shows a summary of our analysis of the gaps in each installation. For example, if we look at the social regulation layer, we see the importance of building a new culture or social norm of ESV. Leveraging our learnings from PC theory, we recommend using public calendars to show blocks of time kept aside for ESV, especially by middle and upper management. Similarly, a large motivator to engage in ESV comes in the alignment of the sub-goals of the employee while the employee is circling in on a volunteering opportunity. We recommend introducing elements of an easy to use system using choice architecture to convey and align preferences of the employee.

LAYER	CHALLENGES	RECCOMENDATION	IMPLEMENTATION
Physical Affordances	- access to ideal opportunities : skill/purpose mismatch - distance - time	Clear description and information	- choice architecture to define preferences 1. time commitments 2. role relevant or other skill 3. frequency of notifications - emails and notifications - platform design
Embodied Cognition	- current system in organisation to access opportunities - task difficulty : feeling like paid/extra/compulsory work - CSR-washing and no real impact	Information and feedback	- workshop at onboarding - quarterly impact report - sealing experiences by sharing video/stories post volunteering
Social Regulation	- disproportionate expectations within a low-reward or high-attrition organisation - motivation for companies : high cost of platform	- Regulation change : Allowances for companies - social norm change	- calendar showcase of blocked time - social proof of invested time - setting examples top down - fiscal incentives for companies that set up volunteering platforms

Fig. 2 – Applying IT to analyse the layers

5. Solutions

Most corporations' goals, ultimately, lie in quantified improvement in efficiency and economic growth, which is fundamentally dissonant with the altruistic nature of volunteering. Therefore, our focus on improving the efficiency of implementing a volunteering strategy needs to, firstly, be anchored to the stakeholder with most resources i.e. the corporations. Hence, we compiled our recommendations into a toolkit that enables customization to the company's needs but still provides a strong framework for implementation. And secondly, be supported by tangible measures of its effects on subjective well-being, skill enhancement, turnover rate, and impact in the communities. These advantages can be made more salient by contrasting it with undertaking ESV with and without a partner, with support from the government and with fiscal aid.

The toolkit addresses the gaps that impede our stakeholders in leveraging value exchange in each transaction. The toolkit includes:

- A comprehensive manual that enables easy adoption of a volunteering strategy in a company. The manual is a step-by-step breakdown written to aid both the HR/volunteer coordinator with tools and frameworks (volunteering policy draft, guidelines and communication templates, newsletter activation, how to set a profile in the software)
- A software platform to follow the volunteer's journey and tailors volunteering opportunities for them
- A report that highlights and matches impact with indicators relevant to the company.

5.1. The Manual:



Image 1 – Mock-up of the toolkit as a printed manual

A) Setting it up:

Firstly, it is fundamental to be aware of the company's motivation, resources, and current employee engagement scores to engage in corporate volunteering since this will significantly influence their performance in the activities and allocation process. The first step in engaging the company in this platform would be to build an internal mission/driver that would assess the engagement readiness to unfold a volunteering strategy.

We recommend an initial assessment tool to map indicators of employee subjective well-being, employee turnover rate, current CSR strategy, productivity measures, skill development and current investment of time/ resources in activities related to such topics would be made.

B) Volunteering policy draft:

Serves to communicate as clearly as possible to the employees the process to engage and document a volunteering activity. This is paired with a tutorial video that explains how to set a profile on the platform and the features included.

Transparency is key in this communication, and it should include a statement as to why the business has chosen to support the community in this way, how many days or hours can be allocated, and should state that volunteering is included in working hours and evaluation.

C) How to successfully communicate a volunteering strategy

Includes templates for posters and social media that could be added to boost involvement in the strategy and recommendations to communicate results with the board. It would also include how to communicate this strategy as part of the benefits offered by the company in their recruitment processes to improve awareness among potential candidates.

Also, it would include an experience workshop in which those that want to volunteer can establish their volunteering goals by generating a personal profile to explore their purpose and skills as well as mapping motives to engage in volunteering. In this workshop, a subjective well-being assessment would be done.

5.2. The Software:

The experience of the platform on the employee-facing side would be curated using choice architecture to the profile the employee designs to keep the engagement easy, and simple and that boosts motivation. Inputs to feed the profile would include preferred causes, ability to commute, frequency of the messages received by the organization, your role and your team.

The *curated feed* would recommend opportunities that align to the user's professional development goals (skills development), causes and location and easily pairs up with calendar apps to suggest volunteering opportunities based on availability (resultantly, to publicly display commitment)

The experience is designed for a simple *check-in and check-out* system to keep track of hours invested and asks to *document their experience* and feedback by requesting a three-line or short video prompt answer that would randomize feedback questions. Volunteers would receive *badges* based on the time spent volunteering. The badges, along with the experience snippets would be shareable on social media and internally to their peers. To reinforce the feedback of having contributed, the NGO shares a *heartfelt message* with volunteers that would also include a *tangible example* of how their help improved something in the organization. In case the volunteer

opted out, it would send a feedback loop to ask for feedback, a chance to *alter preferences* and a reassuring message that they would be most welcome to come back.

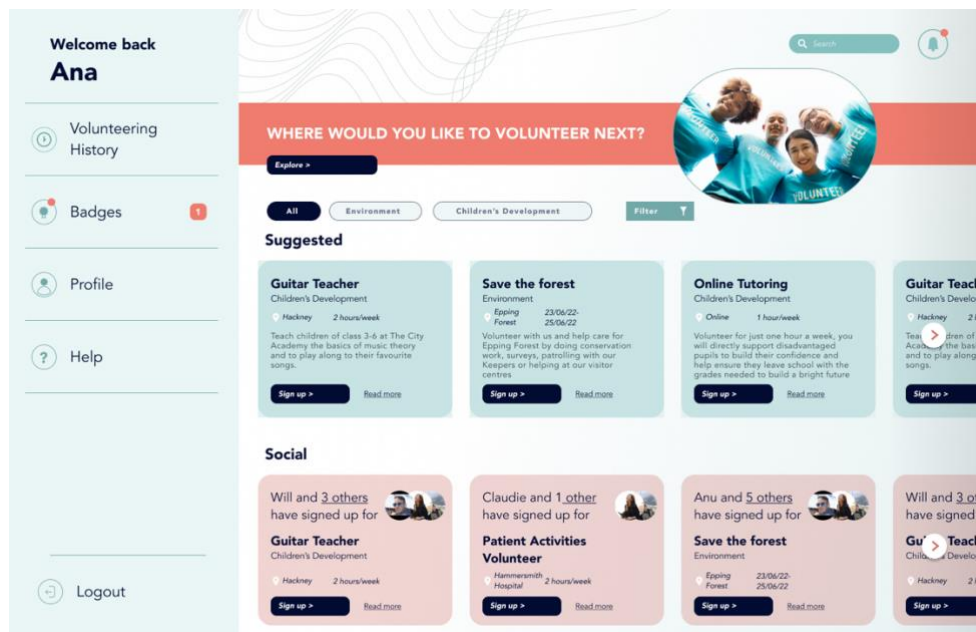


Image 2 – Mock-up of the feed (homepage) of the software platform

5.3. The Report

Companies opt for ESV to support their altruistic beliefs and motivations but also to improve their performance indicators, signal the strength of the organization and reduce attrition rates. Regardless of their conviction, the company is ultimately profit and quantitatively oriented, therefore, any CSR strategy should be easily measured. Display of such measurement would also help continued allocation of funds and other resources. Therefore, a report that balances social impact with performance indicators would be one of the most important parts of maintaining a volunteering strategy in place. For example, including indicators of employee satisfaction into the KPIs along with the cost of running the operation would reinforce the value of ESV to both employees as well as employers.

6. Limitations and Conclusion

6.1. Limitations

One of the limitations of this research is that the ideal employee experience is generalised and does not acknowledge the nuances that come with being an employee from minorities or socially-disadvantaged employees (women, disabled, BAME etc.). For example, according to a 2019 UK national survey on the volunteering experience, people from minority groups are reported to be less satisfied with certain aspects of volunteering. In the future, we hope to expand the scope of the toolkit to represent and account for the experiences of minority groups. Once this is addressed, we feel the solution can then be tested and modified for other nations and not just the UK.

Though we were able to provide a general blueprint that a company can then adapt to suit their business more appropriately, most businesses operate differently and making a one size fits all solution is an impossible task. This is the first draft of the toolkit, and through iterations and a feedback loop with all three stakeholders, it could further develop with trials and continuous

improvement. These two limitations show the barriers our solution may face in transferring them across time and space.

Lastly, there are additional problems that both employees and employers may face in the involvement in any ESV, which we have been unable to address due to constraints on this paper. For example, one out of five employees experiences ESV as an “additional paid work” (Mcgarvey et al., 2019), a sentiment that could harm the beneficial feeling of involvement in an ESV. Also, companies may experience public backlash if their involvement in ESV is perceived as social washing (Bernardino, 2021). These gaps are an opportunity for future research to continue building upon the toolkit that we envision and provide additional solutions.

6.2. Conclusion

This paper has looked at the theoretical and empirical background of employee volunteering, providing a visual experience of how the practice is normally executed. The various social and economic advantages of ESV indicate that there is potential to increase the number of companies that subscribe to ESV. Volunteering, though fundamentally stemming from altruism, faces various challenges to adoption. We have produced practicable solutions to overcome what we envision as the main limitations in current employee volunteering systems. Analysing volunteering using SET, PC, Activity Theory and IT led to detailing the potential moments for interventions and the layers that would have the most impact. We summarize our recommendations in a toolkit, with details that make the value exchange of each transaction salient for all stakeholders. We envision the toolkit to contain a comprehensive manual, a software platform, and a report that makes the impact of the program available and tangible for the users.

We appreciate there are additional challenges past the ones that we have addressed in this paper. Though we believe, and are supported by the literature, that we have provided a solution to the most prominent barriers to ESV. We now hope that our stakeholders take these findings and test them in their real-world scenarios, which will help provide feedback and thus guide the development of the solutions further.

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