

Workshop Presentation

Topic: Corporate Volunteering

The Business Case for Employee Volunteering- Race for Mentors Case Study 2004

Ms. Shalini MAHTANI

Community Business, Hong Kong SAR

shalini@communitybusiness.org.hk

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest by companies to engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is essentially a process that companies undertake to engage with their stakeholders, employees, customers, investors, suppliers, government and others who have a stake in the company. If the engagement is conducted properly, it can be a valuable tool to build a company's profit, its reputation, and to attract, retain and develop employees.

Corporate Community Investment is one element of CSR. It refers to a company's total contribution to the community¹ and has three components - financial contributions, in-kind contributions and the contribution of the time and skills of its staff. The last of these contributions is sometimes known as employee volunteering and is the focus of this paper.

Employee volunteering² can take many forms depending on the company's objectives. Employee volunteering can be one-off or can extend over a period of time. It can include ad hoc projects such as visits to a home for the elderly, or it can require a longer-term commitment such as a mentoring programme. Each type of volunteering activity has its own benefits if carefully thought through, and can have quantifiable business benefits.

The project

Race for Mentors is a unique project in Hong Kong. This project entails a company's employees mentoring youth from ethnic minorities from a local government school. In this case study, 19 CSFB employees volunteered to mentor 19 students from Sir Ellis Kadoorie Secondary School (the "school") in a very structured project for six months. Race for Mentors involves a tripartite relationship between a company (CSFB), a government school (Sir Ellis Kadoorie Secondary School) and a non-profit organisation (Community Business).

The benefits of Race for Mentors to business, its employees and the community were measured and are reported in this case study. The results show that there is a clear business case for employee volunteering.

Company criteria

CSFB employees wanted to work with young people in Hong Kong who did not ordinarily receive community support. In addition to financial support, CSFB wanted be

involved in a project that would give employees an opportunity to transfer skills and experiences to young people over a period of time. Any group of young people chosen had to speak good English given the international profile of CSFB's employees.

Community Business undertook preliminary research and found that youth from ethnic minority backgrounds in Hong Kong fit CSFB's selection criteria. Ethnic minorities are among the least supported groups in Hong Kong. Education attendance rates among 17 to 24-year-olds of ethnic minorities are much lower than for the same age group over the whole population³ and they face higher levels of unemployment.

Project objectives

The setting of objectives at the onset of the project was very important to ensure transparency between all parties. It also provided a benchmark against which the project would be evaluated.

Objectives of Community Business

1. To measure and report the business benefits of an employee volunteering project that is highly structured.
2. To demonstrate to business, community organisations and government that a tripartite relationship can be beneficial to all parties.
3. To develop a model tripartite relationship for other businesses, non-profit organisations and government departments to use as a reference.

Objectives of CSFB

1. To enable mentors to gain an understanding of the local community through interaction with one of the least supported groups in Hong Kong.
2. To motivate, engage and foster the development of employees through community involvement.
3. To build relationships and camaraderie among employees from different departments in the firm.
4. To provide an opportunity for employees to make a positive impact on students' attitudes and outlook towards their future.
5. To enhance employees' sense of pride in CSFB.
6. To reinforce CSFB's position as an employer of choice.

Objectives of the school

1. To increase participating students' ("mentees") confidence and self-esteem.
2. To provide students with firsthand experiences of the world of work, and advice on career development.
3. To encourage students to aim for a higher level of achievement.
4. To develop students' skills for attaining and retaining jobs.
5. To gain a better understanding of challenges faced by working people.

Key components of the project

The project had three main components: **mentoring sessions, workshops and community activities.**

Mentoring sessions

- **Matching:** A questionnaire was sent to all mentors and mentees before the project commenced.

Mentors and mentees were matched based on responses in the questionnaire relating to their

personality, interests, aspirations and other factors.

- **Grouping:** Mentoring took place in groups of four. There were two mentors matched with two

mentees in all but one group, where there were three mentors with three mentees.

- **Content:** The mentors were encouraged to discuss the subject matter of the previous workshops

and individual concerns and questions raised by their mentees.

- **Frequency:** There were five face-to-face “mentoring sessions”. In addition, some mentors

and mentees were also in touch by email. Mentoring sessions took place at CSFB offices on Friday afternoons.

- **Attendees:** The mentoring sessions were compulsory for all mentors and mentees. If mentors

were unable to attend, their co-mentor was required to attend.

- **Commitment:** Mentees and mentors signed a mentoring agreement at the beginning of the

project, pledging to commit to the six-month programme and fulfill their set roles.

Workshops

- **Purpose:** To provide skills and information about life and work issues which students had requested

at the development stage of the project.

- **Workshop subjects:** Working vs. Studying, CV Writing and Job Interviewing Skills, Work Ethics and

Responsibility and Stress Management.

- **Frequency:** There were four workshops delivered by external experts in these areas. Workshops took place at CSFB offices on Saturday mornings.

- **Attendees:** The workshops were compulsory for mentees and optional for mentors.

Community activities

- **Purpose:** To provide an informal setting for mentors and mentees to build a closer relationship

and foster team spirit.

- **Content:** One activity was the painting of a mural at the school. The second activity was a beach

clean-up.

- **Frequency:** There were two community activities, which were open to other CSFB staff and their

families. Community activities took place on Saturday mornings.

- **Attendees:** The community activities were compulsory for all mentors and mentees. If mentors were unable to attend, their co-mentor was required to attend.

Challenges

Building trust among partners — It is not uncommon for community groups to perceive employee volunteering as a platform for commercial activities. In the case of Race for Mentors, the school was initially worried about partnering with a financial institution that may try to promote its products to students. Through dialogue, these fears were allayed.

Matching mentors and mentees — The process of matching mentors and mentees is not an exact science. It was based on a questionnaire to all mentors and mentees. Ultimately, individual personalities and human chemistry played a big part, which is difficult to gauge wholly from a questionnaire.

Grouping — Flexibility is one of the key success factors for any programme. Initially the plan was to have one mentor paired with one mentee. However, given the work and travel commitment of mentors, it was suggested by mentors that the mentoring should take place in groups - two mentors with two mentees. As far as possible, this would ensure that at least one mentor would attend the compulsory sessions.

Gender — Because of cultural sensitivities, the school preferred for mentors and mentees to be in groups of the same gender. There were 9 female mentees and 10 male mentees, and 10 female mentors and 9 male mentors, which meant that one group was a mixed group.

Scheduling — It was initially challenging to work around mentors' work and travel schedules and mentees' school holidays and exam leave. Both mentors and mentees were willing to make some adjustments to their schedule. For example, one of the workshops was held during the school's Easter Holiday.

Human factors — This is probably the most challenging part of any mentoring programme as it is the most difficult to predict and plan for. In the first week, one mentor left the company and another dropped out due to work commitments. These two mentors had to be replaced quickly. Also, although it was compulsory for mentors and mentees to attend all mentoring sessions, there were a couple of mentors and mentees who struggled with punctuality and had a higher incidence of absenteeism.

	Attendance Rate
Mentors	83.50%
Mentees	89.50%

Insuring against potential risks — When planning employee programmes, there is a need to be aware of potential risks that employees and service clients may face. Insurance

was taken out to protect all those concerned in the case of an unfortunate incident. To prepare our mentors to deal with any unexpected events, a training kit was prepared and a briefing was held, telling them what events they might encounter and whom to contact if they needed further help.

Evaluation

Methodology

To measure the impact on mentors and mentees, surveys, focus groups and interviews were used at the end of the project. Mentors, mentees and school teachers were engaged in the evaluation process.

5 Interviews were conducted independently by Dr Albert Chau and Dr Harry Hui at the Department of Psychology of the University of Hong Kong.

	Surveys	Post-project focus groups	Individual interviews
Mentors	✓		✓
Mentees	✓	✓	
Teachers	✓	✓	

Impact on mentees

Unquestionably, there was significant benefit to mentees in terms of enhanced self-confidence, understanding of the world of work, job skills and understanding of challenges faced by working people.

Major areas of impact	Details	Self-evaluation % Improvement
Self-confidence and self-esteem	Self-confidence	100%
	Confidence in communication with adults	100%
Understanding of the world of work	Knowledge about the world of work	95%
	Understanding of career choices	89%
Developing job skills	Interview and CV writing skills	89%
	Understanding of employers' needs	79%
Understanding of challenges faced by working people	Personal and social skills	79%

Mentees

- “When we started we didn’t know how to face older people, who know more than us. But now [we know that] they’re just older and know a bit more than we do and we can learn from that...This has changed our lives.”
- “I know that I’m worth something and people see me.”
- “This programme has given me the confidence in whatever things I do. I now know I shouldn’t give up on things so easily.”

Teacher and School Principal

- “It is an extraordinary programme that every participant can benefit from a lot. I personally have witnessed positive changes with my students. They have become more confident and more motivated in school.” F. K. Hung, Sir Ellis Kadoorie Secondary School teacher and the Race for Mentors School Coordinator
- “Many of the mentees have become head and deputy head prefects and student leaders. Their confidence has grown and they have matured beyond my expectations.” Tse Sik-yun, Sir Ellis Kadoorie Secondary School Principal

Impact on mentors

Mentors benefited significantly from participating in Race for Mentors. Most mentors felt better about themselves and found that their relationship with CSFB colleagues improved. They also benefited from a greater understanding of youth, the local community, and the plight of ethnic minorities. Race for Mentors was a valuable human-resource development tool – most employees felt that their listening skills improved, and some felt that their communication and interpersonal skills also improved.

Mentors

- “The students had to get up and give a speech at the end [of the project]... During one of the speeches, I thought there couldn’t be a dry eye in the room. It was quite touching and everybody felt that they’d accomplished something at the end [of the project].” - Alison Gray, Editor - Equity Research, CSFB
- “I never thought of myself as privileged before...[The interaction with mentees] made me realise that I’ve actually got a pretty decent life and have had lots of opportunities.” - Patricia Sindel, Director - Legal & Compliance, CSFB
- “To learn how to talk to them, you also learn how to listen. And that is very important, on a personal level.” - Eric Mak, Assistant Vice President - IT, CSFB

Impact area	% Improvement
Understanding of ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong	95%
Feel-good factor	84%
Insight into local community	79%
Relationship with colleagues at CSFB	58%
Development of employees’ skills	

• Listening	53%
• Communication	47%
• Interpersonal	42%

Impact on the company

An overwhelming majority of employees have an improved sense of pride in CSFB, and an improved perception of CSFB as an employer of choice. These are important factors in attracting and retaining staff.

In addition, the benefits accrued to individual employees - such as improved relationships with colleagues, a better feeling about themselves, and better human-resource skills - are likely to be positive for the company.

Impact area	% Improvement
Pride in CSFB as a firm	95%
Perception of firm as an employer of choice	68%

Leadership at CSFB

“I see the programme as a two-way street: the mentors learned so much themselves, it gives us an opportunity to gain some perspective. Adults can take themselves too seriously and this puts them in a box. When we’re trying to think of new ways to do business, it’s very helpful to get out of the box and change our way of thinking, which is what this programme has done for us.” Eoin O’Shea, Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer Asia Pacific, CSFB

Independent evaluators

“Some of the gains that mentors had as individuals were also gains to the company as a collectivity. As a result of this project, there was better networking among participating staff, staff morale was uplifted, staff understanding of Hong Kong was improved and finally, there was an increase in non-participating staff’s awareness of the company’s community involvement and values.” Dr Harry Hui and Dr Albert Chau, Department of Psychology, University of Hong Kong

Costs

In order to evaluate the net benefit to any company from employee volunteering, it is important to assess the costs as well as the benefits. CSFB’s total contribution included three elements:

- Financial contribution: Project management fees and all incidental expenses associated with the mentoring sessions, workshops and community activities.
- In-kind contribution: The use of its rooms, provision of refreshments, etc.
- Time and skills of employees: Roughly calculated, CSFB employees contributed 360 hours to this project, including mentoring time as well as time taken for co-ordination. About half of this time was accrued during work hours.

Conclusion

Race for Mentors proves clearly that there is a business case for employee volunteering. If carried out strategically, employee volunteering can be a valuable tool to enhance the personal and professional skills of employees, their perception and sense of pride in their firm and their understanding of the ways different people think and operate. These attributes are vital for any business that wishes to attract, retain and develop employees. At the same time, employee volunteering can be an effective way to make a positive impact in the community.

Race for Mentors has shown that tripartite relationships can work effectively and be beneficial to all parties involved. Needed from the onset are: transparency, an agreed commitment to work towards a common goal, an open channel of communication and mutual trust and respect.

To ensure sustainability of employee volunteering programmes, all parties must be convinced that their objectives are met. Measuring and reporting the impact of employee volunteering is an effective way of quantifying to what degree individual parties' objectives have been achieved.

As more companies in Hong Kong look at ways of being involved in the community while continuing to meet business objectives, the quantifiable benefits of employee volunteering make it a persuasive option.

Acknowledgements

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1 For more information, please refer to "Corporate Community Investment: A Handbook for Companies in Hong Kong", Shalini Mahtani,

Community Business, December 2003, available at www.communitybusiness.org.hk

2 For more information, please refer to the forthcoming publication "Employee Volunteering - The Guide", Shalini Mahtani,

Community Business, November 2004, available at www.communitybusiness.org.hk

3 "Youth In Hong Kong A Statistical Profile 2002" Appendix Chapter 2 pp17-24, Commission On Youth.

4 "Sample survey of the characteristics of the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong: main findings" Paper No. CB(2)590/00-01(01) pp3-4,

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs - Paper on Racial Discrimination Year 2000-2001.