

Corporate Volunteerism, the Experience of a Positive Self-Concept, and Organizational
Commitment: Evidence from Two Field Studies

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ABSTRACT

We examine the relationship between employees' participation in corporate-sponsored volunteerism and their organizational commitment. In two different organizational settings the psychological functions served by participating in corporate-sponsored volunteer programs were shown to be differentially predictive of employees' organizational commitment. The more employees volunteered based on functions that enabled them to experience a positive self-concept, the higher was their organizational commitment. Organizational commitment bore little or no relationship, however, with how much employees took part in corporate volunteerism based on functions less related to experiencing a positive self-concept. Study 2 provided further evidence that the experience of a positive self-concept played a key role in accounting for the relationship between the psychological functions served by employees engaging in corporate volunteerism and their organizational commitment. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed, as are limitations and suggestions for future research.

Corporations and their employees have long acknowledged their responsibility for the welfare of the communities in which they operate (e.g., Tichy, McGill, & St. Clair, 1997). One of the most common ways in which companies and employees try to “give back” is through corporate volunteerism, which refers to employees’ participation in corporate-sponsored activities, often on company time, that benefit some entity typically located in the community or broader society in which the organization does business. Corporate volunteer activities are very much on the rise over the past two decades (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007). For example, by the late 1990s corporate volunteering programs were part of the business plan of about 50% of all large organizations, whereas the comparable figure in the early 1990s was about 20% (Points of Light Foundation and Allstate Foundation, 2000). In a study sponsored by the Financial Services Roundtable, employees reported 4.46 million volunteer hours in 1997, whereas that figure grew by more than 200% a mere four years later (Brudney & Gazley, 2006). More recently, Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the U. K. expressed hope that every company in his country would sponsor an employee volunteering program (Bussell & Forbes, 2008). The intended goals of corporate volunteer programs are to improve the physical and/or psychological well-being of the targeted beneficiaries. However, it also is entirely possible that taking part in corporate volunteer activities may influence the *volunteers’* work attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Bartel, 2001), such as their organizational commitment

If corporate volunteerism is on the rise, and if it has the potential to influence volunteers’ work attitudes and behaviors, then it is important to understand the nature of the relationship between employees’ engagement in corporate volunteer activities and their work attitudes and behaviors. On the one hand, it could be argued that taking part in corporate volunteer activity may detract from employees’ productivity and morale. That is, every hour spent on company

time that is not devoted to organizationally-relevant activities may do little for employees' job performance. On the other hand, the results of several recent studies paint a more optimistic picture. The findings suggest that engaging in corporate volunteerism is positively related to several work attitudes reflective of employees' desire to serve the organization's interests, such as their organizational identification (Bartel, 2001) and their organizational commitment (Frank-Alston, 2000; Peterson, 2004).

Whereas there is some evidence that employees' corporate volunteerism and their organizational commitment are positively related, relatively few studies (e.g., Bartel, 2001) have examined the important questions of when and why this is likely to be the case. The present studies are designed to redress this deficiency. Examining the "when and why" questions is theoretically important, in that we can deepen our understanding of both corporate volunteerism and organizational commitment by explaining the relationship between the two. For example, knowing the reason(s) why corporate volunteerism leads to organizational commitment may reveal: (1) other consequences of engaging in volunteerism (besides heightened organizational commitment), and (2) other factors (besides engaging in volunteerism) likely to affect commitment. Knowing when and why corporate volunteerism and employees' organizational commitment are positively related is practically important as well. For example, if engaging in corporate volunteerism has the potential to heighten employees' organizational commitment, then organizations need to consider how to structure or implement their volunteer programs so as to elicit such positive effects in their employees.

Conceptual Foundation of the Present Studies

We hypothesize that engaging in corporate volunteerism creates the potential for employees to experience a positive self-concept, which in turn may lead to higher levels of organizational

commitment. Theory and research on self-processes have suggested that the experience of a positive self-concept consists of a number of elements (Judge, Bono, Erez, Locke, & Thoresen, 2002). For example, Steele (1988) suggests that a positive self-concept subsumes self-esteem (i.e., people's needs to see themselves as competent and good), a sense of identity (i.e., people's desires to maintain self-conceptions of being coherent, unitary, and stable), and a sense of control (i.e., people wanting to see themselves as capable of free choice, and as capable of controlling important outcomes).

How might taking part in corporate-sponsored volunteer activities engender a positive self-concept? For one thing, people may experience high self-esteem, that is, they may see themselves as good, to the extent that they believe that their volunteer activity shines favorably upon them (Grant, 2007). Moreover, their identity self-conceptions (e.g., the desire to see themselves as coherent or unitary) may be validated by taking part in a volunteer activity that is consistent with how they define themselves. Furthermore, they may experience control to the extent that they believe their volunteer activity is making a positive difference in the world (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010).

The experience of a positive self-concept engendered by volunteerism may lead to higher organizational commitment, in turn, for several reasons. First, as set forth by social exchange theory (e.g., Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976), employees may appreciate the organization for providing an experience that enables them to feel good about themselves. To reciprocate the favor, they may become more committed to the organization. Second, as suggested by social identity theory (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), employees may attempt to solidify their experience of feeling good about themselves by seeing themselves as connected to the organization. That is, employees may view the organization's positive identity (e.g., as a

caring institution) as reflecting positively on themselves, to the extent that they psychologically align themselves with the organization.¹

The Functions Served by Volunteering

Our reasoning suggests that engaging in corporate volunteerism *has the potential* to heighten organizational commitment, that is, particularly when engaging in volunteerism enables employees to experience a positive self-concept. An important implication of our reasoning is that to predict employees' organizational commitment it may be less important to know *how much* employees engage in corporate volunteerism. Instead (and herein lies an important premise of the present studies), the extent to which corporate volunteerism induces people to experience a positive self-concept and thereby heighten their organizational commitment depends on their *reasons or underlying motivations* for volunteering. If corporate volunteerism is positively related to organizational commitment by enabling people to experience a positive self-concept, then it stands to reason that the more that they volunteer for reasons related to experiencing a positive self-concept, the higher their organizational commitment is likely to be. This reasoning also suggests that when people are more motivated to engage in volunteerism on the basis of factors that are less related to experiencing a positive self-concept, they should not necessarily exhibit higher organizational commitment.

Functionalist theory generally posits that people may perform the same behaviors (or maintain the same attitudes) for different underlying reasons (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen & Miene, 1998; Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Clary et al. (1998) and others (Snyder & Omoto, 1992) proposed that functionalist theory may be applied to the study of the motivational foundations of volunteer activity. Thus, when people volunteer for reasons that are conceptually linked to experiencing a positive self-concept, the more likely is

volunteering for these particular reasons to be positively related to their organizational commitment. For example, Bartel (2001) found that volunteers may experience an increase in self-esteem from seeing themselves as better off than the parties towards whom their volunteer activities are directed. However, the functionalist view implies that such favorable social comparisons are not the only route through which engaging in volunteerism may give rise to the experience of a positive self-concept.

More specifically, Clary et al. (1998) outlined six functions of volunteerism: values, understanding, social, enhancement, career, and protective. We suggest that four of them (values, understanding, social, and enhancement) are conceptually related to experiencing a positive self-concept. The values function (short for “prosocial values”) allows people to express their values related to altruistic concerns for others through volunteering. This function is derived from the notion that people maintain certain attitudes as a way of expressing values that are important to them. The understanding function aims to provide people with new learning experiences and knowledge attainment through volunteerism, including but not limited to learning more about themselves (Adams, 1980; Jenner, 1982). The social function focuses on the tendency to build relationships through volunteerism that positively contribute to one’s self-concept. The enhancement function posits that people volunteer to have experiences of personal growth and development that promote their sense of self-esteem, identity, and control (Anderson & Moore, 1978; Jenner, 1982). In sum, whereas the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions are conceptually distinct, a common thread running through all of them is that engaging in volunteerism for these reasons may give rise to experiencing a positive self-concept.

In contrast, the other two functions, career and protective, are less conceptually linked to experiencing a positive self-concept. The essence of the career function is that people engage in

volunteer activity for material reasons related to one's own career advancement. For example, people may volunteer to make connections or to build a network that may facilitate their career growth. Such volunteerism is motivated by a desire to help oneself rather than others. The protective function posits that people may engage in volunteerism as a way to distract themselves from their troubles, such as feelings of guilt about being more fortunate than others. At first glance, the protective function may seem related to helping people to maintain their self-esteem. Closer inspection of how the protective function is measured suggests that one of its main mechanisms is distraction. As Steele (1988) has shown, the experience of a positive self-concept does not simply come about by people distracting themselves from threats to how they view themselves.

The above reasoning gives rise to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: There should be a positive relationship between how much employees volunteer for each of the values, understanding, social or enhancement functions and their organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 1b: Relative to the hypothesized relationships in Hypothesis 1a, there is less likely to be a relationship between how much employees volunteer for each of the career or protective functions and their organizational commitment.

STUDY 1

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Study 1 participants consisted of employees from a large global pharmaceutical company headquartered in New York City, although the actual participants came from a branch located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The design of the study was cross-sectional and web-based questionnaires

were used to solicit participant responses. A total of 385 employees took part in the study, a response rate of nearly 40%. Of those employees that completed demographic information (N = 368), 63% were female. They indicated their ages in ranges provided to them, with most employees reporting that they were between the ages of 31-40 (28%) or 41-50 (35%). They identified themselves as White/Caucasian (81%), Asian American (6%), African-American or Black (5%), Hispanic or Latin American (2%), or Other (6%). A majority of employees were well-educated; nearly 85% had graduated from college. Participants received a web-based survey link via e-mail, which enabled them to complete the survey online. The e-mail sent to participants provided a brief synopsis of the study. As an incentive for taking part, participants were told that several of them would be selected at random to receive prizes, including cash gifts or a donation to be given to the charity of their choice. All responses were kept confidential and anonymous.

Measures

The survey included a list of many of the volunteer activities sponsored by their organization (e.g., the United Way Campaign, and the American Heart Association Heart Walk). Participants were then asked, “In the past year, how much have you volunteered for activities sponsored by [*name of organization*]?” Responses were made on a five-point scale, in which the endpoints were “not at all” (1) and “very much” (5). How often participants had engaged in corporate volunteer activity was treated as a control variable in the ensuing analyses. The survey also included the measures of organizational commitment as well as how much engaging in corporate volunteerism was driven by various functions.

Functions of Volunteerism. The functions served by volunteerism were measured with items from the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) developed by Clary et al. (1998). Two to four

questions from each of the six functions of volunteerism were selected for inclusion in the present study. The instructions for this measure were as follows: “The following statements pertain to reasons why people volunteer in general. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement, reflecting upon your reasons, in particular, for volunteering with [name of organization] over the past year.” Sample questions include, “I feel that it is important to help others in need” (values function), “I thought that volunteering would allow me to gain a new perspective on things” (understanding function), “Others with whom I am close place a high value on volunteering” (social function), “Volunteering makes me feel more important” (enhancement function), “I thought that volunteering would be a good distraction from my own problems” (protective function), and “Volunteering can help me advance in the workplace” (career function). The scale endpoints were “strongly disagree (1) and “strongly agree” (5).

Organizational Commitment. Organizational commitment was measured with three items based on questions from the scale developed by Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982). This three-item measure, which has been used in previous research (e.g., Brockner, Spreitzer, Mishra, Hochwarter, Pepper, & Weinberg; 2004) has been found to be highly related ($r = .93$) to the short form of the widely-used Mowday et al. Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Sample items included, “I am willing to put in effort beyond what is expected to keep this organization successful,” and “I am likely to talk up this organization as a great organization to work for.” Responses on the five-point scale ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlations for all measures are reported in Table 1.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We examined the fit of our measurement model via a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) that included the single-item measure of frequency of corporate volunteerism and the following latent factors: organizational commitment (three items), the values function (two items), the social function (four items), the enhancement function (three items), the understanding function (three items), the protective function (three items), and the career function (three items). To assess model fit in this analysis, we used the standards from the literature: standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) values less than .08, incremental fit index (IFI) values greater than .90 and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) values less than .10 (Hu & Bentler, 1995). The CFA showed that our proposed eight-factor measurement model fit the data reasonably well, $\chi^2 (189, N = 383) = 672.83, p < .001, SRMR = .07, IFI = .89, RMSEA = .08$. Moreover, this model fit better than a number of alternative models. Chi-square difference tests were conducted to compare the eight-factor model to a four-factor model (which consisted of frequency of volunteerism, organizational commitment, the four functions presumed to reflect the experience of a positive self-concept, i.e., values, understanding, social and enhancement loaded onto a single factor, and the two functions presumed to be less reflective of experiencing a positive self-concept, i.e., career and protective, loaded onto a single factor; $\Delta \chi^2 (18) = 658.03, p < .001$), a three-factor model (consisting of frequency of volunteerism, organizational commitment, and all six functions loaded onto a single factor; $\Delta \chi^2 (20) = 848.15, p < .001$), and a one-factor model (in which all of the items were loaded onto a single factor), $\Delta \chi^2 (21) = 1582.87, p < .001$.

Tests of Hypotheses

The association between each of the six functions of volunteering and organizational commitment was analyzed. For each function we conducted a regression analysis in which organizational commitment was regressed on the frequency with which participants indicated that they had engaged in corporate volunteerism (as a control variable) and the respective function. As can be seen in Table 2, and in support of Hypothesis 1a, the four volunteerism functions presumed to be related to experiencing a positive self-concept (values, understanding, social, and enhancement) were positively related to organizational commitment. Moreover, Table 2 revealed that the other two volunteerism functions which were expected to be less related to the experience of a positive self-concept (namely, protective and career) were not significantly related to organizational commitment.

We then conducted a series of additional analyses to evaluate whether the positive relationships between the volunteerism functions presumed to be related to experiencing a positive self-concept and organizational commitment were significantly different from the non-significant relationships between the volunteerism functions presumed to be less related to experiencing a positive self-concept and organizational commitment. More specifically, we performed separate analyses pairing a positive self-concept function with a function less related to a positive self-concept. Given that there were four of the former and two of the latter, a total of eight such pairings were analyzed. For each of the eight pairings, we compared the partial correlation between the positive self-concept function and organizational commitment (partialling out the function less related to positive self-concept) to the partial correlation between the function less related to positive self-concept and organizational commitment (partialling out the positive self-concept function).

For example, in one of the analyses we paired the social function (i.e., one of the positive self-

concept functions) with the protective function (i.e., one of the functions that was less related to experiencing a positive self-concept). The partial correlation between how much participants viewed their volunteerism as driven by the social function and organizational commitment was $.18, p < .01$ (that is, partialling out the career function). The partial correlation between how much participants saw their volunteerism as driven by the protective function and their organizational commitment was $-.03, n.s.$ (that is, partialling out the social function). Of greatest importance, the difference between these two correlations was significant, $z = 2.78, p < .01$.

The results for all eight pairings are shown in Table 3. In all instances, the partial correlation between the positive self-concept function and organizational commitment was significant, whereas the partial correlation between the function less related to experiencing a positive self-concept and organizational commitment was not significant. The difference between the former and the latter relationships was significant in six out of the eight pairings. Furthermore, the mean z -score across all eight pairings was $2.33, p < .02$. These findings lend support to Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was designed to build on the promising results of Study 1 in several respects. First, it is important to evaluate the generality of the findings, especially since some of the relationships, while statistically significant, were somewhat weak. Thus, the hypotheses tested in Study 1 were re-examined in an entirely different organization in a different industry, in which the corporate volunteer activities also differed from those provided by the organization examined in Study 1. To the extent that similar results emerge in spite of these differences, we will gain considerable confidence in the reliability and generality of the findings.

Second, we sought additional evidence for the notion that the experience of a positive self-concept accounted for the relationships between how much employees were motivated to engage in corporate volunteerism by values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions and their organizational commitment. More specifically, we evaluated an important assumption of Study 1, namely, that how much participants were motivated by the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions would be positively related to their experience of a positive self-concept. Furthermore, the experience of a positive self-concept, in turn, should lead to higher levels of organizational commitment. If how much people volunteered for the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions leads to their experience of a positive self-concept, and if their experience of a positive self-concept, in turn, leads to their organizational commitment, then the following mediation hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 2: The experience of a positive self-concept will mediate the relationship between how much people volunteer for each of the values, understanding, social and enhancement functions and their organizational commitment.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Study 2 respondents consisted of 212 employees (representing a response rate of approximately 30%) from a global medical technology company headquartered in New Jersey, in which participants also worked. Working with the head of the company's social investing department, we distributed a survey to employees in sixteen sites across the country. As in Study 1, the design of the study was cross-sectional, and web-based questionnaires were used to solicit participant responses. In partnership with the company's social investing department, we sent an electronic survey through an e-mail to all associates within the sixteen sites. Participants were

given three weeks to complete the survey. The survey methodology was identical across the two companies involved in the studies.

Measures

The survey was generally similar to the one used in Study 1 (i.e., participants completed the same measures of frequency of volunteerism, functions, and organizational commitment), with several noteworthy differences to be described next. First, the corporate volunteer activities sponsored by the organization in Study 2 were different from those in Study 1, therefore the survey was changed to reflect this fact. As in Study 1, participants were asked the extent to which they took part in these corporate-sponsored volunteer activities during the past year, prior to making an overall rating of the amount of corporate volunteerism in which they engaged. Second, to test Hypothesis 2, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they experienced a positive conception of themselves in the workplace. In constructing this instrument, we chose items reflecting self-esteem, identity, and control as set forth by Steele (1988). Sample items included, “I feel like I am a competent person at work” (self-esteem), “I feel that I have a clear sense of who I am at work” (identity), and “I feel that I have the opportunity to make a difference at work” (control). Responses to the five-point scales ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

RESULTS

Summary statistics, reliability estimates, and intercorrelations between variables are presented in Table 4.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We examined the fit of our measurement model in Study 2 via a CFA that included the single-item measure of frequency of corporate volunteerism and the following latent factors:

organizational commitment (three items), positive self-concept (six items), the values function (two items), the social function (four items), the enhancement function (three items), the understanding function (three items), the protective function (three items), and the career function (three items). To assess model fit in this analysis, we used the standards described in Study 1. This analysis confirmed that the proposed nine-factor measurement model fit the data reasonably well, $\chi^2(323, N = 209) = 683.78, p < .001, SRMR = .07, IFI = .90, RMSEA = .07$. Moreover, this model fit better than a number of alternative models. Chi-square difference tests were conducted to compare the measurement model to an eight-factor model (which was similar to the nine-factor solution, the one difference being that positive self-concept and organizational commitment were loaded onto a single-factor, given the sizable correlation between the two; $\Delta \chi^2(7) = 80.96, p < .001$), a five-factor model which consisted of frequency of volunteerism, organizational commitment, positive self-concept, the four functions presumed to reflect the experience of a positive self-concept, i.e., values, understanding, social and enhancement were loaded onto a single factor, and the two functions presumed not to reflect the experience of a positive self-concept, i.e., career and protective, were loaded onto a single factor; $\Delta \chi^2(22) = 483.52, p < .001$), a four-factor model (consisting of frequency of volunteerism, organizational commitment, positive self-concept, and all six functions loaded onto a single factor; $\Delta \chi^2(25) = 545.85, p < .001$), and a one-factor model (in which all of the items were loaded onto a single factor), $\Delta \chi^2(28) = 1175.51, p < .001$.

Functions of Volunteerism

The association between the six functions of volunteering and organizational commitment was analyzed to test Hypotheses 1a and 1b. As can be seen in Table 5, Step 1, we replicated virtually all of the results of Study 1: controlling for frequency of volunteerism, how much

participants volunteered for the four functions linked to experiencing a positive self-concept (i.e., the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions) was positively related to their organizational commitment, whereas the effect associated with the career function was unrelated to organizational commitment. The only difference relative to Study 1 was that the protective function was unexpectedly positively related to organizational commitment.

As in Study 1, we conducted a series of analyses to evaluate whether the partial correlations between the positive self-concept functions and organizational commitment (partialling out the functions that were less related to experiencing a positive self-concept) were greater than the partial correlations between the functions less related to experiencing a positive self-concept and organizational commitment (partialling out the positive self-concept functions). The results of the eight pairings are shown in Table 6. With the exception of the pairing of the enhancement and protective functions, the partial correlation between the positive self-concept function and organizational commitment was greater than the partial correlation between the function less related to experiencing a positive self-concept and organizational commitment. Moreover, these differences were significant for five of the seven pairings (often highly so), and the average z -score comparing the two correlations across the eight pairings was 2.58, $p < .01$. In summary, Hypotheses 1a and 1b also were supported in Study 2.

The Experience of Positive Self-Concept as Mediator

Hypothesis 2 posited that the experience of a positive self-concept would mediate the significant relationship between each of the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions and organizational commitment. Consistent with the Baron and Kenny (1986) method of testing for mediation, for each of the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions, we found: (1) a significant relationship between the function and organizational

commitment (already reported in Table 5, Step 1), (2) a significant relationship between the function and the hypothesized mediator, the experience of a positive self-concept (see Table 4), (3) a significant relationship between the hypothesized mediator and organizational commitment (see Table 4), (4) that when organizational commitment was regressed on each function and the experience of a positive self-concept simultaneously, the latter always remained highly significant whereas the function factor dropped considerably in its significance (see Table 5, Step 2), and (5) that Sobel (1982) tests showed that the drop in the function factor mentioned in the preceding step always was significant; for values, $z = 6.41, p < .001$, for understanding, $z = 4.36, p < .001$, for social, $z = 4.28, p < .001$, and for enhancement, $z = 2.26, p < .03$. Finally, when the function and positive self-concept factors were entered simultaneously, the function factor always became non-significant except in the case of values, which remained significant at the .01 level; see Table 5, Step 2. These findings suggest that the experience of a positive self-concept fully mediated the relationship between each of the understanding, social, and enhancement functions and organizational commitment, and that the experience of a positive self-concept partially mediated the relationship between the values function and organizational commitment.

Given that the protective function was unexpectedly related to organizational commitment, we conducted additional analyses to see if the experience of a positive self-concept may have played a mediating role. In fact, the evidence suggests that it did not: when we controlled for the experience of a positive self-concept, the relationship between the protective function and organizational commitment was not significantly lower than when we did not control for the experience of a positive self-concept, Sobel (1982) $z = 1.89, p > .05$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of both studies showed that participants' organizational commitment was differentially related to the *reasons why* participants engaged in corporate volunteerism. Clary et al. (1998) showed that people volunteer for a variety of reasons. We suggested that some of these functions are more conceptually related to experiencing a positive self-concept than others. If the relationship between corporate volunteerism and organizational commitment was based upon how much employees experienced a positive self-concept while volunteering, then: (1) the more that people volunteered for reasons related to experiencing a positive self-concept (i.e., the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions), the higher their organizational commitment should be, and (2) how much people volunteered for reasons less related to experiencing a positive self-concept (i.e., the career and protective functions) should yield little or no positive relationship with their organizational commitment. The results of both studies supported these predictions. Moreover, the mediational results of Study 2 provided additional evidence that experiencing a positive self-concept at work accounted for the relationship between how much employees' volunteerism was motivated by each of the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions and their organizational commitment: the more participants volunteered for values, understanding, social, and enhancement reasons, the more they experienced a positive self-concept at work, which, in turn was associated with higher organizational commitment.

It is important to emphasize that employees were drawn from two different organizations in different industries, and that the volunteer activities that the corporations sponsored were rather different. Furthermore, the proportion of respondents who took part in at least some corporate volunteerism was considerably lower in the second study (45%) than in the first study (77%). Thus, the fact that the hypotheses examined in both studies (Hypotheses 1a and 1b) yielded

consistent results despite these and other differences bodes well for the reliability and generalizability of the findings.²

Theoretical Implications

Corporate Volunteerism. The present studies provide several important contributions to the corporate volunteerism literature. First, with a few exceptions (e.g., Bartel, 2001) there has been a paucity of theoretically-grounded studies examining the relationship between employees' participation in corporate volunteer activities and their work attitudes and behaviors. Drawing on the functionalist approach to volunteer behavior, the present studies provide insight into when and why engaging in corporate volunteerism is positively related to organizational commitment. The more people volunteer for reasons that enable them to experience a positive self-concept, the higher their organizational commitment. Furthermore, the mediational analyses conducted in Study 2 provide further evidence to support this reasoning.

The findings of the earlier study by Bartel (2001) also suggest that the experience of a positive self-concept accounted for the positive relationship between engaging in corporate volunteerism and employees' support for their organizations. Bartel suggested that when employees engage in corporate volunteerism their self-esteem may benefit from favorable social comparisons between themselves and the parties to whom the volunteer activities are directed. The present studies suggest that corporate volunteerism may give rise to the experience of a positive self-concept through a variety of mechanisms other than esteem-enhancement engendered by favorable social comparisons. As the functionalist approach and the present findings suggest, engaging in corporate volunteerism for certain reasons may promote a sense of self-esteem, identity, or control, which, in turn is positively related to their organizational commitment.

The present findings also bear some similarities to the recent results of Grant et al. (2008), who found that the extent to which employees volunteer for programs that are aimed at helping fellow employees (rather than external beneficiaries) is positively related to their organizational commitment. Moreover, the mediating variables in the Grant et al. study (the extent to which people see themselves and their organizations as “caring”) are conceptually analogous to the mediator in the present studies (e.g., the experience of a positive self-concept). However, the present results extend those of Grant et al. in at least two noteworthy respects. First, the present findings suggest that it is not simply the *amount or frequency of* volunteerism that is predictive of employees’ organizational commitment. It also is important to take into account people’s motives for engaging in volunteerism. Controlling for frequency of volunteerism, we found in both studies that: (1) the more people engage in corporate volunteerism for reasons that enable them to experience a positive self-concept, the higher was their organizational commitment, and in contrast, (2) engaging in corporate volunteerism for reasons less related to the experience of a positive self-concept was less apt to be positively related to their organizational commitment. Thus, it is not simply the quantity of volunteerism that is significantly related to organizational commitment; it is the qualitative nature of it that matters. Second, we demonstrate that engaging in corporate volunteerism is associated with heightened organizational commitment when the beneficiaries of the volunteerism are external rather than internal to the organization, which is the more traditional terrain in corporate volunteer programs. Put differently, the present results lend considerable generalizability to the Grant et al. findings.

Functions of Volunteerism. The present findings also contribute to theory and research on the functions of volunteerism. In particular, we offer at least one meaningful way to differentiate between the various functions, namely, the extent to which they induce people to experience a

positive self-concept by engaging in volunteerism. Whereas the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions are conceptually distinct, how much participants were motivated by them always was positively related to their experience of a positive self-concept. Moreover, the career and protective functions, while distinct from each other, also have in common the fact that how much participants were motivated by them was not related to their experience of a positive self-concept. Furthermore, volunteerism accompanied more by the experience of a positive self-concept had a different effect (i.e., it led to higher organizational commitment) than did volunteerism that was unaccompanied by the experience of a positive self-concept. Thus, the present research provides further insight into ways in which the various functions of volunteerism are similar as well as distinct.

Organizational Commitment. Given the important consequences of organizational commitment, it behooves management scholars to delineate its antecedents as well as the mechanism(s) through which the antecedents influence organizational commitment. The present findings suggest that one such mechanism is the experience of a positive self-concept. If so, then other ways in which organizations facilitate employees' experience of a positive self-concept (apart from sponsoring volunteer activities) also should heighten employees' organizational commitment. For example, the relational theory of procedural justice (Tyler & Lind, 1992) posits that employees are likely to experience a heightened sense of self-esteem or a clearer sense of identity (and also to be more organizationally committed) when they are treated with higher procedural fairness by authorities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

In calling attention to the limitations of the present studies, we also are suggesting some avenues for further research. First, the internal validity of the various findings is reduced by the

cross-sectional nature of the studies. In response to this concern, it is somewhat reassuring that both studies showed that the functions of volunteerism were *differentially* predictive of organizational commitment, as specified by our conceptual foundation. Moreover, the mediation analyses in Study 2 provided further support for our conceptual foundation. Of course, it could be argued that there are other ways to explain the interrelationships we found between people's functions of volunteerism, the experience of a positive self-concept, and organizational commitment. For example, perhaps those who feel good about themselves at work volunteer for reasons that enable them to experience a positive self-concept, which in turn leads to their organizational commitment. Put differently, perhaps the functions of volunteerism mediated the relationship between the experience of a positive self-concept and participants' organizational commitment. Another alternative explanation is that organizational commitment may have led participants to volunteer for certain reasons (e.g., the values, understanding, social or enhancement functions), which in turn led them to experience a positive self-concept. In other words, perhaps the functions of volunteerism mediated the relationship between organizational commitment and employees' experience of a positive self-concept.

To evaluate these alternative interrelationships, we conducted mediation analyses similar in form to the one conducted to test Hypothesis 2. As Baron and Kenny (1986) have suggested, evidence for mediation is present when the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is significantly reduced when the mediator is controlled, relative to when it is not (e.g., as indicated by the results of the Sobel (1982) test). In testing Hypothesis 2, we found that when controlling for the hypothesized mediator (the experience of a positive self-concept), the relationship between each of the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions and organizational commitment was significantly reduced, relative to when the hypothesized

mediator was not controlled. Moreover, in three out of four instances (all but the values function), the effect of the independent variable became non-significant, suggesting complete mediation.

In testing one of the alternative explanations, namely, that the various functions (values, understanding, social, and enhancement) mediated the relationship between the experience of a positive self-concept and organizational commitment, we found that the Sobel test was non-significant in all instances except for the values function. Even for the values function, however, the results evaluating the alternative pathway were less compelling than those shown in testing Hypothesis 2. More specifically, the significant Sobel result for the values function in testing this alternative hypothesis ($z = 3.21$) was considerably lower than the Sobel result when we evaluated the prediction set forth in Hypothesis 2 ($z = 6.41$). Moreover, the mediation evidence for this alternative pathway was only partial, in that the effect of the independent variable (the experience of a positive self-concept) on the dependent variable (organizational commitment) remained highly significant ($p < .001$) even when the hypothesized mediator (the values function) was controlled.

In testing the other alternative possibility (that the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions mediated the relationship between organizational commitment and the experience of a positive self-concept), we found that the Sobel result was non-significant in two instances (for the enhancement and understanding functions) and significant in the other two instances (for the values and social functions). Once again, however, these significant Sobel test results for the values and social functions (z s = 3.60 and 2.31, respectively) were less pronounced than those found when we evaluated the interrelationships set forth in Hypothesis 2, in which the corresponding Sobel results had z -scores of 6.41 and 4.28 for the values and social functions,

respectively. Moreover, the mediation evidence for this particular alternative pathway also was only partial, in that in the analyses involving the values and social functions, respectively, the effect of the independent variable (organizational commitment) on the dependent variable (the experience of a positive self-concept) remained significant ($p < .001$ and .XX for the values and social functions, respectively) when the hypothesized mediator (the values and social functions) was controlled.

In summary, the relationships set forth in Hypothesis 2, that volunteering for each of the values, understanding, social, and enhancement functions led to the experience of a positive self-concept, which, in turn led to organizational commitment, received strong and consistent support; the results supported the mediation prediction set forth in Hypothesis 2 in all four instances. The alternative mediational pathways either were found to be non-significant, or, in those instances in which they were significant, less pronounced than the mediating effect posited in Hypothesis 2. Whereas further research is needed (with more internally valid research designs), the present findings suggest that the interrelationships between the functions of volunteerism, the experience of a positive self-concept, and organizational commitment came about for the reasons underlying Hypothesis 2.

A second potential problem is common methods bias; all of the variables were measured in the same way (through a survey), and at roughly the same point in time. Once again, it is impossible to discount this issue entirely. However, the nature of the findings suggests that they are not simply an artifact of common methods bias. More specifically, *differences in relationships between constructs emerged* in spite of the fact that all of them were measured in the same way. For example, in both studies how much participants reported volunteering for certain functions (e.g., values) was significantly related to their organizational commitment,

whereas how much they reported volunteering for other functions (e.g., career) was less likely to be positively related to their organizational commitment . Nevertheless, future research may extend the present findings by examining other measures of organizational commitment that are assessed in ways other than how its predictor variables are assessed (e.g., Bartel, 2001).

Finally, future research also may examine whether the context in which the volunteering takes place makes a difference. A major theme to emerge from the present findings is that volunteerism that leads people to experience a positive self-concept is especially likely to engender higher levels of organizational commitment. Thus, future research could triangulate on this theme in other ways. For example, if people are more likely to experience a positive self-concept for having committed their time than for having made a financial contribution then it may be, for example, that taking part in a charity walk will be more likely than contributing to a United Way campaign to lead to higher organizational commitment. Moreover, the extent to which people feel pressured to volunteer, the less likely they are to experience the control component of the experience of a positive self-concept. Hence, “volunteering” done under conditions of feeling coerced may be less likely to bring about higher organizational commitment (e.g., Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999).

Practical Implications

The present findings suggest that to build organizational commitment by sponsoring corporate volunteerism, organizations may need to do more than create opportunities for their employees to take part in volunteer programs. Volunteer efforts need to be conducted in ways that promote participants’ experience of a positive self-concept. Whereas the results associated with the functions of volunteerism suggest that some employees may be more dispositionally inclined than others to engage in volunteerism for reasons that promote a positive self-concept, situational

factors also may affect how much people experience a positive self-concept when engaging in corporate volunteerism. Moreover, these situational factors may be influenced by the managers of the sponsoring organizations.

For example, in communicating the positive aspects of taking part in corporate volunteer activities, organizational authorities may wish to highlight certain benefits (e.g., the importance of contributing to a cause that employees deeply believe in), and to give less emphasis to other benefits (e.g., to make connections that will help them to climb the corporate ladder).

Furthermore, once employees have agreed to take part in a certain volunteer activity, its self-enhancing benefits should be made salient on a periodic basis, perhaps through feedback reports from the beneficiaries that show volunteers the progress they have made while also reminding them of the importance of the underlying mission towards which their volunteer efforts are being directed (Grant et al., 2007).

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Footnotes

1. The dependent variable in the present studies, organizational commitment, has itself been the subject of considerable theory and research. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) and many others have shown that organizational commitment shapes a number of important work attitudes and behaviors, including job satisfaction, work motivation, and job performance. Moreover, researchers have distinguished between different forms of commitment, such as affective, continuance, and normative (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Affective commitment refers to people being committed because they *want* to be. With continuance commitment, people are committed because they *have* to be. And, in the case of normative commitment, people are committed because they believe that they *ought* to be. Our focus is on affective commitment, for several reasons. First, because of its centrality to the commitment literature, we draw on Mowday et al.'s (1982) conception and measurement of organizational commitment, which is most closely related to affective commitment in the Allen and Meyer (1996) framework. Indeed, recent research has recently questioned whether the normative and continuance bases of commitment qualify as *organizational* commitment, in that they are directed towards specific behaviors rather than towards the organization (Solinger, van Olffen, & Roe, 2008). Second, the mechanism that we posit to account for the hypothesized positive relationship between corporate volunteerism and organizational commitment is most closely related to affective commitment. That is, engaging in corporate volunteerism is likely to elicit psychological experiences that make people want to be committed, rather than make them feel that they have to be committed or that they ought to be committed.

2. Whereas the relationships between the various functions of volunteering and organizational

commitment were generally consistent across studies, there were some differences in the magnitude of the relationships, in particular, the significant effects were generally stronger in Study 2 than in Study 1. For example, the correlation between the values function and commitment was .19 in Study 1 and .55 in Study 2. One explanation may emanate from the fact that there was a much higher level of volunteerism among the participants in Study 1 (in the sense that 77% of the people we polled reported taking part in at least some CV activity) than in Study 2 (in which the percentage was only 45%). That is, participants in Study 1 may have believed that there was more of a strong norm to volunteer than was the case for participants in Study 2. Based on Mischel's (1973) conception of "strong" versus "weak" situations, individual difference variables (such as the Functions of Volunteerism measure in the present studies) are likely to be less consequential in strong situations, in which perceived situational cues constrain people's beliefs and behaviors. If participants felt more situationally compelled to do at least some volunteering in Study 1 than in Study 2, then individual differences related to their reasons for volunteering may have become somewhat less consequential, thereby weakening the results found in Study 1 relative to those found in Study 2. Of course, such a speculation awaits further research.