

# Costs and benefits of involving corporate volunteers in NPOs

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**Abstract (135 words)**

In this paper, we develop a systematic approach to understanding the costs and benefits of corporate volunteering for nonprofit organizations (NPOs) involved in NPO–business collaboration. We focus on the NPO perspective in this relationship and point to the complexity of the relationships through interactions between both individuals and organizations. Using a qualitative research design based on 39 interviews with NPO managers responsible for corporate volunteer programs in the Netherlands and Belgium, we argue that these programs should be viewed according to four distinct interactions: NPO–company, NPO employee–corporate volunteer, NPO–corporate volunteer, and NPO employee–company interaction. Each interaction offers a unique opportunity for creating value. We conclude by explaining the costs and benefits emerging as the actors involved interact along this theoretical lens.

## **Introduction (528 words)**

In recent years, interest in business–nonprofit collaborations has been increasing rapidly. This increase is largely in response to a shift in the funding patterns of nonprofit organizations (NPOs). Although NPOs in many countries have traditionally relied predominantly upon public subsidies and individual donors, they are now increasingly depending upon donations from corporations (Brammer & Millington, 2003; Foster & Meinhard, 2005; Salamon 1997). Despite concerns raised by NPOs about the “partnership craze” among businesses (McAdoo, 2001, p. 40), many are increasingly engaging in such collaborations. Scholars have largely neglected the NPO perspective on such partnerships, however, prompting Harris (2012) to call for the development of a substantial subfield of NPO research focused on the relationships between the two sectors.

This paper focuses specifically on corporate volunteering (also known as employee volunteering or employer-sponsored volunteering) as a particular case of NPO–business collaboration. In general, corporate volunteering is characterized by volunteering that is encouraged (or even facilitated) by the organization in which an individual is employed (Brewis, 2004). It usually involves commercial companies providing the time and/or expertise of its employees to NPOs. Despite the variety of such programs, corporate volunteering is always conducted on behalf of the employer, and it is always related to the firm in some way. Beneficiary NPOs can use corporate volunteering projects as a means to “build more and deeper relationships with the companies, which may yield future benefits” (Liu & Ko, 2011: 256).

Corporate volunteering has recently become the most common way for companies to engage in collaboration with NPOs. For example, in Canada, most (large multinational) companies send out their employees to volunteer in NPOs (Basil et al., 2009). Corporate volunteering programs have been described as non-monetary transactions that enhance donor commitment

and attachment toward the NPOs involved (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a). The relationship between the company and the NPO is therefore stronger than it would have been if the transaction had simply involved a monetary donation. These effects are unique to corporate volunteering, as it involves both organizational and personal interaction. In this article, we focus on the aspect of both organizational and personal interaction, demonstrating that the relationships between the various actors generate both costs and benefits. In other words, these relationships can create value (as long as the benefits exceed the costs). As such, we examine value creation for NPOs that have this unique set of relationships: an organizational relationship, a personal relationship (e.g., between the employees of the two organizations), a host relationship (e.g., the NPO and the corporate volunteer), and an external relationship (e.g., the NPO employee and company).

The research follows an inductive approach, using qualitative data from 39 semi-structured interviews with NPO managers. It contributes to the literature in two important ways: 1) it provides a new theoretical lens (i.e., 4 distinct interactions) for examining value creation between NPOs and companies when involving corporate volunteers, and 2) it provides an overview of the costs and benefits associated with corporate volunteering for NPOs and their employees.

This paper opens with an explanation of the interactions, culminating in an analytic framework that provides a theoretical lens for studying value creation through personal and organizational interaction. Following a discussion of the results, the paper concludes by outlining implications for NPO managers and possible directions for future research.

### **Value creation through exchange relationships (554 words)**

Most research on NPO–business collaborations focus on the advocacy role of NPOs, resulting in a stakeholder-dialogue perspective as the dominant discourse concerning NPO–business relations (Laasonen et al., 2012). An alternative perspective on NPO–business collaboration

involves service-orientated collaboration, which refers to cooperation focusing on the delivery of services by the NPO. These approaches presume that interaction between actors results in the creation of value (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a; 2012b), mostly from the company perspective. For example, collaborations between NPOs and companies can generate corporate benefits in the area of human resource management (Caliguiri et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2011; Pelozo & Hassay, 2006), marketing (Ellen et al., 2000), and overall profit (Porter and Kramer, 2006), in addition to an array of benefits for the individual corporate volunteer (Gilder et al. 2005). The literature nevertheless offers very little research from the NPO perspective in this regard. In this paper, we examine value creation, as it is the central justification for NPO–business collaborations (Austin, 2010). Value creation is simply the sum of benefits minus the costs (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b).

Benefits are seen as the positive effects (both tangible and intangible) of an exchange relationship. Costs are defined in terms of negative effects or expenses (also tangible and intangible) that occur while trying to obtain the benefits (e.g., operational expenses or reputational risk). As argues by Austin and Seitanidi (2012a, p. 19), “Although many of the asserted benefits (and costs) of collaboration rest on strong hypotheses, there is a need for additional empirical research...” At the partnership level, such asserted benefits and costs can be divided into four main categories of value creation: association, transferred resource, interaction, and synergistic value (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a). Little research has been conducted however, on the value that such partnerships can create for the NPO as a partner.

One exception is a study of Schiller and Almog-Bar (2013), in which the authors demonstrate that the NPO perspective can reveal aspects that tend to be overlooked from the perspectives of corporations or partnerships perspective, including different types of value creation and issues related to the needs, culture, and character of NPOs (p. 17). Schiller and Almog-Bar nevertheless fail to specify much about the content of this value creation for NPOs,

particularly with regard to corporate volunteers (Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). Other scholars have theorized about the implications of corporate involvement for participation in volunteering (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009), has although they have thus far neglected the consequences for the organization and its employees.

In the following sections, we discuss four different interactions existing within corporate volunteering programs that result in value creation for NPOs. The first relationship involves an organizational interaction as often described in partnership literature. The second involves an interaction between the corporate volunteer and the NPO, and the third involves the interaction between the NPO employee and the corporate volunteer through mutual participation in joint projects. The final relationship involves an interaction between the NPO employee and the company, specifically with regard to those coordinating and establishing relationships with the company. The following discussion provides a foundation for our framework, which we subsequently use to examine value creation through corporate volunteering programs.

### **Toward a systematic approach (theoretical lens) (869 words)**

The traditional relationship between NPOs and commercial companies has been well described in literature. For example, Austin (2000; Austin & Seitanidi; 2012a; 2012b) proposes a continuum of collaboration to describe such interactions according to the degree and forms of associational activity. Other scholars describe these relationships in relatively general terms. Lui and Ko (2011) argue that collaboration can differentiate between two extreme types of corporate involvement: those based on conventional involvement and those based on social alliances (for additional categorizations of collaboration types, see e.g., Austin, 2000, and the overviews by Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a; 2012b). The conventional type of involvement is easy to manage, as it largely involves philanthropic giving. In contrast, social alliances require far more time, effort, and involvement on the part of the NPO.

Although these types of collaboration appear distinct in theory, the social-alliance type of delivery rarely occurs in practice (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a; 2012b; Liu & Ko, 2011), and its far-reaching managerial consequences can even make it undesirable (Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013).

Although corporate volunteering can be applied at any stage of collaboration (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a; 2012b), we argue that the introduction of corporate volunteering complicates the relationship for both organizations (and particularly for the NPO), as it introduces individual interaction into a traditional organizational relationship. Corporate volunteering programs often evolve into highly structured collaborative projects, including specific objectives, schedules, and expectations for the exchange of assets (Austin, 2000; Austin & Elias, 2001; Austin, et al., 2004). The benefits emerging from these exchanges result in value creation. Schiller and Almog-Bar (2013) categorize the benefits of such programs for NPOs according to three main areas: field (i.e., the company), skills (i.e., of the corporate volunteers) and teams (i.e., corporate volunteers). Although some authors implicitly consider differences associated with interaction at these different levels, they tend to ignore the different outcomes that occur at different levels. Accordingly, they identify costs in terms of time, energy, and money, while neglecting any potential costs that might be specific to particular individual relationships.

In this paper, we use the term “organizational relationship” to refer to interaction at the organizational level. A second type of relationship is what we identify as a “host relationship,” as the NPO serves as a host organization for the corporate volunteer. Interestingly, although research has shown that corporate volunteers can realize personal gain through engagement in corporate volunteering (Gilder et al., 2005), few scholars explain how value is created for the NPO through its interaction with the corporate volunteer. Furthermore, although the literature does provide insight into the traditional relationship between the

volunteer and the NPO, the relationship between the NPO and the corporate volunteer deserves more attention (Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013), as it might add another dimension to the traditionally emphasized exchange relationship between NPOs and companies. For example, corporate volunteers have particular skills that are not always available with regular volunteers (Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). This suggests that such relationships create a particular type of value. Mapping the costs and benefits of involving particular types of volunteers can help organizations to assign corporate volunteers to specific tasks in which the benefits exceed the costs (Graff, 2006). This could help NPOs to involve corporate volunteers strategically to the benefit of the organization.

The interaction between the NPO employee and the company and between the NPO and the corporate volunteer also creates unique value that cannot be captured through research at the organizational level (see e.g., Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). Something happens between the two actors who are actually doing the projects together, as they interact and share experiences, knowledge, and skills. Although the literature contains many suggestions concerning the relationship between paid staff and volunteers (for example see Brudney and Gazley, 2002; Netting et al., 2004), it neglects the relationship between various groups of volunteers and the relationship between paid staff and new groups of volunteers. In this paper, we see NPO employees as those people that are working for the NPO on a regular basis with some sort of contract (either economically or psychologically) as they (as part of the NPO) welcome a new group of people (e.g. the corporate volunteers) within their organization. In this respect, it does not matter if the employees are paid or volunteers. We identify the relationship between NPO employees and corporate volunteers as a “personal relationship.” We further argue that NPO employees also experience value creation when they interact with companies (i.e., organizations). This applies particularly to employees who are responsible for external relationships with companies. For example, NPO employees can gain new insight into how to



manage an organization when they see how companies are managed. In our analysis, we therefore consider this interaction, which we identify as “outward-focused interaction.”

Having provided a short background on potential interactions between actors within corporate volunteer programs, we propose a new theoretical lens with which to investigate value creation. In addition to the traditional view of collaborations between NPOs and commercial companies (i.e., the organizational relationship), we introduce the aspect of individual involvement into a traditional organizational relationship. In other words, we introduce the involvement of a third party into a traditional NPO–volunteer relationship (i.e., the host relationship). We also address the interaction between the employees of both organizations (i.e., personal interaction), as well as the interaction between the NPO employee and the company (i.e., outward-focused). In the remaining sections of this paper, we use this framework as a mechanism with which to explore various types of value creation (see Figure 1).

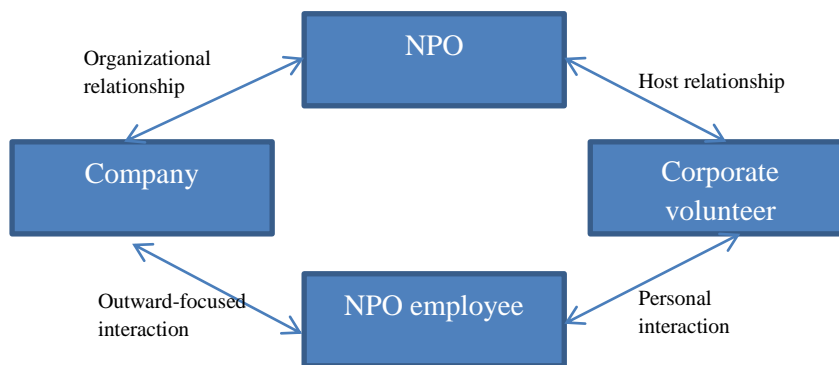


Figure 1: The interactions that lead to value creation

## Methods (481 words)

This exploratory study is based on an inductive, qualitative approach (Neuman 1994), as its primary purpose is to characterize and map a phenomenon that yet to be described sufficiently in literature. Qualitative research is an appropriate strategy for gaining insight into situations about which knowledge is limited knowledge or for which further explanation is needed

(Bryman 2004; Lincoln & Denzin 2005). Following the recommendations of Strauss (1987), we began by becoming familiar with existing knowledge before gathering empirical data. Throughout the study, the researchers constantly returned to the literature in order to build a new theoretical framework.

This paper draws upon data gathered from 39 interviews with professionals in 39 NPOs in the Netherlands and Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium). The sample is purposive, based on the selection of information-rich cases through maximum-variation sampling and snowball sampling. The sample includes variation in social theme and type of organizational-funding tradition, as well as with regard to experience with corporate volunteering projects.

The sampling method was intended to generate a wide description of contemporary trends in the field. Most of the respondents were volunteer coordinators and program managers in NPOs, with responsibility for corporate volunteering programs. A minority of the respondents were employees of intermediary NPOs (i.e., matchmaking organizations aimed at connecting companies and NPOs and facilitating their collaboration). Table 1 provides an overview of the organizations in the sample.

	Education & youth development	Nature conservation & international aid	Field development (intermediary organizations)	Social services & community development
<b>Publicly funded</b>	3	0 <sup>2</sup>	1	14
<b>Privately funded</b>	6	4	7	4

*Table 1: Sample grid*

The interviews were based on open-ended questions and a semi-structured interview method, using an interview guide as a tracking tool (Babbie, 2008). We identified three potentially relevant general themes: 1) partner selection (i.e., with whom and why), 2) value creation

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<sup>2</sup> Typically these type of organizations are not publicly funded which made it hard to include these in this research.

through the corporate volunteer program, and 3) management implications (i.e., how corporate volunteers are managed). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. They form the basis of our analysis, which was conducted by two authors to ensure reliable results. The results of the analysis were discussed among all of the authors.

Coding software was used to screen and sort the textual material before interpreting the data. The software provided a structured mechanism for identifying the relevant text phrases for detailed interpretation (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003).

We used a grounded-theory approach to the analysis, meaning that the analysis was not intended to produce objectified meanings, but to trace the more subjective meanings raised by the actors involved (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The aim of this approach is to develop explanatory theory (Tummers & Karsten, 2012). The analysis generated the theoretical framework presented in the previous section which allows us to structure the results. The themes discussed in this paper “are grounded in the data and therefore do justice to the social reality” (Tummers & Karsten, 2012, p. 69). All relevant quotations were translated and verified by the authors.

## **Results (1915 words total)**

### **The organizational relationship**

The current decrease in public funding and the rapid changes way in public policy have made it necessary for NPOs to broaden their resource portfolios and to seek new ways of coping with these changes. For this reason, NPOs are looking for new opportunities to sustain the current quantity and quality of their services. They are becoming increasingly engaged in multiple types of within-sector or cross-sector collaborative projects (e.g., with other NPOs, governmental organizations, and companies).

The organizational relationship involved in corporate volunteering seems apparently increases the accessibility of the overall pool of volunteers. It enables NPOs to use companies as a mechanism with which to enhance their ability to recruit and maintain volunteers (see also the concept of “recruitability” in Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009). Companies apparently serve as a sort of fishing pond from which NPOs can extract “fish” (i.e., volunteers). As stated by one interviewee, “*by collaborating with these large companies, we [the NPO] were able to build a large network of potential volunteers...*” (NPO5).

Many NPOs tend to see companies as high profit-margin partners with many (or even unlimited) resources. For many organizations, NPO–business collaboration begins with corporate volunteering, with other forms of corporate involvement being added as the relationship between the organizations develops. Based on the information we obtained the interviews, in addition to the involvement of volunteers, companies donate both financial and non-financial resources: “*This way we can bring aboard a lot of additional money, manpower, and means and allocate it to various projects*” (NPO2). Partner companies can also introduce NPOs to groups, organizations, and causes (e.g., consumers and other commercial companies). As companies and NPOs communicate their joint efforts, NPOs use their association with these companies to present themselves more favorably to other stakeholders (see also Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b). Such associations with commercial companies can enhance credibility and legitimacy among other potential funders (e.g., governmental organizations and private foundations). As a result, “*...companies are [seen as] the springboard toward new [individual] donors*” (NPO14).

Collaborations with commercial companies can also help NPOs to enhance their own reputations. As noted by one interviewee, “*we increased our brand awareness*” (NPO2). Particularly for advocacy organizations, the most important reason for collaborating with

commercial companies involves the perception that “*the company is a platform through which we can reach a large group of people ... who are telling others about the importance of the [target group]*” (NPO6). In this respect, NPO–business collaboration is used to create additional awareness regarding the social issue and the organization.

Nevertheless, interviewees from NPOs indicated that involving companies in their routines also presented several challenges and potentially less favorable consequences. Most of our respondents indicated that NPO–business collaboration in general and, more specifically, corporate volunteering requires considerable time and effort to organize repeatedly. As explained by the interviewees, it demands a great deal of relationship management. Most commercial companies would prefer to engage without entering any long-term commitment. They can therefore be characterized as high-risk investors as they bring along high uncertainty for the NPO (Jones, 2007).

The interviewees also reported that they additional costs might be incurred because not every company is willing to compensate organizations for expenses associated with corporate volunteer projects. Some companies simply wish to donate their time. The organization and implementation of such projects thus become expenses for the NPOs. For example, Company X would like to support NPO Y by sending of 10 of their employees to paint the common area in an intramural facility. In this case, the NPO would incur additional expenses for purchasing the paint, as well as for providing lunch, snacks, and beverages for the corporate volunteers, in order to ensure that they have a good time, in the hope of building a longer and broader relationship with the company.

### **The host relationship**

The host relationship consists of the relationship between the NPO and the corporate volunteer as the corporate volunteer creates a specific type of value for the organization. As argued by several interviewees, involving corporate volunteers can socialize corporate

employees with volunteering to a certain extent, in addition to introducing them to the cause and the organization. This could eventually attract new volunteers on a more traditional basis. These observations are consistent with previous research on determinants of volunteer participation (see e.g., Musick and Wilson, 2008), which demonstrates that socialization and familiarization can lead to volunteer participation. According to the interviewees, several of their corporate volunteers had indeed continued their involvement, in order to “... *find out the activities so that they [corporate volunteers] can connect to us [NPO] and they can help the organization on a more private level*” (NPO9). They expressed a desire to be involved “*not just as corporate volunteers, but as regular volunteers*” (NPO10).

Organizations that work directly with recipients are able to see the direct effects of corporate volunteers on their service delivery. Information obtained from the interviews suggests that some NPOs simply use corporate volunteers as an addition (“... *an additional gift ...*” NPO11) to the services they already provide, implying that corporate volunteers increase the quantity and quality of the services that the NPOs provide. For example, corporate volunteers can be scheduled at times that regular staff members would not be able to provide a given service. Their efforts are in addition to the regular programs of the NPOs, “... *because we [the NPO] usually do not offer any activities on weekends*” (NPO11). Corporate volunteers also allow NPOs to increase the quality of their services, as they increase the number of volunteers available to support the recipients. For example, corporate can increase the ratio of caregivers to beneficiaries, simply by supporting the regular staff. Nonetheless, some NPOs also feel pressured to involve corporate volunteers in maintaining the quality of their services in the aftermath of recent severe budget cuts. “*If we want to continue delivering services to our clients, it [involving corporate volunteers] is a necessity*” (NPO1).

Representatives of other NPOs explained that their organizational models are heavily dependent upon the input of volunteers. As some interviewees reported that that their

organizations work exclusively with corporate volunteers. Moreover, because they are fully funded through private sources, they are dependent upon support from commercial companies. The entire business models of these NPOs are thus based upon collaboration with commercial companies.

Organizations also learn from what corporate volunteers bring along with them. The interaction enables NPOs to reflect upon and renew their current policies and practices. In the short term, corporate volunteers can use their capabilities to improve some of the systems that are in place within the NPO. In the longer term, they also provide reflection on the functioning of the NPO and on ways of achieving internal improvements. As noted by one interviewee, “*We didn’t really care that our receptionist did not have the proper customer-service orientation. The [flaws in] culture of our organization became apparent when we got involved with third parties [companies] ... [Now] we say, ‘Look guys, we really can’t do that anymore’*” (NPO13).

The involvement of corporate volunteers is also accompanied by potential risks for NPOs. Traditionally, NPOs have tended to seek specific knowledge, skills, and expertise by consulting with external organizations or by recruiting employees. Through corporate volunteering projects, NPOs attempt to acquire such services directly from companies at no cost, or at least at a considerable discount. The skills, knowledge, and expertise that the NPO seeks do not necessarily correspond to the primary capabilities of the company or the corporate volunteers. For example, corporate volunteering projects involving gardening, maintenance, or similar activities are usually carried out by companies that are not specialized in these sectors, and not every volunteer has gardening skills. Similarly, not every volunteer has the skills needed for working with people with mental or physical challenges. The use of corporate volunteers who lack the necessary capabilities can thus decrease the quality of the services provided by the NPO. For example, according to one interviewee, “*Some of our*

*employees indicate that [involving corporate volunteers] might be too intense for our recipients; they just need peace and quiet sometimes ...” (NPO4).*

### **Outward-focused interaction**

When NPO employees interact with companies, they are often exposed to alternative approaches to management, and this can help them to develop new ideas for their own organizations. For example, several interviewees indicated that, through their interactions with partner companies, NPO employees have gained new insight into ways of organizing various matters more effectively. As illustrated by one interviewee, *“Due to the changing dynamics in our healthcare sector [in the Netherlands], we are seeing a need for more professionalization, for different behavior. In the past, this did not make much of a difference to our organization, but now it’s a necessity. We [NPO employees] have gradually come to realize this [through corporate involvement]” (NPO13).*

At the same time, some of the impressions that NPO employees receive about current HR practices through their interactions with commercial companies might not have a positive influence. Although NPO employees presumably have some sort of impression of corporate employees upfront, this interaction can also show them the differences between the corporate and non-profit world. When corporate volunteers arrive at NPOs in company cars, wearing suits and ties, driving company cars, the employees of the NPO are likely to form an impression of the salaries earned by the corporate volunteers, possibly generating resentment. In general, NPO employees (in this case, paid staff members) earn less than people who are employed in the commercial sector, and their employment benefits tend to be less favorable. Moreover, the involvement of a large number of temporary volunteers can sometimes impose a burden on NPO employees: *“The [operational employees]... don’t always have the time for it [the corporate volunteer projects], particularly given the increasing demand from*



*companies wanting to be involved*' (NPO7). Such situations might tend to dampen the job satisfaction of NPO employees.

### **Personal interaction**

The interaction between NPO employees and corporate volunteers is interesting, as it involves employees who come from environments characterized by different institutional logics. Such interactions have several unique features that could be of interest to managers of both NPOs and commercial companies. First, through this personal interaction, it appears that NPO employees can *"...learn from the people from the companies..."* (NPO11). Moreover, it can enhance *"employee pride ...,"* and *"...collaboration with external parties results in personal growth of our [NPO] employees ... [Corporate volunteers] tell my employees, '... what you're doing is great ...' [and] that their work is not being taken for granted"* (NPO11). Moreover, several interviewees suggested that corporate volunteers support NPO employees by providing some level of work relief. In other words, they provide *"support in the day-to-day work of regular staff"* (NPO1).

Individual interactions between NPO employees and corporate volunteers can also have negative consequences. The information gathered from our interviews suggests that NPOs are increasingly using corporate volunteers to compensate for budget deficits. As described earlier, from the organizational perspective, this might be interpreted as an innovative way of responding to changes in the resources that are available to NPOs. As explained by one of the interviewees, *"We [NPO] get an annual budget to discuss, and now we can say: you don't have to put that in the budget anymore. We will find a company to take care of that. This is how we resolve some of the [financial] personnel issues"* (NPO13). From the perspective of NPO employees, however, such involvement of corporate resources – and especially corporate volunteers – has potential negative consequences. For example, corporate volunteers could be used as a replacement for paid staff members. As noted by a

representative of one NPO, “*Indeed, they [corporate volunteers] perform tasks that would otherwise have been done by our regular employees*” (NPO7).

## **Discussion and implications (2614 words)**

Most research on collaborations between NPOs and commercial companies has thus far focused largely on organizational interaction. Other scholars have focused on the benefits of such collaborations for the corporate partner, assuming that such endeavors would have favorable outcomes for NPOs as well. In this study, we build upon existing theory by identifying the costs and benefits of such collaborations from the NPO perspective.

We also introduce the notion of value creation within four interactions that emerge through collaborations based on corporate volunteering. We propose that corporate volunteering is a complex relationship (see also Liu & Ko, 2011), as it involves subjecting something that is usually perceived as a highly personal activity (i.e., volunteering) to facilitation and intervention in the workplace (Houghton et al., 2009; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009). More generally, this is known as third-party involvement (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009). Third-party actors are becoming increasingly involved in volunteer-based programs. In addition to governmental actors and educational institutions, private companies comprise a major category of third-party actors who are becoming increasingly involved through the creation of corporate volunteering projects. This situation adds an additional layer of complexity by introducing a commercial company into the relationship between the parties involved: the volunteer, the NPO (and its employees), and the recipient (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009).

We contribute to existing frameworks (e.g., Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a; 2012b) by introducing the complexity of multiple types of interactions including the organizational relationship, the host relationship, personal interaction, and outward-focused interaction. We do not address the interactions of the beneficiary with the corporate volunteer, the company, or the NPO

employee. These relationships are beyond the scope of this article, which focuses solely on interactions within the context of the two partner organizations involved in corporate volunteering programs. We also do not provide a detailed discussion of the costs and benefits of each relationship to the commercial organization and the corporate volunteer, as our purpose is to elaborate on the benefits and costs of NPO–business collaboration through corporate volunteering for the NPO, thereby enhancing existing knowledge concerning value creation through corporate volunteering projects.

### Benefits

Following the two-factor motivation–hygiene theory (see Herzberg, 1959), interaction between corporate volunteers and NPO employees can enhance **motivators** (e.g., recognition for efforts, change from regular tasks, skill development, and pride). At the same time, interacting with the partner company can provide NPO employees with **new insight into organizational practices**. Based on the information obtained from our interviewees, NPO employees can learn more about management practices and governance issues by observing how these matters are organized within the partner companies.

For NPOs, corporate involvement can **increase organizational capacity** in several ways. First, the involvement of corporate volunteers increases donor commitment, which is likely to have additional benefits as well (Liu & Ko, 2011). In terms of the well-known Five M's of management (as adapted by Meijs & Van der Voort, 2004), in addition to contributing Manpower (i.e., corporate volunteers), partner companies may also offer Money (i.e., financial resources), Means (i.e., goods), Mass (i.e., opening networks and creating connections), and Media (i.e., internal and external channel of communication). Other scholars have confirmed similar patterns at the organizational level (for an overview see Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a; 2012b). Corporate volunteering is thus one way in which NPOs are able to obtain the resources that they need in order to achieve their missions.

A second manner in which corporate involvement can increase the organizational capacity of NPOs is by enhancing **volunteer recruitability**: the ability of NPOs to recruit and maintain volunteers (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009). Recruitability consists of two major components: accessibility (i.e., the extent to which the NPO is physically, technically, and geographically accessible to potential volunteers) and the capacity of networks and cooperation. Drawing upon the metaphor of natural resources in relation to volunteerism developed by Brudney and Meijs (2009), corporate involvement can enhance volunteer “energy” within society as a whole by stimulating participation among a wider audience. For example, companies can increase the efficiency of NPOs in recruiting volunteers by distributing information on volunteering to their employees. Corporate involvement also grants NPOs access to time in the agendas of corporate employees.

A third capacity-enhancing aspect of corporate involvement with NPOs involves broaden the base of **legitimacy** for the NPO (Suchman, 1995). As defined by Suchman (1995), legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are socially desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, value, beliefs and definitions” (p. 574). Partnerships between NPOs and commercial companies can increase the pragmatic legitimacy and moral legitimacy of the NPO, as well as its legitimacy among other stakeholders (e.g., private donors, governments, and the general public). The partnership relationship enhances pragmatic legitimacy as the NPO offers the corporate partner an avenue for resource exchange involving the time of its employees (i.e., corporate volunteers) and perhaps other resources. The NPO gains moral legitimacy as people within the commercial company gain a better understanding of the importance of the work that the NPO does. The cognitive legitimacy of the NPO can be enhanced as the corporate partners increase their understanding and awareness of the NPO, making it an unquestioned reality for the company

and its corporate volunteers. The organizational relationship thus affects the ways in which the company, its corporate volunteers, and other funders perceive the legitimacy of the NPO.

The host relationship with the corporate volunteer can also generate several benefits for the NPO. Corporate volunteers bring specific resources along with them, including experience, knowledge, and skills. For example, corporate volunteers can support NPOs through **single-loop and double-loop learning** (see for the theory Argyris, 1976). The corporate volunteer's knowledge can be of direct use to the NPO (e.g., a corporate volunteer with a background in IT could build a new website for the NPO). In this way, the NPO utilizes the knowledge of a particular corporate volunteer, but it does not embed this knowledge into its policies and practices. This is an example of single-loop learning. The host relationship can also generate double-loop learning by facilitating the transfer and embedding of knowledge within the organization. In some of the cases described by our interviewees, such learning resulted in changes in organizational culture and management practices.

As with traditional volunteers, corporate volunteers donate time to NPOs. Particularly for organizations that work directly with beneficiaries, such donations of time can help NPOs to **increase the services** that they provide to their beneficiaries. For example, as demonstrated in studies of traditional volunteering and youth-development interventions, increases in the ratio of caregivers to beneficiaries are associated with improvements in the quality of services (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). The donated time can also help the NPO to fulfill specific needs that would otherwise have been left unaddressed (McGonigle 2002). The information we obtained through interviews suggests that NPOs that use corporate volunteers as an additional resource (rather than to replace existing volunteers or employees) do experience such an increase in their ability to deliver services.

## Costs

Despite the many benefits that collaborations with commercial companies can offer for NPOs, such projects are also accompanied by costs. This aspect is often neglected in both research and practice. In many NPOs, volunteers and paid staff work together in order to achieve the organization's mission. The quality of this working relationship depends heavily upon the organization's tradition of volunteer involvement (Brudney, 1990; Brudney & Gazley, 2002; Netting et al., 2004). Many NPOs that have traditionally been dominated by paid staff are increasingly implementing corporate volunteering programs. Given its relative novelty, corporate volunteering does not have a long tradition within NPOs. This can lead to conflicts between NPO employees and corporate volunteers. For example, because volunteers are usually less expensive, paid staff members can feel threatened by the involvement of volunteers. Another source of tension can emerge if staff members perceive that some volunteers have more experience or better skills (McCurley & Lynch, 1997). We identify this potential issue as **fear of replacement**.

In terms of Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, corporate volunteering can have a negative influence on the **hygiene factor** for NPO employees (particularly paid staff). As they interact with commercial companies, NPO employees are able to observe ways in which various matters can be arranged differently. This could also make them more conscious of the differences between how they are treated within the NPO and how employees are treated in other settings. Dissatisfaction with hygiene factors (e.g., salary and working conditions) can lead to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1959). The introduction of another institutional logic to NPO employees may cause these employees to become less satisfied, possibly increasing turnover (particularly among paid staff).

In addition to the costs discussed above, NPOs can incur two distinct types of costs in their organizational relationships with corporate partners: 1) **transaction costs** and 2) **opportunity costs**. Transaction costs consist of the expenses associated with coordination (e.g., matching

and organizing) and with production (e.g., out-of-pocket expenses during the project). The costs of coordination are consistent with the costs that NPOs incur when managing barriers that prevent people from volunteering. People are more likely to volunteer as their willingness, capability, and availability increases (Meijs et al., 2009). In many cases, NPOs adapt their regular volunteer (or operational) tasks to suit the willingness, capability, and availability of corporate volunteers and their companies. For example, some NPOs create delineated tasks, one-day events, design fun team-building projects, and adjust their schedules to suit those of the company and/or corporate volunteer. Interestingly, NPOs often do not make such adjustments for their regular volunteers. Caution is thus advised when engaging with corporate partners, as these relationships cost both time and energy. As argued by Weisbrod (2004), in many cases, NPOs would do better to invest these resources in achieving their organizational missions.

The information provided by our interviewees also reveals many transaction costs that are directly related to the projects. Consistent with Weisbrod's (2004, p.44) argument, NPOs that invest significant resources and staff time in order to exploit activities with companies can compromise their ability to carry out their missions, which is crucial to their organizational survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Many of the organizations involved in our study reported feeling external pressure to involve corporate volunteers, even if the activities were not entirely consistent with the internal needs and priorities of the organization.

Despite to the tendency of NPOs to use corporate volunteering and company involvement to enhance their reputations, many organizations are aware that they are at risk of **reputational damage** by linking themselves to particular companies. Such indirect costs could decrease their ability to raise funds from individual donors. Previous research has suggested that the risks of reputational damage are much greater for NPOs than they are for their corporate

partners (Wymer & Samu 2003). Such risks could ultimately threaten the NPO's sustainability as an organization.

The introduction of corporate volunteers can also result in **damage to the quality of services** provided by the NPO. Although corporate volunteers are assumed to have valuable skills, they might not have the appropriate skills that the NPO needs. As a result, beneficiaries might be less appreciative of the efforts of corporate volunteers than they are of the work of NPO staff members. The damage associated with such situations could outweigh any benefits that might emerge from them (see also dark side of episodic volunteers: Eliasoph, 2011). Table 2 provides a framework summarizing the categories of value creation through the various types of interaction.

	NPO Employee		NPO	
	Corporate Volunteer	Company	Corporate Volunteer	Company
Benefits	Motivating factors	New insight into organizational practices	Single-loop and double-loop learning	Increased NPO capacity to achieve its mission effectively
Costs	Replacement	Negative influence on perceptions of hygiene factors	Decreased quality of NPO service	Transaction costs, opportunity costs, and reputational risk

Table 2: NPO perspective on value creation through corporate volunteering

### Implications for NPO and corporate managers

By involving corporate volunteers, NPOs can increase their ability to recruit and maintain volunteers by gaining access to a wider pool of potential volunteers (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009). In general, corporate volunteering takes the form of episodic volunteering (i.e., one-time or short-term engagement in volunteering). Although volunteering has always been relatively limited in terms of time investment (Pearce, 1993), the temporal intensity of episodic volunteering (and corporate volunteering, as a specific case) is even more restricted, thus increasing the need for flexible and short-term assignments (Hustinx & Lammertyn,



2003) and makes it necessary for NPOs to adjust their volunteer-management practices. Costs are obviously associated with the meeting the management challenges (or, in some cases, the development of new management practices) associated with corporate volunteers. Because NPOs generally prefer to involve fewer volunteers for longer periods, NPO staff members might perceive corporate volunteering as jeopardizing their traditional volunteer programs (Hustinx et al., 2008). In order to maintain an effective level of volunteer recruitment, however, NPOs are increasingly finding it necessary to accommodate multiple individuals as volunteers, each for a relatively short period (Cnaan & Handy, 2005). The introduction of corporate volunteering as a new form of volunteer involvement might thus pose additional management challenges to NPOs (e.g., transaction costs, reputational risk, damage to the quality of services, and job dissatisfaction among their employees). Corporate volunteering projects can also entail other costs that are beyond this scope of the article (e.g., the influence of corporate volunteers on beneficiaries or on the long-term sustainability of the acquired resources).

The outcomes of this study also raise issues regarding the differences between the management of corporate volunteering and the management of other types of volunteers. Corporate volunteering is just one of several contemporary forms of volunteer involvement. Other examples include community service programs in schools and service learning programs at universities. These forms of volunteering have clear implications regarding the management of the common pool of volunteer energy within society as a whole (Brudney & Meijs, 2009), as well as within specific NPOs. We propose that corporate volunteering does not differ that much from other types of involvement, if it is focused solely on the delivery of services. For example, the issues raised by service learning programs are similar to those raised by corporate volunteering (Gazley et al., 2012; Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2008).

Nevertheless, corporate volunteering does differ from other third-party volunteer programs (e.g., from educational institutions), as they involve commercial companies that often have more resources than the NPOs have. In addition, the experience and skills of corporate volunteers are also likely to exceed those of students. This also relates to challenges inherent in the personal relationships between NPO employees and corporate volunteers, particularly if corporate volunteers are being used to replace staff. For this reason, NPO managers should balance the needs of their organizations against the costs associated with involving corporate volunteers, in order to determine which type of volunteer could or should be involved. In many organizations, the main concern associated with involving volunteers involves balancing efforts to attract and manage them against the benefits that they bring to the organization (Paine et al., 2007). Being aware of the costs and benefits can help NPO managers to make well-informed decisions about the instrumental purposes for which corporate volunteering can be applied within the organization.

This article opens a discussion concerning how NPOs can manage their volunteer and resource portfolios to maximize their effectiveness. As discussed throughout this paper, NPOs are currently facing the challenge of responding to shifts in the manner of volunteering, particularly toward ad-hoc and episodic forms of volunteering. For this reason, NPO managers should reconsider their volunteer portfolios and make conscious choices regarding the purposes for which they wish to involve volunteers and the manner in which they wish to involve them (e.g., through service learning, community service, corporate volunteering, or traditional volunteering).

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research (213 words)**

Our study was conducted in a relatively small part of Western Europe. Researchers interested in outcomes of NPO–business collaboration and, more specifically, corporate volunteering might therefore consider conducting an international study exploring the extent to which our

findings can be generalized. Additional topics for further study could include other mechanisms that drive the outcomes, including the type of volunteers involved and the type of programs, organizations, and stages of collaboration. Such knowledge could pave the way for deductive approaches and theory testing. It would also be interesting to use our interaction framework to compare various types of third-party involvement in volunteering and build new insights regarding possibilities and outcomes for NPOs. Another interesting avenue for research involves the comparison of various types of corporate involvement in NPOs, reflecting upon value creation and the resulting challenges to management. Furthermore, given that corporate volunteers are currently being used for a variety of tasks and for varying duration within organizations, their use poses challenges for volunteer managers or supervisors. For example, they must determine how to manage various types of corporate volunteer “input” in order to maximize the effectiveness of their contributions. This type of decision would require additional volunteer-management frameworks based on the application of this and perhaps other contemporary forms of volunteer involvement.

### **Conclusion (123 words)**

This article provides a novel theoretical perspective on the creation of value through NPO–business collaboration, particularly with regard to the involvement of corporate volunteers. We contribute to existing theory by explaining a complex set of interaction and suggesting that each type of interaction results in a distinct form of value creation. One unique feature of this study is that we do not restrict our focus to the organizational relationship between the NPO and the partner company. We also examine value creation through three other types of exchange: within the host relationship and through personal and outward-focused interaction. We propose that insight into value creation can be beneficial for NPOs, particularly with regard to considerations involving the volunteer and resource portfolios.

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