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Abstract

Employee Volunteering (EV) schemes represent a cornerstone of many company Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies, being identified as a classic 'win-win' situation in which businesses contribute significant resources into local communities whilst gaining a more skilled and engaged workforce and increased reputational benefits. This article questions the 'win-win' scenario of EV arguing that existing research has focused predominantly upon the business-employee dimension whilst largely ignoring the role of third sector organisations engaging in these relationships. By focusing more directly on third sector experiences, the article identifies four 'gaps' which place considerable constraints on the reach and impact of EV. It demonstrates the importance of not simply presuming a 'win' for the third sector and the added value that can be gained from redirecting EV research towards the 'business/non-profit interface'.

Introduction

Employee Volunteering (EV) schemes enable employees to volunteer in the local community with the support of their employers through formal and informal policies and programmes (Tschirhart, 2005). As an increasingly significant aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies, EV schemes have been identified as a classic 'win-win' scenario with businesses providing significant resources into local communities, while simultaneously gaining reputational benefits for the firm and skills development for employees (de Gilder et.

al., 2005). Despite growing interest, recent analysis suggests that engagement remains relatively low with company engagement levels rarely extending beyond 10-20 per cent and third sector[i] engagement dominated by larger charities (Brooks & Schlenkhoff-Hus, 2013). Given EV's notional 'win-win' status, this raises questions regarding why take-up is so low and what barriers are restricting engagement?

This article seeks to examine this paradox. In doing so, it presents a theoretical approach focused specifically upon the experiences of the third sector organisations and the employee volunteers, rather than the more traditional business-employee focused analysis (Rodell et al., 2016). By adopting this approach, the article demonstrates that the notional 'win-win' for EV is not inevitable and that too often the 'win' for the third sector is simply presumed rather than analysed.

The article develops three core arguments; first it outlines the problem of overstating the win-win in existing approaches to EV. Second, it highlights the importance of focusing more attention on the role of third sector organisations. Third it utilises this alternative focus to conceptualise a series of gaps which can restrict the ability of EV to achieve its potential. To bridge these gaps, the article argues, greater consideration needs to be given to the infrastructural support processes underpinning engagement. The article begins by summarising theoretical approaches to EV, highlighting an over-emphasis upon business focused analyses at the expense of closer examination of the 'business/nonprofit interface' (Harris, 2012; p.899). It will outline a series of UK-based research projects focused upon the interactive cross-sectoral processes surrounding EV and the experiences of third sector organisations within this. Subsequently, it will highlight the four 'gaps', derived from this

research data, which it is argued, can shape the ability of EV activities to realise their 'win-win' potential.

Existing approaches to EV

EV focuses upon employees giving their time, knowledge, or skills as part of a community service, outreach, or CSR activity during company time without additional compensation or direct personal remuneration (Bussell & Forbes, 2008; de Gilder et al., 2005). A plethora of definitions have emerged with Rodell et al (2016) noting that definitions vary according to whether the volunteering is employee initiated (Grant, 2012) or employer defined and organised, and the extent to which it takes place on corporate or own time etc. However, all these terms describe broadly the same phenomena, defined as:

> *employed individuals giving time during a planned activity for an external nonprofit or charitable group or organization (Rodell et al., 2016; p.57).*

Rodell et. al. (2016) note *'areas of muddiness'* regarding exactly what constitutes EV, so this article makes a clear distinction between EV that is attached to the organisation and volunteering that is self-initiated, undertaken in the personal domain and separated from the organisational context.

EV schemes represent a core aspect of the evolving CSR agenda with research indicating increased engagement across Europe and North America. Rodell et al. (2016) for example, estimate that at least 60 per cent of companies have formal EV programs with participation rates and hours volunteered increasing annually. One can also identify a series of newly

emerging international initiatives such as the United Nations Impact 2030 and the Employee Volunteering European Network.

EV research has adopted a broad range of approaches with many studies examining the strategic value for companies of developing relationships with non-profit organisations. Aligning EV programmes with their own strategic goals, it is argued, increases the propensity for businesses to generate a range of internal benefits including increased motivation/morale (Caligiuri et al., 2013; do Paco & Nave, 2013), training (Basil et al. 2008; Cycyota et al., 2016), retention and attraction of new employees (Pajo & Lee, 2011; Sanchez-Hernandez & Gallardo-Vazquez, 2013) and increased employee commitment and attachment (Booth et al., 2009; Peloza et al., 2009; Jones, 2010). Similarly, sociological and psychological approaches reflect on what motivates employees to volunteer and how engagement may strengthen organisational commitment (Clary et al., 1998; Rodell et al., 2016).

Studies have also examined EV through the lens of social exchange and social identity theory perspectives whereby, employees that perceive high levels of organisational support are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of emotional attachment to the company (Jones, 2010; Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015). These approaches conceptualise the shaping of organisational identity through volunteering and the interaction of employees' own identities in terms of how they perceive or attribute their company's values (Kim et al., 2010).

… corporate volunteers are likely to reciprocate with affective commitment in response to a variety of social and psychological benefits derived from CSEV, such as perceptions of skill

acquisitions …, expression and fulfilment of prosocial motives, well-being at work and

satisfaction with life in general (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015; p.9).

EV programs enable organisations to enhance a pro-social identity which in turn fosters a sense of pride and emotional bonding; enabling employees to 'make sense' of their emotional commitment to their company (Meyer & Allen, 2007). Present throughout most of the literature outlined above is the assumption that EV represents a classic 'win-win' scenario (Caliguri et al., 2013) providing benefits to the employing organisation, the employee volunteers and the receiving third party organisation (Kim et al., 2010; Rodell et al., 2016).

Given its portrayal as a growing phenomenon producing 'win-win' outcomes, recent statistics somewhat surprisingly suggest that EV's scale and impact remains relatively limited and peripheral for both businesses and third sector organisations. A Volunteering Matters (UK) study noted that while approximately 70 per cent of FTSE 100 businesses have active EV programmes, only 23 per cent of private sector organisations and 33 per cent of public sector organisations engaged in volunteering (Brooks and Schlenkhoff-Hus, 2013; p.4). In addition, while SMEs represent an overwhelming majority of UK businesses 'only 14 per cent … have access to [EV] schemes' (Brooks and Schlenkhoff-Hus, 2013; p.6). Similarly, within the EU, engagement levels generally represented less than 10% of available employees even within countries with strong EV engagement activity (Perez et al., 2014; p.28).

It is not only within the private sector that statistics identify limited engagement. In the Netherlands, the 'Management by Objectives' Monitor noted that only 10 % of 5,450 volunteer organisations surveyed, were actively working with companies (cited in Perez et.

al., 2014; p.32). In the UK, the majority of EV processes and business partnerships involve larger third sector groups with incomes over £100k (Thompson, 2012), but only 18 per cent of organisations registered with the charity commission fit this category. Additionally, while more than 6 million people have ticked the volunteer box on their 'linkedin' profile, only 55,000 volunteer opportunities have been listed (Murray Financial Times, 23rd July 2015).

While these statistics inevitably represent only a partial view of EV development, they do raise important questions for research. If EV represents a classic 'win-win' scenario for business, their employees and the third sector (Caligiuri et. al., 2013), and this is framed by a socio-economic context in which it should flourish, the inevitable question must be 'what is holding back the levels of engagement with EV'? To address this question, research must look more closely at the 'win-win' assumption and particularly the impact of EV on the third sector.

The Absent Partner: problematizing the win-win from a third sector perspective

In a 2012 NPVSQ article, Margaret Harris called for nonprofit scholars to 'undertake systematic empirical investigation of what is happening at the business/nonprofit interface' (Harris, 2012; p.899), noting that prior research was predominantly business led and largely ignored the experiences of the nonprofits. EV analysis undoubtedly sits at this interface and has experienced the one-sided analysis Harris identifies. With the exception of a handful of studies (Bussell and Forbes, 2008: Caligliuri et. al., 2013: Muthuri, Moon & Matten, 2009) EV analysis has focused upon two sides of a three-way relationship; evaluating the 'wins' for

businesses and employees, while largely neglecting the potential 'win' for third sector organisations.

As third sector organisations often rely on volunteers, the simple provision of a greater number of volunteers through EV is assumed to represent a 'win' for these groups. Peloza and Hassay's (2006) study, for example states that:

> charities are often heavily reliant upon volunteers for the delivery of programs and services and clearly benefit from the additional support provided by employee volunteers (Peloza & Hassay, 2006, p.357).

Indeed, their study goes on to suggest that charities are 'perhaps best positioned to reap the benefits of intra-organizational volunteering' despite their study only interviewing volunteers and not actually engaging with third sector organisations at all. Research has failed to adequately address the building of the relationship with the third sector, and the myriad of issues and challenges that these organisations face in engaging with EV.

This article seeks to contribute to redressing this imbalance and to demonstrate why examining EV from a third sector perspective provides significant insight. Adopting this approach can help to explain the engagement paradox outlined earlier, to consider whether EV is being utilised to its fullest potential and to examine whether what is on offer actually reflects the resources sought by the third sector from business engagement. In addition, it places significant emphasis upon the conditions under which this engagement is taking place. By adopting this approach, the article presents a more critical standpoint which addresses the impact and potential, but also the limitations, of EV from the perspectives and experiences of all groups involved.

EV in the UK context

To examine EV from a third sector perspective, one must first contextualise the socio-economic conditions that shape, enable or restrict the sector's engagement with business. The UK represents an interesting case with an extensive EV framework built upon a strong commitment to CSR within the business community and a heritage of active community organisations. The Conservative government has engrained EV and business/third sector collaboration into its policy agendas - under David Cameron via the 'Big Society' and the 'three-day leave' agendas[ii] and more recently under Theresa May through the emergence of concepts such as 'Shared Society', 'Inclusive Economy' and 'Social Action' [iii]. Embedded within these initiatives are policies designed to facilitate the socialisation of business and the marketization of the third sector, within a context of severe economic austerity and drastically reduced third sector funding. NCVO estimate that the UK voluntary sector has experienced a drop in public funding of 9.4 per cent between 2010-2016; approximately £3.3 billion over this period (https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac16/income-from-government/ #Income_from_government_the_policy_context). Professor Diane Leat characterised these challenges as *'doing more with less, less background support, more competition, more demand and higher expectations'* (Leat, 2012; 14).

Concurrently, policy agendas have encouraged the third sector to engage with business CSR activities and forge new cross-sectoral relationships as a route to enhancing long-term sustainability (Alcock, 2010; Leat, 2012). Non-profit and social policy scholars point to the broader changes within which EV operates suggesting we are entering a new epoch in state/third sector relations; bringing a form of trial separation or at least a 'partial decoupling of the state and the third sector' (Macmillan, 2013; p.187). Others highlight the risks of

commercialising the third sector - including the race to win contracts and seek alternative funding sources - which threaten to undermine the sector's authenticity and ability to meet the needs of its communities (Baines et al., 2011; Purkis, 2012).

Faced with such dramatic cuts, there has inevitably been a drive towards greater involvement of business in civil society; whether through CSR (including EV), philanthropy, employability agendas or through contracting the private sector to provide public services (Farnsworth & Holden, 2006). The third sector is being encouraged to engage with business in a climate of reduced funding but heightened community demand. Some have questioned the desirability of increased business/third sector engagement when the overwhelming emphasis appears to be marketization in preparation for state withdrawal (Purkis, 2012; Macmillan, 2013). The insights offered by these approaches combined with an understanding of the broader policy context, helps to contextualise some of the opportunities and risks EV may offer.

The study and methodology

The data in this article stems from a series of projects examining the development of EV in the UK and the experiences of different actors (business, employees and third sector). The research methodology draws from Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, Bradbury, 2015) which prioritises 'working with' participants as opposed to 'doing research on' them (Barnes, 2005). The research examined the challenges, drivers, motivations and lived experiences of the actors engaged in EV; including the individual experiences of employee volunteers and the organisational (both business and third sector)

experiences shaping these processes. The data comes from three studies (2009-2016) and a series of Employee Volunteering Network (EVN) Workshops co-ordinated by the research team between 2010-2015. Table one summarises the focus for each of these projects, the data collected and which aspects of the data have been utilised within this analysis.

"[INSERT TABLE HERE]"

Purposive non-random sampling techniques were used to recruit participants (Mason, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2003); ensuring a broadly representative spread of business, third sector and consultancy actors and a cross-section of values, perspectives and approaches. Third sector organisations included regionally located small and medium size charities as well as large national bodies. The sampling techniques are non-random and involve some degree of snowballing. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The research was approved via ethics committees and participants gave informed consent.

Transcripts were analysed using thematic coding of emerging themes (Ritchie et. al., 2003; Mason, 2002). Qualitative data was examined using inductive thematic analysis whereby the emerging themes were explored through an iterative process of moving back and forth between the themes and the extent literature to identify patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; McShane & Cunningham, 2012). This iterative process underpinned the development of the 'gaps' framework as a way of conceptualising emerging themes regarding different actors' experiences of EV participation, the conditions under which they were engaging, and the benefits, challenges, barriers or opportunities for their organisations' engagement. These gaps should not be seen as functioning in isolation from one-another but as interrelated. While not the only way to interpret these themes, the gaps framework offers a useful

conceptualisation of the challenges facing business, employee volunteers and third sector organisations in realising the win-win in EV.

The gaps framework has been tested and validated as useful for reflecting the primary challenges surrounding EV. In 2016, the research team utilised this framework to structure a series of EV workshops with over 650 business, third and public sector organisations at 11 separate locations across England. These workshops were organised in partnership with Office for Civil Society (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, UK), and the framework was reiterated and substantiated in the reports from this new phase. (Downloadable at http://www.sheffield .ac.uk/management/esv). To illustrate and evidence the gaps framework we review the emergent themes that constitute each gap and where appropriate illustrate with direct quotes, both to reflect the collective experiences of all participants and also the differing perspectives of actors across sectors. Quotes are drawn from the three studies, the EVN workshops and the 11 regional workshops where the framework was tested.

The article will now outline the four key inter-related gaps; the skills, capacity, knowledge and infrastructure gaps. It will demonstrate that the interplay between these gaps creates a challenging environment for creating successful EV engagement and help to explain the continuing participation paradox.

The Skills Gap

The research highlighted a mismatch between the business-led prioritising of numbers of volunteers and hours volunteered and third sector concerns regarding the actual utilisation and impact of the volunteers. While EV offers significant additional resources to the third

sector, the research highlighted an important skills gap restricting their impact. In particular, the skills being offered were not necessarily those most needed by third sector organisations (Burchell et al., 2013). Key issues incorporated within the skills gap theme included a greater demand for professional skills over more general volunteering support, the nature and scale of volunteering activities being undertaken, volunteers' evaluations of the activities they enjoyed undertaking and employers' evaluation of the developmental benefits of volunteering.

The incongruence between skills demand and supply, in terms of both scale and skill level, was a consistent theme emerging within third sector interviews and EVN workshops. In terms of scale, an imbalance existed between the utilisation of short, resource-intensive engagement processes and longer term, less intensive, targeted models. One-off 'challenge-day' style activities represent a traditional focus for EV. While skills-based volunteering is evolving, 'challenge-days' still predominate; partly because they allow businesses to involve large numbers of employees with a clearly defined outcome, good publicity potential and measurable impact. While these activities can enable some third sector groups to undertake transformations they lack the resources to achieve otherwise, many groups wanted fewer volunteers but for a longer period.

> *Well we've had offers of the one day blitzes…we never have anything like that needs to be done,… That would be way more trouble than it's worth. I mean it's just good for their publicity purposes but it doesn't actually benefit us much because you know why would you want a team of volunteers you've never met before, you've no idea their abilities or what the hell are you gonna give them to do? … (third sector interview 1 Brokerage project).*

Building partnership-based relationships over time, they argued, enables volunteers to work on longer-term developmental projects and become more engaged with the organisation.

Third sector organisations also emphasised their desire to gain skilled resources from EV rather than the generic volunteer support of 'challenge' days. Skills in marketing, accounting, IT, planning and finance were key areas identified. EV often creates an anomaly whereby skilled professionals (accountants, lawyers etc) are undertaking painting, decorating, and other low-skilled activities rather than providing their distinct professional skills. This reflects Bussell and Forbes' (2008) contention that EV activities are often 'driven by the needs of the employing organisation rather than the receiving organisation' (Bussell & Forbes, 2008).

Business participants also highlighted a skills gap of their own. Employers were keen to develop skills-based volunteering opportunities but were encountering several challenges in doing so. Evidence is growing concerning the value of challenging employees to utilise their professional skills in alternative settings (Burchell and Cook, 2011; Skills Exchange, 2016). However, employers still appear relatively unsure of what skills employees can strengthen through EV and how to utilise this within a HR setting. Simultaneously, third sector organisations struggle to market skills development opportunities to employers effectively.

The motivations and drivers that employees identify for volunteering often appear incongruent with the development of a skills-based volunteering framework. The opportunity to 'give something back' and 'do something different' from their day jobs were key motivations for volunteering, with employees often preferring opportunities to do more

'hands-on', manual activities. This reflects Grant's (2012) claim that 'employees often seek out experiences in one domain of life that substitute for what is missing in other domains' (Grant 2012; p.596). Employees prioritised activities where they could 'see a finished product' and 'make a difference', seeking volunteering opportunities which broke with the 'monotonous' day job or the 'isolated environment of being sat in an office' (excerpts from employee interviews from all three projects). This challenge is captured by the following quote

> they [employees] want to go as a team, they don't want to engage long-term and in skills. It's harder to get people to volunteer for personal, face-to-face mentoring activities, but these are the bits that are needed most (Business, Leicestershire workshop).

Employees and managers identified 'soft/generic skills' i.e. empathy, networking and improved confidence, as EV outcomes but rarely identified 'core' skills development. Further, many were reluctant to link volunteering to career development; perceiving volunteering to be something given to help others rather than for personal benefit.

> I work for a good company, on a good salary with good benefits…not everybody has had the same opportunities… So for me I just feel I have a responsibility to give something back to the local community …(brokerage study focus group 1).

While the majority of employee volunteers welcomed the opportunity for their volunteering to be recognised, few wanted it formalised;

> I wouldn't ever want to put that sort of stuff into an appraisal, people's actual job because I mean you're just setting yourself up for making volunteering a competition,

you're making it into, you know, you're forced to do it, to do well in your job basically

rather than you're doing it because you want to (brokerage study focus group 3).

Connecting EV to skills development is challenging as employees appear highly motivated by the break from the workplace that EV offers and fear that its formalisation through instrumental skills agendas could conflict with the pro-social motivations of 'giving back' without 'personal gain' (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015). There is however potential in harnessing the motivation to 'make a difference' if one can demonstrate to employees the increased community impact resulting from the utilisation of work-based, professional skills.

To summarise, EV activity needs to overcome a skills gap which requires better matching of third sector need with employee skills. Without addressing this gap, the resources offered will not necessarily generate the best benefits for the third sector, or enhance the skills development potential of EV for employers and employees. However, this is difficult to bridge with 'challenge' activities still more popular than small scale incremental support, employers not always clear about what skills development staff gain through volunteering and many third sector organisations struggling to pitch skills based opportunities. There is a disparity between the skills agenda and what employees say they enjoy about volunteering. The skills gap poses significant questions for existing EV research. While attention has been devoted to identifying and classifying motivations to volunteer, and the development of work design approaches to creating effective volunteering programs (Pajo & Lee, 2011, Grant, 2012), little attempt has been undertaken to connect these dimensions to the needs and challenges of the third sector and the contradictions that might exist when one is seeking to satisfy their needs with the demands of the employer and the employee.

The Capacity Gap

While organisations were able to recognise the potential benefits of EV, significant barriers existed regarding the capacity of some to actually engage. The capacity issue has been neglected in existing research, with little focus on what types of organisations are more likely to engage and the implications of this. Within the capacity gap, themes included the resources required for third sector organisations to engage with businesses, the costs of engaging, supervising and training volunteers, the locational specificities of where EV is having an impact, and the challenges for businesses of engaging staff in EV activities.

For third sector organisations, the capacity gap concerns the ability to become 'EV ready'. Identifying, co-ordinating and planning volunteering opportunities that meet employers' requirements is resource intensive and many third sector organisations struggle to commit staff resources to these processes. Many smaller organisations struggled with the administrative burden of health and safety and risk assessments, and the scale of support and training that employee volunteers required. This was especially prominent for 'challenge days', with organisations often finding it impractical to have numerous volunteers descending on them in a single day. Organisations highlighted the additional costs these events created, and that volunteering was not a 'free' activity. Companies, it was argued, were either unaware of these, or were reluctant to meet them within their offers of support.

> *It's difficult to be able to facilitate whole departments coming and volunteering with us*
> *for a day. It will cost us to do it and we can't afford it. Or we waste it and get them to*
> *[undertake mundane task] because we don't have the resources to supervise people*

doing anything meaningful. There's a misunderstanding that volunteering is cost free –
there is a lot of investment there to ensure it is safe (Third sector organisation, EVN
Workshop 4).

As the quote illustrates, gaining the 'support' EV offered often meant diverting key staff
resources from core organisational tasks. Set against the backdrop of reduced funding and
greater demand, the barrier this poses to third sector organisations embracing EV is
significant. Within the brokerage study, a diagnostics exercise identified that only one third
of groups could be considered as potentially 'volunteer ready'. While many other groups
would like to engage, their lack of spare capacity prevented their participation (Burchell et
al., 2013).

Businesses also identified their own capacity gap. Engagement levels remain relatively low
and context-specific; being more suited to large businesses, with significant regional or
national administrative headquarters and less suitable for smaller regional offices or within
businesses where the majority of employees are either customer facing or production line
focused. While many businesses have official EV policies, the pressures of workloads and
targets often reduce the viability of volunteering. Further, despite representing the vast
majority of businesses, SMEs currently only display marginal levels of formal EV
engagement. [iv]

These capacity issues have serious implications for EV as a mechanism for increasing
resources into a stretched third sector. In particular, it questions the ability of EV to deliver
resources to areas of high deprivation (which struggle to attract large employers) and

highlights a catch-22 scenario that has thus far been ignored in existing research. Large employers represent the cornerstone of EV activity but are largely absent from areas of high deprivation. Without them however, the potential of EV in these locations is severely restricted. In short the areas with the biggest demand are often those where capacity for supply is most limited.

The capacity gap is a key challenge to EV in terms of both targeting business resources to areas of most need and enabling third sector organisations to utilise them. Failure to overcome this gap, and build capacity on both sides, will consistently restrict EV's potential and lead to resources being targeted towards larger organisations. Business capacity building therefore needs to encourage organisations to look towards alternative models of volunteering engagement, more suited to smaller third sector organisations and for companies for whom large-scale offsite EV is problematic.

The Knowledge Gap

The research identified a knowledge gap, emerging from claims that private and third sector organisations 'speak a different language' and a raft of myths and misunderstandings which pose barriers to collaboration (Burchell & Cook, 2013a, 2013b). This gap is exacerbated by the limited opportunities for cross-sectoral dialogue, engagement and networking. Within the knowledge gap key themes included misunderstandings across sectors about the aims of EV, limited access to detailed information regarding opportunities, understanding the aims and objectives of groups for engaging and the costs of volunteering.

Third sector participants highlighted a number of ways the knowledge gap was restricting EVs potential. Businesses were perceived to have limited understanding of the costs incurred by the third sector to administer and support EV activities. Participants noted that companies were often reluctant to pay for volunteering opportunities since they were already offering 'free resources'.

Everyone thinks the third sector is a free service and people can dip in for nothing, and people are surprised when there is a cost involved. They don't see the value - we need to dispel that myth, it's not a free service and there are costs involved in every interaction (charity, Birmingham workshop).

Some businesses incorporated these costs into the brokerage fees but were reluctant to pay third sector groups directly.

I think businesses would be far more up for paying for brokerage if they know what they're paying for. ... would I pay [third sector organisation name] to come in, you know and do something ... I think the response from colleagues and managers would be no (brokerage study company 1 manager 2).

Participants identified a limited understanding from business of the range of third sector organisations, the types of support they needed and why offers of support might be refused. EV activity was often linked to existing charity connections, or to key causes supported by owners, directors or employees resulting in resources being directed to well-known third sector organisations. Thus, EV tended to be concentrated among the 'usual suspects' limiting its reach and potential.

Misunderstandings of business motives also existed among the third sector. Business participants explained that third sector organisations often failed to clarify what types of engagement they were looking for.

> *What's articulated to the business, as what the charity needs, is not always what they actually need. Often they don't have a business plan, they need prodding and probing to find out where they are and what they need (broker, Leicestershire workshop).*

Organisations often had unrealistic expectations of business resources and requested funds rather than targeting EV related support and tailoring requests to the business case and internal business skills development. Many third sector organisations recognised that they struggled to pitch what their organisation did and why it needed support. Concerns were also raised that often cross-sectoral misunderstanding meant that potential relationships often failed after an initial engagement.

Many larger charities had proficient strategies for engaging with business and negotiating forms of EV that delivered real organisational benefits. However, others were operating at much earlier stages of engagement and lacked the ability to conduct due diligence exercises and the confidence to refuse opportunities.

> *You perceive that you have to say yes otherwise you may lose it [the opportunity] in the future. You don't want to be ungrateful (Third sector participant, EVN workshop 4).*

The research found that this reluctance to say no can lead to a waste of resources;

> *I know somebody within the charity sector … and they had a site where they kept an unruly garden …because they constantly had requests for companies to come down and do some gardening work…and they said well we might as well just let that, we don't*

need it, we'll just let that overgrow and they'll feel like they're doing themselves some

good and doing us some good but they're not (brokerage study, broker 1).

This 'Fallow Field' scenario is an example of both the strategic response of the sector to engagement opportunities, while symbolising the risks of wasted resources that the knowledge gap can create. Another example involved a charity who had been given so much chicken by one company that their freezers were full, their clients were tired of eating chicken but they felt unable to disrupt the collaboration by refusing yet more chicken!

In summary, the research highlighted a significant level of cross-sectoral misunderstanding. Participants across sectors spoke of the importance of developing a common language around EV, emphasising the value of transparent negotiation. Often where potential relationships have failed, lack of understanding has created unrealistic expectations. Successful relationships by contrast emerged as an evolutionary process of engagement and learning, creating joint initiatives that met shared objectives. Power imbalances between small charities and large businesses can play a significant role in producing EV activities that meet business needs but not those of the third sector. More needs to be done to empower third sector organisations to engage on a level playing field.

The Infrastructure Gap

The discussion above highlights the importance of greater cross-sectoral understanding in order to match the potential skills contribution of EV with the resource requirements of the third sector and to overcome restricted capacity on both sides. At its core, is a need for a strengthened infrastructure framework that enables greater interaction and builds effective

collaboration. This research demonstrates that the infrastructure gap needs to be bridged if the other gaps are to be tackled. Key themes within the infrastructure gap include the resource restraints facing infrastructure bodies, the range of activities that need to be supported for EV to be successful, the increased competition and market environment for infrastructure support, issues of state support, and the significant role of brokers.[v]

Infrastructure support, predominantly in the form of brokerage, is key to successfully matching resources to demand, creating cross-sectoral connections, and providing support and training to increase EV capacity. The role of brokers was identified as key to improving connections across sectors and effectively targeting skills and resources. Brokerage is especially important for third sector organisations lacking the resources, knowledge and power to negotiate as equal partners (Haski-leventhal et. al., 2010). However, little research has focused upon the role of brokerage and infrastructure organisations in shaping EV (Lee, 2015).

Brokerage takes on a bigger developmental dimension than the simplistic 'match-making' often ascribed to it. Brokers undertake significant capacity building, getting third sector organisations 'EV ready' and helping them to present their activities to business. They also build capacity within business organisations, to develop a clearer understanding of EV aims, understand the interest among employees for different types of engagement, design EV to enhance organisational benefits, and develop connections between business skills and community need.

While understanding the brokerage role is in itself a valuable contribution to EV research, significant questions exist regarding where this form of support will come from and how it should be funded. Funding represents a key challenge in bridging the infrastructure gap given that traditional funding sources have been depleted against a backdrop of austerity and increased commercialisation of infrastructure bodies (National Association for Voluntary & Community Action (NAVCA), 2015; Purkis, 2012).

Brokerage has traditionally been located within volunteer support services such as the Community and Voluntary Service (CVS), Voluntary Action Services (VAS) and Community Foundations. With their historic grounding in volunteer co-ordination and sector support, these organisations could potentially help bridge the gaps highlighted above. However, they have undergone significant resource depletion and, faced with increasing demand but reduced capacity, have few resources to deploy towards EV brokerage. Some infrastructure organisations have developed commercial brokerage models but corporate willingness to pay is low, so many have found limited commercial potential for these activities. Yet without initial financial support, organisations struggle to develop an effective brokerage role with many successful examples being instigated through financial support from businesses, local government or grant capture.

A number of consultancies and commercial brokers are also active in this arena, seeking to provide large-scale EV services tailored to business requirements. With a stronger commercial business-to-business focus, these organisations provide fee-paying corporate clients with a tailored set of EV activities; often as part of a portfolio of CSR services. While arguably demonstrating that some businesses will pay for EV brokerage, there are clear

limitations with this model similar to the catch-22 model outlined earlier. First, commercially focused services inevitably target areas where there is a financial incentive to deliver. As a consequence, these groups cluster in areas where large companies predominate, such as Central London. In contrast, these organisations have either withdrawn or are entirely absent from locations where the financial incentive is low, where SMEs predominate and where larger companies are scarce - the locations most in need of EV support. Second, these organisations are less embedded in the third sector, are less able to meet these needs and could potentially be directing scarce resources away from the very sector which EV claims to support. Third, the 'muddiness' of the EV brokerage marketplace leaves many businesses unsure of who to work with.

While brokerage frameworks could provide the infrastructural support necessary to bridge the key gaps in EV, to achieve this one must overcome a significant funding dilemma regarding the creation and maintenance of this infrastructure. The emphasis upon market-led brokerage funding currently encourages a commercial brokerage model that prioritises what businesses want to achieve from EV, rather than developing an EV framework targeted towards third sector need. While some groups strive to create a brokerage model more targeted towards third sector need, the difficulty of commercialising this to a business audience and lack of state funding support reduces their capacity to develop this role. It is questionable, therefore, whether the current methods of bridging the infrastructure gap will actually meet the demands of both the corporate and third sector that the 'win-win' interpretations of EV claim to deliver.

Conclusion: Bridging the Gaps in ESV

This article has demonstrated the importance of focusing upon the experiences of third sector organisations in order to understand the potential of, and the barriers to, creating effective EV. By focusing upon EV as a three-way relationship between employer, employee and third sector, it has highlighted the danger of assuming the 'win' for third sector, while also indicating some of the limitations of the 'win' for business. The 'win-win' scenario therefore, is not an inevitable outcome of EV but often occurs in locational pockets and for certain types of organisations. The gaps framework outlined above highlights the significant challenges that exist in trying to tailor EV schemes to satisfy the demands of the employer, the employee and the third sector.

Highlighting the skills, capacity, knowledge and infrastructure gaps helps to frame many of these challenges and questions the underlying assumption that simply introducing business resources into the third sector can fill the void left by state funding and provide the types of resources that the third sector actually needs. In doing so, the article demonstrates why the 'win-win' potential of EV must be examined from a multi stakeholder perspective (business, employee and third sector) and must be placed in its broader socio-economic context so that the conditions under which the third sector are being asked to engage come to the fore. It should not simply be assumed that third sector groups should be grateful for any form of support. Similarly, third sector groups cannot expect business engagement purely because they represent a 'good cause', but must have the skillset and resources to demonstrate professionally what support they need and the value that engagement with their organisation will bring to both business and the community.

The skills gap highlights a significant mismatch between the resource needs of many third sector organisations and the traditional framing of EV activities. While this gap is being addressed by the increasing focus on skills volunteering, the challenge day 'quick fix' model of EV still holds significant appeal for business and also for many employee volunteers. Indeed, while the skills agenda may appeal to businesses it may prove a harder sell to the volunteers themselves; given its incongruence with many of the initial motivations for why employees choose to volunteer and the underlying perception that volunteering should benefit others and not necessarily the volunteering individual.

Traditional approaches to EV also tend to presume that these forms of engagement inevitably bring extra valuable resources into the third sector, increasing capacity. However, the capacity gap identified above highlighted a more complex picture with many organisations struggling to become 'EV ready' and unable to commit increasingly stretched resources. Many businesses also have their own capacity gap as they struggle to engage more than a small proportion of the workforce. As a consequence, the 'win-win' model of EV only tends to occur under certain contexts and within specific areas often clustering around the location and engagement of large businesses and involving more established third sector organisations who already have the capacity to engage.

The knowledge gap is also central to the potential weaknesses of the 'win-win' as it highlights the consequences of myths and misunderstanding across the sectors. This gap demonstrates the significance of the cross-sectoral power imbalance which leaves third sector groups struggling to direct EV to meet their needs, engaging on business terms rather than on their own. Currently the knowledge gap serves to reinforce presumptions of a 'win-win' and

hides some of EV's limitations. This is particularly significant for those companies wanting their EV activities to have a positive impact and for employees who engage in the schemes precisely because they want to 'make a difference'.

Finally, the gaps framework demonstrates that there are significant barriers to EV delivering on its potential as the current infrastructure is too weak to ensure that resources are channelled to meet third sector need. Stronger infrastructure is needed but the research highlighted that the emphasis upon commercialisation and financially self-sustaining brokerage support results in a framework that prioritises business led aims and objectives rather than prioritising third sector need.

Focusing attention on the external relationships aspect of EV rather than the internal structuring of EV programs raises some important questions that future EV research must address. Significant amounts of research has been devoted to establishing a business case for business engagement with EV and to demonstrating the positive impacts and outcomes such activities can have for business. In contrast, the 'win' for the third sector has largely been assumed rather than analysed in any real detail. As this article has demonstrated, more research focus needs to be addressed towards both challenging this assumption on the one hand and the incorporation of the third sector dimension into existing models and analyses on the other. Redirecting EV analysis in this way, and considering exactly what the case for EV engagement is for the third sector, offers a range of key research challenges for future analysis and can help to broaden the understanding of the potential impact of EV.

First, more research needs to be developed regarding the distribution of EV support and the implications that this holds for third sector engagement. The gaps framework pointed to a relatively uneven distribution of EV engagement both with regard to location and size of third sector organisations successfully engaging. Currently it seems that EV activity is more connected to locations and organisations that suit business participants rather than always being areas and activities in most need. More attention therefore, could usefully be given to questions regarding how EV resources are distributed and the size of groups engaging.

Second, the research highlighted the central role of brokerage and infrastructure organisations in shaping and developing effective EV engagement. However, relatively little research has been devoted to the role such organisations play at the business/third sector interface. While Lee (2015) provides initial insight into this area, much more consideration needs to be given to the role of these organisations in helping to bridge many of the challenges and gaps that exist between business and the third sector as they seek to develop EV.

Third, closer examination needs to be given to the types of activity being undertaken within EV. As the skills gap highlighted, there is significant potential in increasing the application of skills based volunteering and, to an extent, distinguishing this from more 'challenge' based activities. While skills based EV would appear to more effectively fulfil the 'win-win' model claimed for EV, more research needs to address why the up-take of skills volunteering is still quite weak. Our research suggests there could potentially be some important contradictions between the motivations and aims of employee volunteers and the benefits both businesses and third sector organisations seek from EV. More broadly this connects to a wider research question regarding what factors are holding back engagement with EV and how might these

be overcome; given that EV remains the domain of only a small number of companies (and only a small percentage of employees within them) and a minority of third sector organisations. As our research shows, answers to these questions clearly require analysis of all three parties within EV; business, third sector and employees.

Finally, while the gaps framework presented here has been developed from an analysis of the UK context, there is real potential for its application in other locations and for comparative analysis. Much could be learnt from further analysis to identify where, and under what conditions, these gaps are either addressed or present themselves differently.

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Project Title and Date	Primary Focus of Project	Data Collected	Data Utilised for Current Analysis
Employee Volunteering from the Employees perspective (2009-2010)	Analysed employees experiences and reflections on EV schemes within three companies	• Employee Surveys in each company (n=500) • Interviews with employees within each company (n=17) • Focus groups within each company (n=3)	• One-to-one employee interview transcripts, • focus group transcripts
Analysis of the 'Together we Can' EV initiative (2011-2012)	Detailed study of a single EV initiative between a large UK company and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens	• One to one interviews with employees (n=13) • Interviews with third sector host organisations (n=10) • Interviews with Managers (n=2) • Focus Groups (n=1)	• One to one employee interview transcripts • Transcripts of interviews with third sector host organisations • Focus group transcripts
Brokering EV Strategies (2012-2014)	ESRC funded impact study examining a community organisation's attempts to develop an EV brokerage role.	• Company case studies (n=3) • Interviews with employees (n=15) • Interviews with third sector organisations(n=6) • Third sector mapping exercise • Interviews with EV brokers (n=8)	• One-to one employee interview transcripts • Transcripts of interviews with third sector host organisations • Transcripts of interviews with EV brokers • Focus group transcripts

		- Interviews with foundation managers (n=3) - Focus groups (n=3)	
Employee Volunteering Network (2010-2015)	A series of cross sectoral action workshops in Yorkshire and the Humber examining the challenges of developing EV in the region.	Seven half-day cross-sectoral workshops. Each workshop focused upon distinct challenges and utilised small group discussions and feedback sessions. All sessions recorded and transcribed	Transcripts of workshop discussion and feedback sessions
Employee Volunteering Regional Workshop series (2016)	A series of 11 workshops held across the English regions in collaboration with the Office for Civil Society to examine the applicability of the Gaps framework and to consider ways to bridge the gaps and enhance EV provision. Total of 650 participants	- Participants at each workshop were divided into four cross-sectoral groups. - Following presentations on the gaps framework and context presentation from regional speakers, each group engaged in two 50 minute discussion sessions - Sessions were recorded, transcribed and summarised	Transcripts of workshop discussion and feedback sessions.

[i] The Oxford English Dictionary (2017) defines the third sector as 'the part of an economy or society comprising non-governmental and non-profit-making organizations or associations, including charities, voluntary and community groups, cooperatives, etc.'

[ii] Under this proposed policy, public sector employees and employees of private sector organisations with over 250 staff will be entitled to claim three days paid volunteering leave per year. Still under development in the current parliamentary period.

[iii] For more details of these initiatives see Theresa May's speech on the Shared Society (https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-shared-society-prime-ministers-speech-at-the-charity-commission-annual-meeting) and the Office for Civil Society's Enabling Social Action Guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance).

[iv] The federation of small businesses estimates that SMEs represented 99.9% of all private sector business at the start of 2016 and accounted for 60% of all private sector employment in the UK (http://www.fsb.org.uk/ media-centre/small-business-statistics).

[v] We define a broker in this context as an organisation or individual who co-ordinates EV engagement between employee volunteers and third sector organisations. Cook, et. al. (2014) classified 3 main types of EV brokerage organisations i) Localised community focused brokers, ii) Consultancy based CSR-focused brokers iii) Nationally focused brokers