

Article

Engaging Employees Through Corporate Volunteering: Case Study of SPARK Program, PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines how corporate communication enhances employee engagement through corporate volunteering, focusing on the SPARK program at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia. The problem addressed is the limited understanding of how internal communication shapes employees' emotional and motivational responses to volunteering initiatives, despite the growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR). The objective is to identify how communication strategies support participation, strengthen organizational identification, and translate volunteering into meaningful engagement. Using a qualitative case study method, the research collected data through in-depth interviews with key internal stakeholders and analyzed the data using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 14. The findings show that corporate communication plays a strategic role not only in delivering information but also in building emotional connection, shared identity, and a sense of ownership. Storytelling, testimonials, and value-driven messages successfully position SPARK as a meaningful initiative that aligns employees' personal motivations with organizational purpose. Participation is reinforced by peer influence and the program's alignment with individual passions, though challenges such as time limitations and unclear participation pathways remain. The study reveals that volunteering fosters cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, with employees expressing increased purpose, belonging, and identification with the company. These insights imply that well-designed communication around volunteering can strengthen employee–organization relationships and support organizational performance. The study contributes practical guidance for integrating corporate volunteering into strategic communication, emphasizing empathy, clarity, and value-based messaging.

Keywords: Corporate communication; employee engagement; csr; volunteering; internal communication

Introduction

Effective communication is widely recognised as a cornerstone of organizational success, as it contributes to improved employee satisfaction and overall organizational effectiveness (Men, 2014, Sulaiman et al., 2023). Within any organizational context, communication functions not merely as a medium for information exchange but also as a strategic instrument that shapes culture, influences behaviour, and supports organizational goals (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). Strategic internal communication plays a critical role in fostering trust and strengthening employee–organization relationships through transparent and authentic

communication practices (Jiang & Men, 2017). Moreover, effective communication enables alignment among internal stakeholders by helping employees understand and internalize the organization's values, vision, and mission, thereby enhancing engagement and commitment to shared organizational goals (Mazzei, 2010; Welch, 2011). Conversely, ineffective communication can lead to organizational dysfunctions such as uncertainty, anxiety, and dissatisfaction among employees (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). For this reason, organizations are increasingly investing in communication strategies that not only disseminate information but also foster engagement, particularly among employees.

One of the key approaches to fostering effective internal communication is by strengthening employee engagement, as engaged employees are more responsive to organizational messages and actively participate in communication processes (Mazzei, 2010). Employee engagement is widely defined as a multidimensional construct encompassing employees' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment toward their organization, which ultimately influences their motivation and willingness to contribute to organizational success (Saks, 2006). Engaged employees are not only more productive, but they also exhibit a stronger sense of belonging, contribute positively to the organizational culture, and are more resilient during periods of change (Muhammad & Hidayat, 2020). Numerous studies have established that effective communication is a primary enabler of employee engagement. Communication and engagement are mutually reinforcing: clear and transparent communication enhances trust and participation, which in turn fosters a higher degree of engagement (Mmutle, 2023).

Employee engagement does not occur in isolation; rather, it must be actively cultivated through intentional organizational practices led by leaders and communication professionals (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). One of the organizational functions that plays a pivotal role in driving engagement is the corporate communication department, which contributes to shaping the employee experience and fostering meaningful organizational–employee connections (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Corporate communication is widely recognised as a strategic management function responsible for coordinating and integrating all internal and external communication efforts to ensure message consistency, coherence, and alignment with the organization's identity, vision, and strategic goals (Cornelissen, 2020; Zerfass et al., 2018). It is responsible not only for shaping the company's reputation externally but also for fostering a healthy organizational climate internally (Koeswayo et al., 2024).

Through well-designed internal communication strategies, the corporate communication function can directly influence employees' attitudes and behaviours by shaping how they interpret and engage with organizational messages (Verčič & Men, 2023). Contemporary internal communication practices emphasise employee voice by creating two-way communication platforms that encourage participation, dialogue, and inclusion in organisational processes (Verhoeven & Madsen, 2022; Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017). Additionally, corporate communication plays a strategic role in crafting organisational narratives that communicate values, purpose, and identity, thereby strengthening employees' sense of meaning, belonging, and alignment with the organisation (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). One effective strategy under this domain is corporate volunteering—a program that enables employees to engage in structured voluntary activities, contributing their time, knowledge, and skills to community development efforts (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2019). Volunteering is an important component in healthcare organizations and corporations (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Corporate volunteering serves as a meaningful form of employee engagement, as it allows employees to connect their work with a broader social purpose and experience a sense of fulfillment (Rodell, 2013). Participation in corporate volunteering programs has been shown to nurture personal and professional growth by enhancing skills, self-development, and emotional well-being (Booth et al., 2009). Moreover, employees who engage in such initiatives often develop stronger organizational identification and engagement, which positively influences their work attitudes and performance (Caligiuri et al., 2013). In addition, well-communicated corporate volunteering efforts contribute to strengthening a company's reputation and positive organizational image among both internal and external stakeholders (Jones et al., 2014). Participation in corporate volunteering activities has been found to enhance morale, foster team cohesion, and positively influence organizational commitment (Glavas & Kelley, 2014). Research has also demonstrated a strong correlation between employee involvement in corporate volunteering and increased levels of engagement

(Boštjančič et al., 2018). In this light, corporate volunteering is not only an expression of corporate social responsibility (CSR) but also a strategic tool for human resource and communication development.

CSR, broadly defined as a company's commitment to social and environmental sustainability, provides a platform for organizations to demonstrate their values through responsible business practices (Etikan, 2024). Corporate volunteering is widely recognized as an operationalization of CSR, where employees actively participate in social initiatives supported by their employer (Lor-Serrano & Esteban-Salvador, 2021). By integrating employee engagement with CSR through corporate volunteering, companies can align employees' intrinsic motivations with the organization's social responsibilities, creating shared value for employees, the company, and the wider community (Caligiuri et al., 2013; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Corporate volunteering also enhances employees' sense of meaning and engagement, reinforcing positive work attitudes while simultaneously contributing to societal well-being (Rodell, 2013).

This study focuses on PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia, a subsidiary of the global company Merck, which has demonstrated a strong commitment to both CSR and employee engagement. Merck Group is a German multinational science and technology company headquartered in Darmstadt, Germany, and it is the world's oldest operating chemical and pharmaceutical company, founded in 1668. Merck is a leading science and technology company operates in the healthcare, life science and electronic sectors, contributing to innovations that improve quality of life worldwide. PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia exemplifies how multinational companies localize their CSR efforts while engaging employees in initiatives that reflect the company's global values and purpose. One of PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia's notable CSR is the SPARK program, a global skills-based volunteer program that provides community service opportunities for its network of nearly 28,000 life science employees, with a focus on science and education. This program including the corporate volunteering initiative that engages employees in community development projects as part of the company's broader CSR agenda.

The corporate communication department at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia plays a strategic role in facilitating employee involvement in the SPARK program. By designing communication strategies that invite participation, generate enthusiasm, and align corporate messages with employees' personal values, the department actively contributes to enhancing employee engagement. Understanding how corporate communication supports employee engagement through corporate volunteering is critical not only for communication scholars but also for practitioners aiming to integrate CSR and internal communication strategies more effectively.

Employee engagement and corporate volunteering have increasingly become key strategies for fostering a sense of purpose and belonging within organizations. Understanding how corporate communication facilitates engagement, as well as what drives employee participation in programs like SPARK at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia, is essential for enhancing organizational identification. In this context, the following research questions (RQs) are proposed:

- i. RQ1: How does corporate communication influence employee engagement in corporate volunteering initiatives?
- ii. RQ2: What factors affect employee interest and participation in the SPARK program at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia?
- iii. RQ3: How does participation in corporate volunteering activities shape employees' perceptions of purpose, belonging, and organizational identification?
- iv. These research questions serve as a foundation for the Research Objectives (ROs):

The objectives (ROs):

- i. RO1: Examine the role of corporate communication in enhancing employee engagement through corporate volunteering.
- ii. RO2: Investigate employee interest and participation in the SPARK program at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia.
- iii. RO3: Explore how corporate volunteering contributes to employees' perceptions of purpose, belonging, and organizational identification.

This research contributes to the growing literature on internal communication, employee engagement, and CSR by offering empirical insights into how corporate volunteering programs are strategically managed by corporate communication departments. The findings may assist practitioners in designing more impactful communication strategies to foster engagement, and help organizations realize the full potential of integrating CSR into employee relations and internal culture.

Literature Review

1. Corporate Communication as Strategic Management

Corporate communication serves as a strategic management function that facilitates the alignment of all internal and external communication within an organization. Its central aim is to shape and maintain a favorable reputation among various stakeholder groups (Cornelissen, 2014). As organizations face increasing complexity and interdependence, corporate communication plays a vital strategic role not only in disseminating information but also in shaping how organizations build relationships and engage with key stakeholders (Zerfass et al., 2018). Effective corporate communication enables organizations to navigate dynamic environments, foster stakeholder trust, and support meaningful engagement across internal and external audiences (Men & Bowen, 2017).

The importance of corporate communication lies in its capacity to coordinate the flow of information and foster shared understanding both internally among employees and externally with customers, partners, regulators, and the wider public (Nuortimo et al., 2024). Effective corporate communication enhances transparency, alignment, and stakeholder trust in complex and digitally mediated environments. Media relations, employee communication, issue management, and crisis communication as the primary domains (Cornelissen, 2014). These aspects are critical to managing perceptions, building trust, and ensuring continuity during disruptions or public scrutiny.

2. Internal Communication and Its Strategic Role

Among the central domains, internal or employee communication is critical for cultivating an engaged and aligned workforce (Men & Yue, 2019). Employee communication strengthens internal cohesion and promotes consistent understanding of organizational goals (Afridah, & Lubis, 2024). Internally directed communication builds a sense of belonging and trust, leading employees to support organizational initiatives more proactively (Santos et al., 2023).

Internal communication is not just informational but motivational and participatory (Lee & Li, 2019). It empowers employees to contribute feedback, express concerns, and participate in problem-solving (Detert & Burris, 2007). By reinforcing organizational culture and strategic alignment, employee communication creates a two-way channel that enhances transparency and reduces misunderstandings (Bryce, 2024).

3. Communicative Roles of Employees

Beyond the dissemination of internal messages, employees also act as communicators themselves, playing multiple roles within organizations (Ruck & Welch, 2012). These roles as including the promotion of organizational values, representation of the corporate image, defense against external criticism, relationship management, and sensemaking during organizational change (Verhoeven & Madsen, 2022). These communicative functions illustrate how employee behavior influences internal dynamics and external perceptions simultaneously.

The broader view of employees as communicative agents reinforces the importance of organizational communication structures that empower rather than constrain employee voice (Kim & Cho, 2023). It also affirms that internal communication is not a one-directional effort, but a dynamic interaction that shapes culture, innovation, and reputation (Wuersch et al., 2023).

4. Employee Engagement and Organizational Outcomes

Employee engagement is defined as the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment of employees toward organizational objectives (Tiwari & Lenka, 2020). Engaged employees exhibit discretionary effort,

proactive behavior, and resilience, which significantly contribute to organizational performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Engagement increases productivity, reduces turnover, and boosts innovation (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025).

Engagement categorized into three types: engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged employees (Gallup.com, 2020). Engaged employees act as organizational advocates, while disengaged individuals tend to be indifferent or even counterproductive (Saks, 2019). Effective communication is essential in shifting employees toward higher engagement levels by creating trust, recognition, and inclusion (Karanges et al., 2025).

5. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employee Relations

Corporate social responsibility has evolved into a central organizational strategy aimed at contributing to societal welfare beyond economic performance (Tench & Jones, 2015). CSR is no longer optional; it is a reputational necessity that impacts not only public perception but also internal stakeholder satisfaction (Aguinis & Glavas, 2017). Employees, particularly younger generations, increasingly seek employers that demonstrate ethical practices and social responsibility (Barauskaite & Streimikiene, 2021).

CSR can strengthen organizational commitment by creating a sense of pride and shared purpose among employees (Liu et al., 2024). While CSR efforts may involve short-term costs, the long-term rewards—such as increased employee retention and customer loyalty often justify the investment (Alnehabi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2023). Furthermore, CSR strategies often serve as platforms for enhancing internal communication, engagement, and innovation (Alshukri et al., 2024).

6. Corporate Volunteering as a CSR Initiative

Corporate volunteering represents one of the most visible and participatory forms of CSR, offering employees opportunities to contribute directly to societal causes (Mazanec, 2022). Corporate volunteering is organizationally supported programs that allow employees to engage in volunteer work during paid or unpaid work hours (Derecskei & Nagy, 2020).

Skill-based volunteering is increasingly popular, aligning employees' professional expertise with nonprofit or community needs (Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2022). This approach increases the impact of the volunteering experience while also reinforcing employees' sense of self-efficacy and contribution (Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2022). Corporate volunteering is linked to greater engagement, teamwork, and personal development (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2019).

Corporate volunteering enhances employee motivation and commitment further demonstrated (Ma & Chen, 2025). Employees often view these opportunities as a way to grow professionally while participating in causes they value. The dual benefit social impact and employee development—makes corporate volunteering a strategic CSR tool.

7. SPARK Program

One of PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia's leading CSR initiatives that integrates corporate volunteering is the SPARK program. Initiated globally and implemented locally since 2016, SPARK reflects PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia's long-standing commitment to science and technology, particularly in its mission to contribute back to the community through education. The program focuses on science outreach, aiming to break the notion that science is difficult and uninteresting, and instead inspire future generations—especially children to find joy and curiosity in scientific knowledge. The SPARK program is designed to communicate that science can be fun, engaging, and closely connected to everyday life. Activities are hands-on, simple, and localized, enabling children to easily understand and replicate science experiments with materials they can find around them.

As a CSR initiative involving employees, SPARK is fully operated by the corporate communication division. This team not only serves as the program's main organizer—from planning and implementation to evaluation but also ensures broad participation by disseminating information through internal channels. The corporate communication division functions as the bridge between the program's vision and the company's employees, making sure that opportunities to participate reach all corners of the organization.

SPARK typically runs two to three times a year. While regular execution offers employees consistent volunteering opportunities, it also raises the challenge of potential fatigue or loss of novelty. To address this, the corporate communication team is tasked with keeping the concept fresh, engaging, and exciting each year. In doing so, they help sustain employee interest while providing space for employees to explore their creativity and experiment with new approaches to science communication.

Another essential aspect of the SPARK program is the flexibility in target volunteer numbers, which vary depending on the theme and type of activity each year. Despite fluctuating targets, employee registration has consistently met or even exceeded expectations. Even when business workloads intensify and volunteer sign-ups decline, registered employees often step up to personally encourage their colleagues to join. This peer-driven motivation demonstrates that the SPARK program successfully cultivates interest and emotional investment among employees even when participation requires them to take time off from their professional responsibilities.

Volunteers don't just show up on the day of the event. Many are actively involved in ideation, concept development, venue selection, and preparation of science materials. They participate in brainstorming sessions and bring their ideas into action, showing a high level of ownership. One prominent example occurred during the 2022 SPARK program, held in remote areas such as Nias and Tanjung Jabung Timur. The main challenge was the limited technological access and expensive materials in these regions. To overcome this, volunteers collaboratively designed simple experiments using local and easily accessible materials—such as sand, coconuts, and leaves. A notable idea was a tsunami preparedness experiment, inspired by the children's coastal surroundings. The experiment served not just as a scientific demonstration but also as an educational preparedness tool that could have lasting benefits in the event of a future disaster.

Such examples reflect how corporate volunteering at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia contributes to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement among employees. CSR-based employee initiatives can generate deep involvement and foster a sense of belonging, purpose, and proactive contribution within the organization (Alnehabi, M. & Al-Mekhlafi., 2023).



Figure 1. SPARK 2023 Event

Source: PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia's Documentation (2023)

Further supporting this, a post-event survey from SPARK 2023 revealed that 78% of employees found the program highly fun and creative (SPARK post event report, 2023). All respondents expressed satisfaction with the experience, with overall ratings ranging from eight to ten on a ten-point scale. These findings not only validate the emotional impact of the program but also reinforce the idea that SPARK offers meaningful experiences that employees value and remember.

In addition, the company ensures that every volunteer receives proper recognition and appreciation. This recognition takes various forms, from publishing names and contributions in EVA articles and creating appreciation videos shown on Merck's videotron, to distributing small gifts as tokens of gratitude. Importantly, corporate communication also advocates for executive recognition from directors—an approach that

significantly enhances motivation and employee engagement (Modise, 2023). This thoughtful system of acknowledgment helps employees feel valued and appreciated, boosting their willingness to participate in future CSR programs.

Ultimately, the SPARK program stands as a testament to how well-managed corporate volunteering can reinforce employee engagement, foster innovation, and strengthen the organizational culture. It connects employees not only with communities but also with their own sense of purpose within the company turning CSR into a platform for both social impact and personal fulfillment. (The fact and data in this sub-chapter are derived from interviews with informants of this study, observation, and secondary data of PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia's documents).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the role of corporate communication in enhancing employee engagement through corporate volunteering programs. The qualitative approach is appropriate for understanding the depth of employee experiences, perceptions, and motivations, particularly in the context of internal communication and corporate social responsibility. Through this method, the study aims to uncover nuanced insights into how employees perceive and participate in corporate volunteering activities, as well as the strategic function of the corporate communication department in facilitating such engagement.

1. Research Design

The research adopts a case study design, focusing on PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia—a multinational science and technology company known for its active employee engagement programs, particularly the SPARK corporate volunteering initiative. The case study method allows for an in-depth examination of real-life organizational practices and provides rich contextual data, enabling the researcher to analyze how internal communication strategies are operationalized and perceived within a single organizational setting (Rashid et al., 2019).

The selection of PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia is based on its reputational standing in employee engagement and CSR practices. The study investigates the communication strategies used by the corporate communication department to promote employee participation in volunteering, as well as employee responses to these initiatives.

2. Participants and Data Collection

This study utilizes primary data as the core source of information. Primary data refers to information obtained directly from informants whether through verbal responses, physical gestures, or observable actions provided by credible and relevant sources in relation to the variables under study (Arikunto, 2013). In this research, primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with individuals who are directly involved in internal communication and corporate social responsibility activities within the organization.

The informants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who possess substantial experience and responsibility in managing corporate communication and CSR programs. Two key informants were interviewed: one holds a strategic role in Healthcare Communication Business Partner, while the other is responsible for Creative Communication and CSR Officer initiatives within the company. Both informants are the person in charged and involved in the implementation and evaluation of the corporate volunteering program (SPARK), including its integration into employee engagement strategies.

The use of two informants in this study is appropriate given the qualitative single-case study design, which prioritises depth of understanding rather than numerical representation. Qualitative case studies commonly involve small samples because the goal is to obtain rich, contextually grounded insights from individuals who are closely connected to the phenomenon being investigated (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The selected informants were directly involved in the development, coordination, and communication of the SPARK corporate volunteering program at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia, making them information-rich cases capable of providing detailed and relevant perspectives.

Purposeful sampling of key actors is widely supported in qualitative research, as it selects participants based on their knowledge and ability to illuminate the research topic (Patton, 2015). Recent literature further affirms that small samples can be methodologically sound in qualitative research—Boddy (2016) notes that small sample sizes are justified when the focus is on depth, not generalisation, while Guest et al. (2020) demonstrate that thematic saturation can be reached with as few as two to three interviews in relatively homogenous participant groups. Therefore, although the number of informants is small, it is methodologically justified and sufficient to address the research questions within the context of a single organisational case.

Table 1. Informants Background

Informant Code	Education	Position / Role	Division / Category	Job Desc. Background
P1	Bachelor	Communications & Corporate Volunteering (SPARK)	Healthcare Communication Business Partner	Has direct responsibility in planning and executing the SPARK corporate volunteering program at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia. Possesses experience in coordinating employee engagement initiatives that involve cross-functional collaboration, external partnerships, and communications strategy. Actively involved in the development of project concepts, communication content, volunteer coordination, and evaluation.
P2	Bachelor	Communications & Corporate Volunteering (SPARK)	Creative Communication and CSR Officer	Supports the execution of SPARK activities and communication initiatives that promote employee participation. Experienced in managing volunteer coordination, internal communication channels, and post-event feedback collection. Actively contributes to creative content development, stakeholder engagement, and building cross-departmental participation.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to enable in-depth exploration of the research themes, while allowing for flexibility in follow-up questions. This approach facilitated the collection of detailed narratives concerning communication strategies, employee involvement, and perceptions of corporate volunteering. All interviews were conducted in person, recorded with the participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

The data collection process was conducted over approximately three months. Data collection (Interview) took place at the office of PT. PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia, located in Arkadia Green Park, Pasar Minggu District, South Jakarta City.

3. Data Analysis Method

The study utilizes thematic analysis to interpret and organize the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It allows the researcher to move beyond counting phrases or words and focus instead on identifying and examining broader meanings, ideas, and assumptions in the dataset.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase process: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. These stages provided a structured yet adaptable framework for analyzing the interviews, facilitating both data reduction and interpretive depth.

To ensure analytical rigor, the study used NVivo 14, a qualitative data analysis software that supports thematic coding and visualization of patterns across data sources. NVivo enabled the researcher to systematically organize the codes, track emerging themes, and conduct queries that helped to identify relationships and co-occurrences within the data (Allsop et al, 2022).

4. Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the study applied criteria commonly used in qualitative research: credibility and transferability (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and member checking, where participants were asked to verify their statements and interpretations (Lloyd et al., 2024). Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings (Drisko, 2024).

The and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, analyzed using NVivo 14. The themes are structured according to the study's three research objectives: (1) examining the role of corporate communication in enhancing employee engagement through corporate volunteering, (2) investigating employee interest and participation in the SPARK program at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia, and (3) exploring how corporate volunteering contributes to employees' sense of purpose, belonging, and organizational identification. To enhance the richness of the data interpretation, direct quotes from participants are included.

Table 2. Themes derived from in-depth interview

RQ1: How does corporate communication influence employee engagement in corporate volunteering initiatives?	RQ2: What factors affect employee interest and participation in the SPARK program at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia?	RQ3: How does participation in corporate volunteering activities shape employees' perceptions of purpose, belonging, and organizational identification?
Value-based framing Emotional storytelling Ownership & engagement	Continuous reminders Multi-channel internal communication Peer testimonials Removing participation barriers	Meaningful purpose Organizational identification Belonging & relationship-building

The Role of Corporate Communication in Enhancing Employee Engagement through Corporate Volunteering

The findings indicate that corporate communication plays a central role in enhancing employee engagement by framing corporate volunteering as a meaningful and value-driven activity. Communication strategies at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia go beyond basic information dissemination; they focus on connecting the company's identity with employee values through storytelling and consistent internal messaging. As P1 explained:

"We always try to present volunteering programs not just as ordinary social activities, but as part of the company's identity. So, the way we communicate them must reflect the employees' values too."

This illustrates how communication is intentionally designed to create a shared narrative that resonates emotionally with employees. Internal communication channels such as newsletters, video stories, and employee testimonials are used to foster emotional connection and understanding. This aligns with Mmutle (2023), who emphasized that communication is integral to shaping employee engagement and identity.

P2 also noted:

"We believe that engagement comes from a sense of ownership. That's what we aim to create through our communication—a sense that they are truly contributing."

This statement reinforces the concept that communication fosters emotional investment and ownership, which is key to sustaining long-term engagement (Muhammad & Hidayat, 2020).

Employee Interest and Participation in the SPARK Program

The SPARK program, PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia's flagship corporate volunteering initiative, has received strong interest and participation from employees. The analysis shows that effective internal communication, program alignment with employee interests, and peer influence are essential factors in maintaining this enthusiasm. P1 shared:

"When we first introduced SPARK, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Many said, 'Finally, a program that aligns with my passion.' But we still need to constantly remind them, because work responsibilities can easily shift their focus."

This highlights how communication must be sustained and repetitive to maintain momentum. Interest tends to grow when the program aligns with personal values and offers a sense of relevance. In terms of strategy, P2 explained:

"We use internal channels like email blasts, intranet, and even chat groups to promote SPARK. But honestly, the most effective tool is when co-workers share their own experiences."

Peer testimonials humanize the program and offer relatable stories that reduce barriers to participation. However, the study also found challenges in maintaining participation due to time limitations and lack of clarity, P2 explained:

"Some employees said, 'I'd like to join, but I don't know where to start,' or 'I'm too busy with deadlines.' That's our challenge to make the program feel accessible and flexible."

This underscores the need for tailored communication strategies that address employee concerns (Ruck & Welch, 2012), who emphasizes two-way, empathetic communication in employee relations.

Corporate Volunteering and Employee Perceptions of Purpose, Belonging, and Organizational Identification
The third theme highlights how corporate volunteering contributes to employees' perceptions of purpose, belonging, and connection to the company. Participants described their volunteer experience as meaningful and impactful. P1 stated:

"Joining SPARK made me feel like I contributed beyond my regular job. There's a sense of humanity I carry with me after each event."

This quote illustrates the emotional fulfillment employees derive from volunteering, linking personal values with organizational goals. P2 added:

"Seeing the real impact of our activities on the community made me feel more connected to the company. It gave me a sense of why I work here."

This reflects a deepened organizational identification—a psychological state where employees align their self-concept with the organization's values, as suggested by Glavas and Kelley (2014). Volunteering also fosters a strong sense of community within the organization. P1 shared:

"We got to know each other better, especially when we participated in off-site activities together. There's a sense of family that forms from those experiences."

This finding supports Lor-Serrano & Esteban-Salvador (2021) study, who view corporate volunteering as not only a CSR tool but also an internal engagement mechanism that strengthens interpersonal relationships across departments.

Conclusion

This study shows that corporate communication plays a central role in enhancing employee engagement through corporate volunteering at PT Merck Chemicals and Life Sciences Indonesia, particularly within the SPARK program. Communication practices were found to shape emotional connection, shared identity, and employees' perception of volunteering as an activity that reflects both personal and organizational values. Storytelling, internal testimonials, and consistent value-based messaging emerged as key communication strategies that successfully positioned SPARK as a meaningful, purpose-driven initiative.

Drawing on these insights, several actionable recommendations can be made. Organizations should treat corporate volunteering as an integral component of internal communication and engagement strategies, supported by empathetic, clear, and motivating messages. To address participation challenges, companies can introduce flexible volunteering formats, comprehensive onboarding guides, structured communication tools (such as activity calendars and progress updates), and peer-led sharing to sustain interest and clarity. Future research may broaden the scope by examining different organizational settings, conducting longitudinal studies on outcomes such as retention and well-being, or exploring how digital platforms—like enterprise social media and gamified engagement systems—can strengthen communication and participation, especially in hybrid work environments.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how corporate volunteering can operate simultaneously as an external CSR initiative and a strategic internal engagement mechanism. By illustrating how communication fosters purpose, belonging, and organizational identification, the findings highlight the transformative potential of volunteering programs when supported by intentional communication practices. Ultimately, this research underscores that communication-driven corporate volunteering can be a powerful catalyst for building a more engaged, values-driven, and resilient workforce.

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