

People are more charitable if their employer is environmentally-conscious

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Employees are more likely to make donations and willingly volunteer outside of work if their employers engage in environmentally-conscious activities, finds new research from Mannheim Business School (<https://www.mannheim-business-school.com/en/>) (MBS).

Dr. Irmela Koch-Bayram and Prof. Dr. Torsten Biemann, both from MBS, conducted three experiments to investigate how an employees' private prosocial behaviour is impacted by their organisation's environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) and environmental corporate social irresponsibility (ECSIR). ECSR includes behaviours such as reducing pollution, conserving resources, and planting trees; while ECSIR includes the use of harmful production methods and creating massive amounts of waste.

In study one, workers were provided with information about their employer's environmental activities before measuring their willingness to volunteer. Study two investigated whether students were more or less likely to donate to a charity when they believed they worked for a start-up that engaged in ECSR vs. ECSIR activities. The final study measured ECSR and ECSIR perceptions of employees from a variety of organisations and observed their willingness to volunteer.

Results suggest that an employer's ECSR activities increase employees' donations and willingness to volunteer outside work. Employers engaging in ECSIR activities, on the other hand, reduce employees' private donations and willingness to volunteer.

"Companies not only contribute to environmental protection and harm through their own activities but also contribute to environmental issues by influencing employee behaviour," says Dr. Koch-Bayram. "The positive effects of environmental CSR are partly explained by the strengthening of employees' environmental self-identity."

Environmental self-identity (ESI) refers to the perception individuals have of themselves in relation to the environment. Those with a strong ESI may actively engage in environmentally-friendly behaviours such as recycling and reducing waste.

In the final study, participants also recalled ECSR, ECSIR, or neutral employer activities and had their ESI and guilt measured. Recalling ECSR activities of one's employer enhanced employees' ESI, while recalling ECSIR activities of an employer increased feelings of guilt.

Organisations have an ethical responsibility toward the environment and their employees and should implement environmentally-conscious practices that influence the private behaviour of employees positively, say the researchers. Politicians and legislators must also set boundaries and regulations that ensure organisations do not negatively impact the environment, to ensure the influence on employee behaviour is positive.

These findings were published in the Journal of Business Ethics.

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