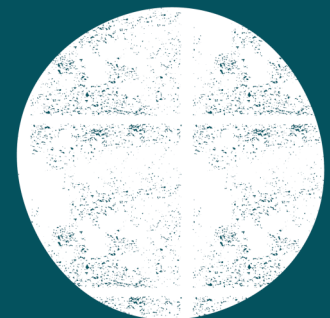


The Best of Both Worlds

Maximising the effectiveness of Corporate
International Service Learning (CISL)
Programmes in a Hybrid Context

September 2022

EMERGING W•RLD



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Executive Summary

Over the past few years, to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, companies and their social partners have been working on new and innovative Corporate International Service Learning (CISL) initiatives that utilise virtual spaces to maintain their corporate volunteer programmes and to meet the needs of both partners and employees. However, in shifting delivery of programmes to virtual, despite the benefits that virtual spaces can bring, there are undoubtedly obstacles to overcome so that virtual CISL

What is Corporate International Service Learning (CISL)

Corporate International Service Learning* programmes enable employees to cross international borders, either in-person or virtually, to apply their work-based skills to a project or other assignment that serves a third party constituency. These programmes may also be referred to as International Corporate Volunteering (ICV) or Global Pro Bono.

* Based on and modified from the ISL model by Pless, Maak & Staal 2011.

This paper aims to identify the advantages and disadvantages that delivering CISL programmes virtually can offer. It will provide a deeper insight into how to use virtual spaces to maximise the impact of programmes. Through desk research on publicly available information and interviews with twelve companies with experience of virtual programmes over the last few years, we identified several benefits of virtual CISL programmes as well as areas that need addressing if virtual programmes are going to continue to play a strong role in a company's overall CISL offer.

Advantages of virtual engagement include the significant flexibility in terms of the participation of participants and partner organisations, that allow for longer-term engagement between the parties. Virtual programmes have been seen to be more inclusive so that a more diverse range of employees can participate. However, our research has shown that the level of participant learning in virtual programmes is sometimes lower than in in-person programmes. And another challenge is the difficulty of maintaining participants' motivation during virtual programmes.

We revealed some innovative approaches that companies have introduced to overcome these challenges. For example, to address the difficulty of maintaining a high level of commitment from participants, mentoring has been offered to volunteers during the project. In addition, building a community among the cohort participating in the programme both enables participants to support each other and to share insights from beyond their particular project. To address any difficulty in building cross-cultural literacy, tasks with human value, such as undertaking stakeholder interviews, have been included to create opportunities to build an understanding of the organisation from as many perspectives as possible.

The growth of virtual volunteering and the benefits generated from it are universal and will continue to be in the future. The appetite for virtual programming remains high, with interviewees citing both cost savings and a positive impact on climate change given the reduction of carbon emissions from the absence of international travel in virtual programmes. And all this has been shared within the context of the current economic climate that has put pressure on programme budgets. However, it is also worth noting that interviewees stressed the value that can only be gained from in-person experiences and that cannot be achieved through virtual projects.

We believe that hybrid programmes that maximise impact by combining the best of both the in-person and virtual context could be the answer. Hybrid programmes would provide both the advantages of flexibility in a virtual programme and the advantages of learning from human interaction in an in-person programme.

The hybrid programmes add a new set of tools to the toolbox for corporate volunteering, CISL programmes and leadership and learning managers: virtual, in-person or hybrid; long-term or shorter-term programmes, one-off engagements hackathons, or short interventions over an extended period of time; a wider variety of tech platforms to support engagement and to manage the 'back end' of programmes, facilitated programmes, employee-led initiatives, etc. The role of the programme manager will need to adapt to meet this range of possibilities, but companies are left with difficult decisions. While current evidence is mixed and there are definitely advantages and disadvantages of virtual programming, trade-offs will need to be made and quantitative/empirical information is in short supply to support those choices. We aim to look at how programme managers should go about making real the tantalising possibility of finding the best of both worlds.

We could not have done this Study without the time and support from the 12 companies that participated in interviews; thank you to the companies including Credit Suisse, Genentech, GSK, Johnson & Johnson, Medtronic Foundation, Microsoft, Novartis, Pfizer and Randstad.

1 Introduction

Introduction

Over the last decade, virtual and hybrid corporate volunteering programmes have become more popular following the increased use of online communications and virtual platforms for engagement. The trend to bring programmes online was accelerated during the pandemic, with reports from one study that more than two thirds of companies had brought their programmes online in 2020. With a greater focus on addressing climate change, the opportunities offered to companies by virtual programming have increased, with the need for international travel eliminated. Companies looking for ways to increase employee engagement to alleviate the impact of the Covid-19 and associated lockdowns found virtual corporate volunteering a great solution. The advantages of virtual programmes, such as low programme operating costs and the ability to increase the number of participants, clearly demonstrate their promising potential. It was also a value-added way to continue support for partners whose resources were stretched due to the unprecedented demands of the COVID-19 pandemic by offering virtual skills based volunteering. On the other hand, we heard concerns from programme managers operating virtual programmes during the pandemic that participants are increasingly expressing fatigue from being online for so much of their time. Having said that, we are not aware of any studies that have looked at the situation as of 2022, when the world is opening up again and travel and in person programming has been returning.

In January 2022, Emerging World published a report that explored how CISL programmes could build resilience. It covered the participants experience of both virtual and in person programmes from 2015-2021 and compared the effectiveness of both approaches. We found that although levels of participant learning in virtual programmes were lower than in face-to-face programmes, improvements and application of knowledge, skills and abilities were still high and so virtual programmes retain their interest and value. Taking this further, this Study aims to clarify in terms of maximising impact how best to do something, what to do and what not to do.

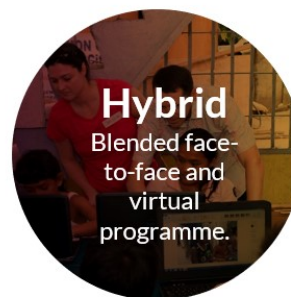
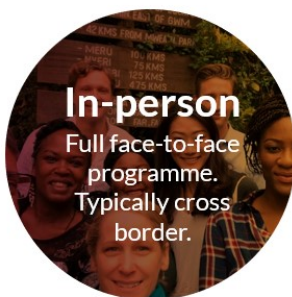
The report is based on extensive literature reviews and desk research of publicly available information, Emerging World's accumulated knowledge and data from its CISL Long Term Impact Studies and Benchmarks as well as interviews with twelve companies with experience with virtual programmes over the last few years. Interviews with the twelve companies were conducted for 45-60 minutes each, and all were conducted online. Of the many corporate volunteering and learning programmes, this paper focused on skilled based programmes, where employees use their business skills, rather than 'hands-on' programmes. The paper includes programmes from companies running both domestic programmes with local partners, although the main focus is on international programmes where the partners are located in a country other than where the employee is located

Through this, we can provide some insights into the value of adding virtual into international corporate volunteering and learning programmes and how to leverage the virtual space to maximise impact.

¹ As part of our desk research to support the Study, the PYXERA Global 2021 State of the Practice Report and the 2022 IAVE Report on Corporate Volunteering were valuable resources and have been used in combination with our own original research to inform the report.

2 Expansion of Virtual/ Hybrid programmes

Expansion of Virtual/Hybrid programmes



Pre-Pandemic Approaches

Corporate volunteering has changed dramatically over the last decade with a massive increase in virtual volunteering due to the development of tools to support virtual engagement.

For the purposes of this study, we have defined virtual programmes as those where employees undertake the volunteering or immersive experience using the internet and a computer or other internet-enabled device (e.g. a smartphone or tablet) to access tools to enable communication, programme management and implementation.

Emerging World's CISL Long Term Impact Studies found that from its inception in 2015, most participants reported that their on-site experiences were complemented by virtual support. Only 15% of respondents provided no virtual support. Participating companies included virtual elements into their programmes, such as providing online pre- and post-training, alongside in-person programme implementation. Furthermore, several companies introduced virtual volunteering opportunities into the volunteering portfolio to add flexibility and allow employees to easily participate without having to leave their personal or professional life.

'Our virtual programmes existed before the pandemic. We initially wanted to provide opportunities for people who could not leave their desks, and we wanted to support the nonprofit organisations in a flexible way. This experience was put to advantage during the pandemic' (Programme officer, financial company)

Although virtual support was already a feature in Corporate International Service Learning programmes before the pandemic, an increasing focus on reducing carbon emissions and initiatives to address climate change has driven moves to reduce unnecessary overseas or air travel. Another factor accelerating the trend towards programme virtualisation was the fact that projects could be implemented with partners in parts of the world where security or medical risks might preclude engagement if the projects were operating in person. And in 2022, for many companies, the war in Ukraine and its resulting impact on the economy has provided a further boost to seeking to leverage the potential of virtual programmes.

Impact of the pandemic

The pandemic in 2020 accelerated the implementation of volunteering programmes, as well as their virtual implementation. Firstly, the travel restrictions and 'work from home' policies adopted by many governments forced companies that wanted to provide volunteering opportunities to develop/increase their delivery on a virtual basis. The impact of the lockdowns during the pandemic resulted in many employees feeling isolated, building a momentum to seek connection with their local communities. At the beginning of the pandemic there was an increased desire to contribute to society that often manifested in hyper-local and hands on volunteering which was encouraged and supported by companies. And to maintain employee engagement, companies also looked to other types of volunteer programmes including healthcare projects related to Covid-19. In addition to providing their own staff with engagement opportunities, many companies wanted to contribute to support community partners during this time of need. We also heard how the events of 2020, including racism driven murders and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, together with the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on black and minority communities led to increased employee interest in Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging and has led to the development of new approaches to corporate volunteering and employee engagement in some companies. While some companies that originally ran skills-based volunteer programmes for their employees suspended their programmes due to travel restrictions and employees working at home during the pandemic, many companies did shift their programmes to virtual. As mentioned above, some companies that were already running virtual programmes increased their offer during the pandemic.

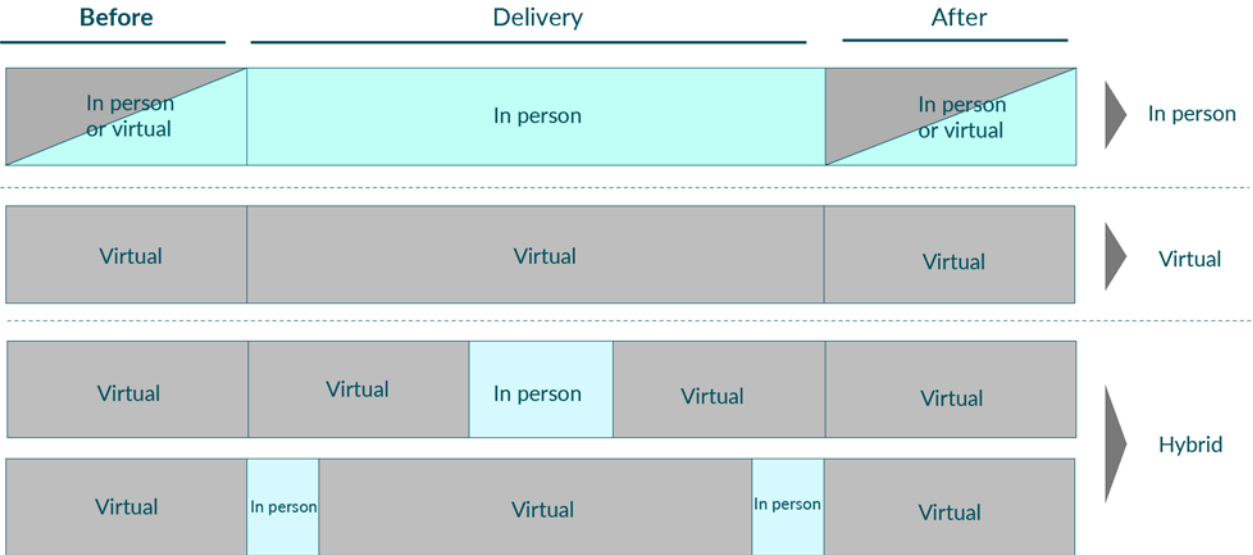
'Our new commitment to racial equality and social injustice was initiated in direct response to employee requests following the death of George Floyd.' (Programme officer, pharmaceutical company)

Now, with Covid restrictions coming to an end and travel restrictions beginning to be eased, an increasing number of companies are offering hybrid programmes by adding in-person modules to the virtual volunteering that had previously taken place.

A hybrid programme is defined here as one in which the volunteering delivery phase itself is divided into virtual and in-person modules (See table 2).

For example, one financial institution has launched a hybrid programme in the form of a “sandwich”, with an initial three days of in-person volunteering, followed by a few weeks of virtual work, and a final three days of in-person work as a final debriefing. In this way, programmes that combine the advantages of both virtual and in-person volunteering are beginning to emerge. Some companies that now run their volunteer programmes virtually are planning a hybrid format with an in-person element soon. Thus, from the blight of the pandemic, corporate volunteering is evolving and innovating to meet the needs of the times.

Table 1: Definition of in-person/virtual/hybrid programme



3 Current Landscape of Virtual Programmes

Current Landscape of Virtual Programmes

3-1: What has been accelerated by more virtual programming?

Flexibility of the length of programme/project durations

One of the biggest shifts we have seen in the pivot from in-person experiences to virtual has been the elapsed period that people could engage with their partner organisations. This has been particularly true for project-based programmes, where participants work on a partner organisation's challenges or problems for a specific period of time. With in-person CISL programmes requiring international travel, there is often a limit to the length of time one can leave work behind – usually one to several weeks, (with some notable exceptions). However, most virtual programmes allow for part-time project engagement alongside current work, which also allows for assignments with a longer elapsed time between start and finish.

'We used to offer a three-week intensive face-to-face skills-based volunteer projects, but, in response to the pandemic, we shifted to a virtual model and lengthened the programme to a 10-week activity alongside the day-to-day responsibilities.' (Programme officer, healthcare company)

In some virtual international programmes, we have seen the opposite opportunity emerge in that the virtual setting has made it possible for employees to make a tangible impact through their engagement in short activities of less than a few hours. Since there is no need to leave their desk or home to participate—no need to travel at all—the extra time taken up by travel and logistical arrangements is eliminated.

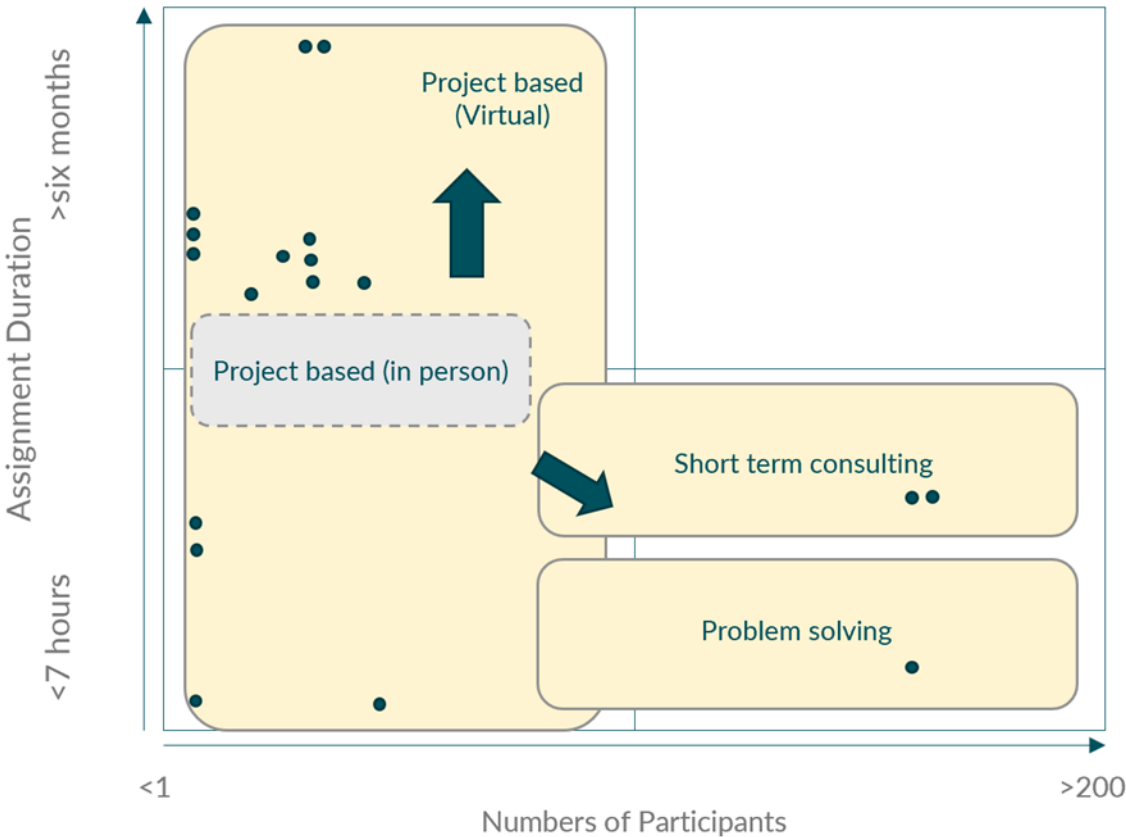
The number of participants

Going virtual has also made it possible to conduct short-term activities with larger cohorts of participants than would be feasible with in-person engagements. For example, a 'partner problem solving' approach has developed, in which issues faced by partner organisations are discussed and resolved in an interactive dialogue format that can be facilitated in as little as half a day or be extended to several sessions over two weeks.

Hackathon-type virtual programmes have also emerged, in which several partner organisations gather at once and a group of participants with relevant skills are brought together to work with them to tackle their issues in small groups over a day, two days, or a short-term 1-2 week consulting project. We heard from financial services and healthcare companies amongst others that are running such programmes. Without the time, cost, logistics and carbon of international travel, this type of virtual approach not only allows for more employees to participate in the programme at one time, but also makes it possible to work with partner organisations that may have previously had difficulty hosting volunteers.

'Short-term consulting involves as many as 200 people at a time; increasing scalability has been made possible by the virtual.' (Programme officer, healthcare company)

Table 2: Types of virtual programme



*Dots indicate assignment duration and participant numbers where identified in desk research and interviews

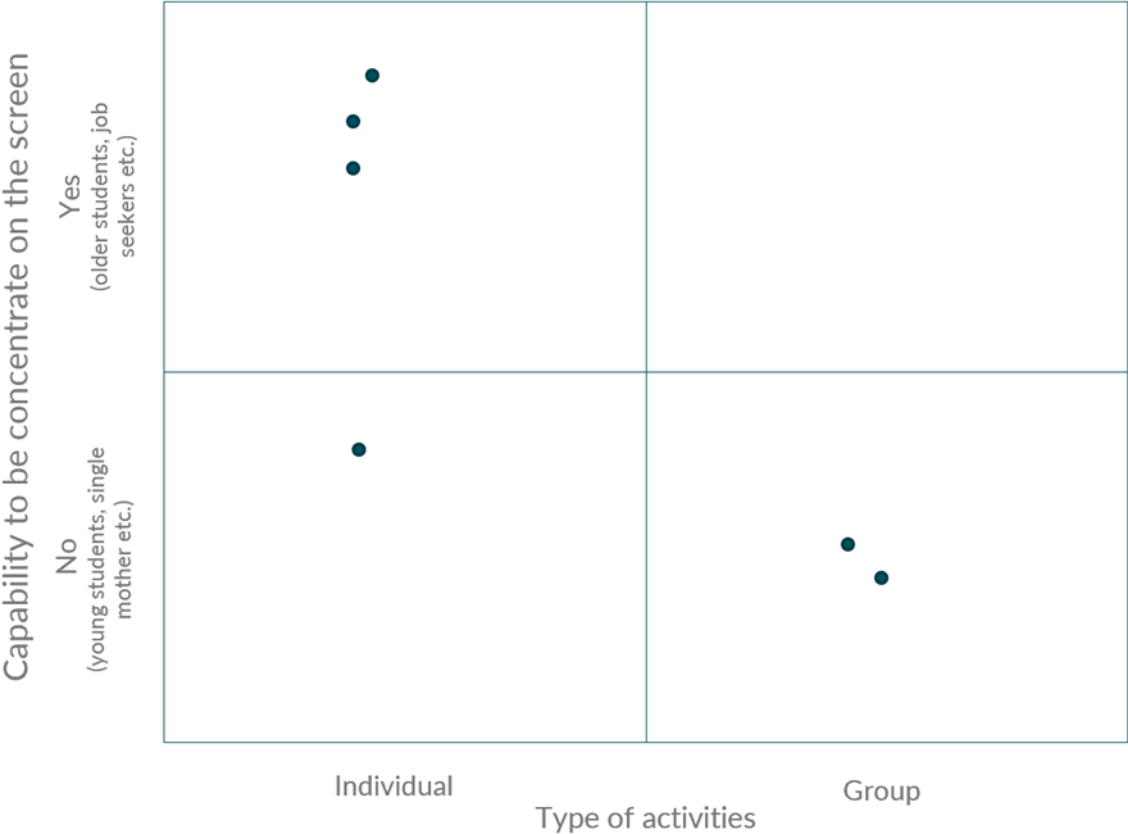
Beneficiary focus

In-person CISL programmes tend to offer both opportunities to work on projects for the partner organisations themselves as well as projects that provide engagement directly with beneficiaries. Some virtual programmes have even accelerated opportunities to connect directly with beneficiaries that are based in different countries from the participants. For example, mentoring and coaching programmes, programmes that focus on STEM education for school aged children, job consultations for jobseekers, and CV coaching with students all were provided as examples of programmes introduced during the pandemic to maintain or build connections between participants and beneficiaries. These activities often required a general set of work based skills, and have therefore been relevant to a wide range of industries/companies. We heard of how some of these beneficiary-focused activities were conducted in-person with beneficiaries living in the same country as participants, while others were virtual and involved corporate participants from a range of countries working with beneficiaries elsewhere. Where programmes had started pre-pandemic, they proved popular and grew over the last two years.

Programme managers shared how they had experimented with different approaches in their virtual programmes and from these experiments it has become clear what kinds of things are and are not suitable when working with beneficiaries in a virtual environment. One company's group classroom activity for younger students was not successful because the children were unable to stay focused online for the time required. Similar examples were found in other companies's programme. On the other hand, one-on-one mentoring activities worked well with students who had difficulty concentrating on a screen for long periods of time as mentors can follow up individually. This suggests that if the targeted beneficiaries are less likely to tolerate long hours of online activity, they may need a different approach or that more facilitation is required. Equally, that success is more likely when participants can work on a one-to-one basis and can be followed up on individually.

'It was not easy to carry out a project to support primary school children virtually. It was stressful for them to have to do something complicated virtually and difficult for the families supporting them.' (Programme officer, pharmaceutical company)

Table 3: Types of beneficiaries focused programme



* Dots indicate type of beneficiary focus programme where identified in desk research and interviews

Employee-led approaches

Over the last decade, more and more companies have launched digital platforms to support CISL and corporate volunteering management and that include functions for programme operations, such as matching the needs of partners to the skills of volunteers and encouraging communication between participants. Some of these are configured to enable employees to post and organize their own volunteer opportunities. We saw an increase in this type of approach during the pandemic with one result being a reduction in workload for some programme managers in some areas. However, we also noted how the responsibility of the programme manager has shifted over the last two years and has required additional responsibilities in terms of managing the platform.

During our interviews, we heard how employees are increasingly keen to take a lead on projects to support issues that matter to them. This may be influenced by greater numbers of Generation Z employees in the workplace, whose strong desire for social contribution is increasingly present.

Whether that's a reaction to George Floyd's murder in 2020 or the Ukrainian crisis in 2022, there is now momentum and platforms for employees who want to do something on their own or with colleagues, and several companies have seen employee-led projects spawned as a result. The development of these types of digital platforms have made it easier for employees to set up and manage their own projects. We were told by several companies of employees who wanted – and did set up their own projects in places difficult to visit in person, for example, to support the crisis in Ukraine, where it has been easier to implement when the project is operated virtually.

'Employees took it upon themselves to help refugees from Ukraine. They asked for collaborators on the platform and individuals connected with each other to volunteer. As a company, we just acted as a broker.' (Programme officer, pharmaceutical company)

3-2: Virtual Programme Benefits

Virtual programming allowed CISL and corporate volunteering programmes to continue during the pandemic. They offer flexibility around launch and operations, a lower cost option to in person international volunteering, and fewer logistical arrangements. There is no doubt that the costs for in person international volunteering programmes can be a concern. They require specialised operational support, often include fees for intermediaries and require significant investment in travel costs and administration. Because of the lower cost, virtual programmes allow companies that had previously limited volunteering to top talent for whom it was worth the investment, to evolve their programmes and expand their focus to include a wider range of employees. In addition, because virtual offers limited health and safety concerns, it is now possible to volunteer virtually in places where there may well be medical and security concerns, or where previously it would not have been possible to send volunteers. The dilemma for companies is that the societal need is often greatest in places where the security or health risk is also high and where companies are unable to place employees directly in the field - such as the recent crisis in Ukraine. Virtual programmes, however, make it possible to provide support to these areas, as the volunteers do not have to be travel to the projects in person. The knock-on benefits for programme management are less time needed for travel and other logistics, which lowers the time and effort required for programme coordination.

'We were always challenged in how we could engage more employees in high impact volunteering opportunities. We know that these activities grow employee skills, increase their networks, and elevate company pride. When the programmes were in-person, we were only able to support 30 people in very curated and intense experiences. It was also very limited to only like kind of high potential employees due to the cost of lodging and travel.' (Programme officer, healthcare company)

There are also advantages for participants. Virtual programmes are more inclusive allowing participation for those who have been unable to put themselves forward for international programmes due to personal, family or work commitments.

Virtual programmes offer a flexibility in scheduling, and location. Physically disabled employees, who may have found it difficult to participate in the past, no longer face a barrier to participation and participants can make an impact on causes and organisations irrespective of where they are based. It is natural to assume that international travel is one of the appealing factors of in-person programmes, but the ability to participate in a programme on a part-time basis without much disruption to one's regular job is a significant change and is seen as an attractive alternative. Another advantage for participants is that they are now able to work with partner organisations on pieces of work that require more elapsed time to be successful (e.g. change management, leadership development, mentoring), as programmes that previously lasted only a few weeks in the field have become longer-term virtual programmes taking place over several months.

'Longer project engagements allow for elements to be incorporated that would be difficult to do in a shorter timeframe, such as learning from what has been tried in the past, or interviewing and conversing with other organisations doing similar activities to gain a better understanding. The virtual model allows for in-depth analysis that would not be possible in a time-limited format.' (Programme officer, financial company)

Partner organisations can also benefit. In the past in in-person programmes, partners had required time, effort and other costs to host corporate volunteers from abroad. Being able to accept volunteers virtually without such costs is an advantage. It also shortens the time it takes to launch a project, which means that projects can be implemented at a time more suited to the needs of the partners. There is also appreciation among some that virtual volunteering allows for a more balanced or equitable programme design.

'When it comes to in-person engagements, the experience of the employee can sometimes take precedence over the experience of the partner organisation. The virtual model can balance that in terms of power dynamics.' (Programme officer, financial company)

3-3: Obstacles to Virtual Programme Success

There are some areas that cause challenges in running a virtual programme. Google 'Zoom fatigue' and you'll be given tens of thousands results. It is therefore unsurprising that programme managers report increasing difficulty in maintaining the engagement of volunteers and

Furthermore, when working in virtual teams, because the members are not all co-located for the project implementation as they would be in an in-person activity, the team needs to be structured with time differences in mind. This makes it sometimes more difficult to pull together a truly global team than in person programme, as it need to be more mindful of drastic time zone differences when matching either participants/teams and/or partners. And unlike the strong relationships that are built by teams participating in in-person experiences, virtual teams have less opportunity to build those connections – both with each other and with their partners.

‘For both partners and employees, there is a definite value in face-to-face interaction. It can even be a life-changing experience. There is a noticeable difference in the quality of the relationships that can be built in virtual projects. The interactions between teams do not build the same intimacy or emotional connection as when meeting in person.’ (Programme officer, healthcare company)

Because participants are unable to meet the partner organisations in person and visit their field sites, this can inhibit them from acquiring cross-cultural literacy. There are less opportunities to overcome assumptions about the local context that can be quickly dispelled when seeing things in-person. This means that certain activities are harder to complete effectively in a virtual space, such as focus groups or interviews/surveys with partners’ stakeholders. And as our 2021 CISL Study revealed, although still strong, certain learning competencies are weaker in virtual

Table 4: Advantages and obstacles of virtual programmes

Advantages	Corporate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible & cost effective • No safety and security concerns • Scalable & inclusive
	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More employees are able to participate • Deeper understanding of partners through longer term projects and more in-depth activities • Ability to impact on causes irrespective of location
	Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a wider pool of talent and skills • Less time required in hosting participants • Improved power dynamics; volunteer satisfaction is less a priority in virtual with more parity between partners and participants
Obstacles	Corporate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams cannot be truly global as need to be configured for time zones • Engagement can be hard to maintain and can need more facilitation • Activities need to be carefully selected to ensure they are appropriate for virtual settings
	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harder to make strong connections between team members • Online fatigue • Difficult to develop cultural literacy
	Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build and maintain commitment and connection to cause • Limitation of assignment activities

3-4: Key success factors

As companies' experience in implementing virtual programmes has increased, knowledge has been collected on how these obstacles can be overcome and the impact of virtual programmes can be maximised:

Providing additional support at the front end

- Guidelines: many companies provide participants with guidance or guidelines on managing a virtual engagement/initiative as part of the onboarding process to ensure that their projects run well, and to help them understand what they can do to take ownership of the project and the relationship with the partner. For example, companies offer orientation into non-profit operations, power-dynamics in non-hierarchical systems, training & tools to use when managing projects with participants. Also, participants can practice inquiry vs. advocacy and other listening skills. Companies also provide incorporate decision-making tools such as consensus decision making or RAPID decision making.

Adding facilitated time with participants

- Mentoring: some companies provide regular opportunities for input from past participants, line managers or the programme manager to connect with participants to discuss and share experiences. This helps to bring in an external perspective and can take the form of mentoring or coaching.

Encouraging personal connections and social interaction

- Casual meetings: to address the potential of a lack of bonding within the participant teams, many companies provide opportunities for off-task conversations and casual lunches among the teams.
- Building community between participants and across the programmes more broadly: often in programmes where participants are working as individuals with their partner organisations, companies will provide regular opportunities for the whole cohort to come together to share their experiences and learn from each other. Example includes volunteering at community events, celebrating individual and group success.

Increase people-centred opportunities as much as possible

- Maximise the value of humanity: to address the issue that it is difficult to increase cross-cultural literacy without in person access to the partner organisation's site, it is helpful to encourage participants to undertake activities that are virtual but still allow for human connections, such as stakeholder interviews with the partner organisation. In this way, volunteers can get to know their partners better.

'We encourage volunteers to utilise tools of Human-Centred Design and be aware of the human component when working with nonprofits. We ask them to take time with partner's stakeholders to really understand the challenges they face, rather than just looking at the issues facing the organisation. We ask them to take the time to learn about the organisation and its culture, and to talk to the people who work there and those they serve to find out what has worked and what has not. This way they can understand the world of the organisation and find more sensitive and cultural solutions.' (Programme officer, healthcare company)

Build opportunities for employee led activities

- Leverage any programme management platforms to encourage employees to post and organise their own projects that align with your corporate objectives. When employee interests and corporate goals align (e.g. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion or Climate Change), you're likely to reap the benefits of employee engagement.

"Our new commitment to racial equality and social injustice is a US only programme now, but it was what our employees were calling for and what our company committed to." (Programme officer, pharmaceutical company)

Partner & project identification

- It may be that some existing partners are not geared up for virtual programmes or will lack the technical ability/capacity to engage. In light of this, many companies took the opportunity to reach out to new partners to develop virtual programmes and conducted special training/preparation workshops with partners to ensure that they were ready to host virtual participants. Our CISL Study showed that all parties benefit more when the projects are meeting a real partner need, and this is the case whether the programme is virtual, hybrid or in-person.

Hybrid programming

- The benefits of both in person and virtual will be unique to each company and each partner organisation, but some companies have introduced hybrid programmes that leverage the benefits of both virtual and in-person communication. These companies conduct elements of their programmes in-person in locations where travel restrictions are being lifted, thus creating a hybrid programme of cross-cultural understanding.

“The hybrid version will surely evolve in the future. Our current approach is to have all teams and partners meet in person for about three days at the start of a project, allowing each team to spend time together. Then, after working virtually, the team meet again in person at the end for a closing handover and presentation of deliverables.” (Programme officer, financial company)

Good practice is emergent. However, many companies are not yet clear on which of the success factors are critical for their own programmes. The above are examples we gathered from our initial research, but more research is needed to understand best practice and the circumstances required to achieve it.

4 Prospects for the Future

Prospects for the Future

There is no doubt that building a virtual element into a company's CISL programme expands the programmes' potential. So what questions should companies be asking themselves in the future to maximise the possibilities of a virtual programme?

- Could you expand the range of your programme's offer even further?
- Could you 'virtualise' any more components of your programme?
- Could you work with a greater number of partners?
- Could you offer skills-based volunteering to partners working on issues that you may not have been able to access before because of their location?
- Could you target groups of employees that have not been able to access your CISL programmes before?

These and more questions make the task of programme managers more complex in terms of designing and implementing the best programme with the most appropriate employee engagement working with partners and on projects that align with employee interests and corporate goals. Right now, we have many questions and only some ideas of the answers. In the future, with a better understanding of the full picture of what can and cannot best be done virtually, programme managers will be able to be more confident about their ability to maximise the impact of their virtual and hybrid CISL programmes.

5 Conclusion

Conclusion

Our research on virtual programmes over the last couple of years has shown a great deal of innovation and efforts from companies and their social partners to keep CISL programmes going and to meet the needs of both partners and employees during the pandemic. Much of that has been by utilising virtual platforms and programme design. But with all the benefits that this has brought, there are some learnings and areas that need addressing if virtual programmes are going to continue to play a strong role in a company's overall CISL offer.

As the world begins opening up again, most companies will want to retain the advantages of virtual programmes within their CISL offer. But to address some of the obstacles and the trade-offs that exist with purely virtual offers, hybrid programmes could be one of the possible solutions to maximise impact.

For managers of corporate volunteering, CISL, and leadership and learning programmes, there are new possibilities for programmes: virtual, in-person, hybrid, long-term or short-term programmes, one-off engagement hackathons, short-term interventions over an extended period of time, and a variety of technology platforms to support engagement and manage the 'back-end' of the programme. To support decision making, we plan to conduct a cross-company quantitative research Study to generate the data and insights that are currently missing. In this way we will learn how to combine in-person and virtual experiences in order to design more effective CISL programme; we will identify the differences in the value of in-person and virtual experiences and what factors make virtual programmes more effective and in doing so will contribute to the further development of CISL.

6 Call to Action

Call to Action

In the new post-pandemic era, we are calling on business leaders, leadership development and CSR and CISL managers to embrace the possibilities that both virtual and in person experiences can offer. Your business case for considering this may be about cost savings; it may be about reducing carbon emissions or any number of other objectives. But, in order to make more use of the virtual environment, you need more evidence to support your choices on which employees will gain the most from what type of virtual, hybrid or in person experience; and what kinds of projects are most valuable for your partners in the same settings.

In Phase Two of our Study, Emerging World will survey programme participants to explore their experiences participating in and learning from virtual programmes to understand how to design and deliver hybrid programmes that maximise participant learning, employee engagement and partner impact. By sharing experience with other participating companies, you'll get the Best of Both Worlds.

If you are interested in including your virtual/hybrid programme participants in the Study and learning how to make your programme even more effective in the future, please contact us:

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