

# Corporate volunteering as a form of social innovation

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**Abstract.** Corporate volunteering (CV) is a new phenomenon in the activities of Russian companies. Based on the use of diachronic analysis, a comparative study of the transformation of the essence and content of corporate volunteering in the works of foreign and domestic scientists and specialists has been carried out. There has been revealed a shift in emphasis from CV as an element of corporate social responsibility, to CV as an independent business process. Due to the novelty of this phenomenon, as well as the complex of characteristics determined on the basis of the use of synchronous analysis, it has been proved that CV can be defined as one of the forms of social innovation.

## 1 Introduction

The development of the social sphere is an important direction of the internal policy of the state. Since the emergence of the first state formations, the task of finding the most effective approaches and mechanisms for solving social problems of society has remained paramount, especially during periods of exposure to global challenges and threats. In the last decade, social innovation (SI) has been recognized as an important resource for improving the lives of the citizens. However, in our country, a single concept has not yet been developed regarding mechanisms that can provide a level of social security for the population corresponding to the world, which is especially necessary during periods of global social upheavals. Along with this, volunteering is a special sphere of human activity, which makes a significant contribution to increasing the effectiveness of the country's social policy. Volunteering can be individual, group, carried out within the framework of a volunteer organization. The newest form for the Russian companies is corporate volunteering, aimed not only at helping those in need, but also increasing the company's social role in society and its internal stability.

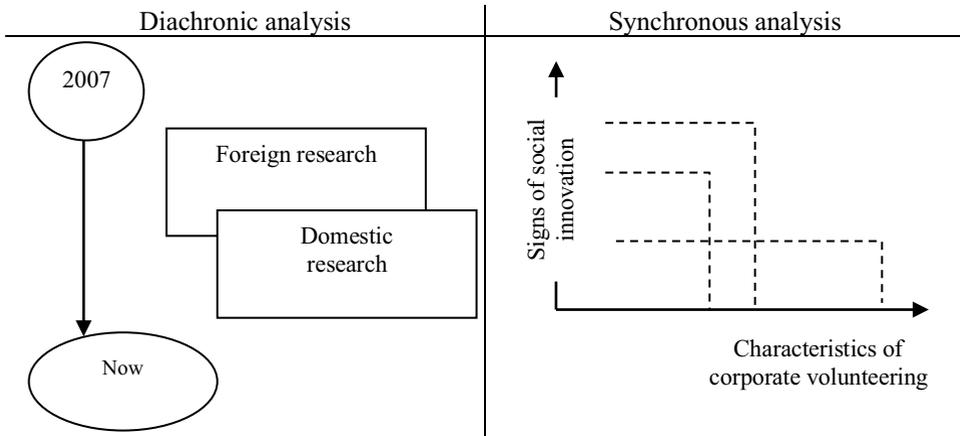
In the context of social changes taking place in recent months, caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the increasing importance of volunteering, while the number of innovative solutions in the social sphere increases, it seems relevant to study the issue of the essence and content of corporate volunteering as a form of social innovation.

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## 2 Research methods

Based on the use of two methods of analysis - diachronic and synchronous, the study investigates the transformation of the essence and content of corporate volunteering in the works of foreign and domestic scientists and specialists, identifies characteristics of corporate volunteering that allow us to consider its form of social innovation (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** Research methods of corporate volunteering as a form of social innovation

## 3 Analysis of corporate volunteering as a form of social innovation

Social innovation is a new idea, method, approach to solving social problems of a society, making significant changes in its life.

The emergence of the term "social innovation" is associated with the research of M. Yunus, winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. One of the significant works devoted to the study of the methodological foundations for assessing social innovation is the work of Preskill H., Beer T. According to the authors, a social innovation is one that is aimed at solving a social problem not only at the "present moment", but also for the future, and which has the characteristics of efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability [1]. Moreover, the significance of this innovation should grow from year to year not so much for individual individuals as for the whole society. With regard to domestic research, their heyday falls on the early 2000s. Most often, social innovation is understood as the development of new ideas for solving social problems of society, meeting social needs. Social innovation can be expressed as a new product, service, initiative, organizational model, or service delivery approach. Some social innovations are "modest and gradual" [2], others are systemic and fundamental. Some include new services, others - new social enterprises.

Social innovation can take several forms:

- 1) social innovation in the public sector in the provision of public services (the goal is to increase productivity or save financial resources);
- 2) social innovation in the non-profit sector (the goal is to improve the quality and increase the volume of public services, or to provide new types of them);
- 3) social innovation of voluntary and community groups that can be involved in the provision of basic public services.

Social innovation offers practical, budget-friendly solutions for achieving positive social change. In other words, we can talk about two types of innovations: innovations "from above" (initiated by the state) and innovations "from below" (initiated by the

population, faced with the difficulty or impossibility of meeting social needs within the framework of existing social mechanisms, as well as by non-profit organizations (NPOs) that have realized the need to solve certain social problems).

Social change can occur at any level, both locally and internationally, as determined by the proven effectiveness of the approach, the potentially large number of beneficiaries, high levels of expectation and sensitivity to social innovation. Most often, an idea arises from below, as an answer to a certain problem, or as a fundamentally different way of realizing the existing social needs of the population. In this context, CV can also be considered as a social innovation, since, on the one hand, it allows a company to achieve a stable position in a competitive market, and, on the other hand, bring benefits to a population in need. In order to determine the full set of characteristics of CV as a social innovation, a study of the transformation of the essence and content of CV in the works of foreign and domestic scientists and specialists was carried out on the basis of diachronous analysis.

The concept of "corporate volunteering" is relatively new in the studies of domestic authors. According to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program, almost 30% of the total number of people in the world who volunteer on a permanent basis (and this is 109 million people) are from the CV sector. The emergence of the concept is associated with such a phenomenon in the activities of companies as the provision of gratuitous assistance by employees to those in need in the territory of their presence. Most often, CV is perceived as a stage in the development of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the quality level of CV is directly dependent on the level of CSR development. Today, when the external reputation of the company is of paramount importance in the competitive struggle, CV allows to strengthen the corporate culture, increase the loyalty of employees, develop their social responsibility, strengthen the team spirit, which positively affects the quality and results of the entire company.

2007 is highlighted in the content of the research as the starting point of the analysis because the first work on the topic under study was posted in the Scientific Electronic Library eLIBRARU.ru exactly that year. D.V. Chernov considered the change in the structure of social responsibility in the context of the transformation of the model of society [3]. The appeal to this topic is due to the growing number of private and public initiatives focused on charity during that period, which became significant for the entire developing system of social work. According to D.V. Chernov, "the strategy of modern social work, regardless of the model, is aimed at enhancing a person's position in the process of accepting help by increasing his independence, the ability to control his daily life and his problems. Under certain conditions, corporate social responsibility may well become one of the mechanisms for solving social problems within the framework of the state-social model" [3, p. 160]. At that time, CV was not yet an independent element of the company's business processes. Until 2012, domestic researchers had published only 5 works on CV, the most notable of which is the work of N.Yu. Bondarenko, who clearly positions CV as a tool for the effective development of the company, including at the international level [4].

The period of 2012-2014 in domestic studies of CV should be characterized as a search for CSR consistency [5], psychological aspects of the behavior of corporate volunteers [6]. D.P. Frolov, A.A. Shulimova consider social responsibility from the point of view of "the institutional form of the forced adaptation of corporations to the growing demands of civil society and regulators (defensive reaction), marketing technology to strengthen the brand image (response), the way of expanding norms and practices on counterparties and partners in global supply chains (backlash)" [5, p. 124]. At that time, the authors recommended that domestic entrepreneurs act in three directions: 1) analyze and take into account in their activities the experience of transnational corporations and enterprises with foreign investments in the field of reputation management and brand management; 2) adapt innovative practices in the field of business social responsibility.

In 2015-2016, there was a shift in emphasis from CV as an integral part of CSR to its role as a new instrument for the company's strategic development [7]. In addition, the interest of researchers in the foreign experience of CV has significantly increased. It seems that it is 2016 that can be called the year of active interest in CV on the part of domestic authors. In 2017, the authors turned to the mechanisms for organizing and implementing CV [8], works began to appear defining CV as an innovation in certain areas of the company [9]. Interest in foreign experience was manifested in the study of the main features of CV in the European Union (EU). It was determined that the coordination of CV in the EU countries is maintained by non-profit organizations, but the role of the companies themselves is increasing. This is due to the fact that CV is included as an independent element in the range of possible areas of business social responsibility.

In 2018, a lot of studies appeared that define CV as a tool for promoting a company, a landmark for modern business, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, a tool for communication with the external and internal environment. Approaches for the activation of CV are considered [10]. In 2019-2020, there is a clearly expressed tendency for the development of CV models and the formation of trends in its development [11]. So, S.A. Galchenko determined that "the experience of leading companies shows that corporate volunteering is a driver of social change, both for the organization itself and its internal environment, and for the external society" [10, p. 121]. One of the drivers is Pro Bono - an outstaffing site or a new direction of the market "Learning 2 Business", the main idea of which is active interaction of representatives of educational organizations (young scientists, teachers, students) with entrepreneurs (small businesses).

Despite the fact that a definite date for the appearance of CV in Russia has not yet been designated, according to a group of analysts with the support of the National Council for Corporate Volunteering, "the financial crisis of 2008 acted as a catalyst for development" [12, p. 13], when many companies reduced their CSR costs. Undoubtedly, an important milestone in the formation of CV in Russia is the International Forum "Corporate Volunteering: Business and Society", whose mission is "to identify and replicate best practices and innovative practices of socially responsible business conduct" [13]. A notable tendency is that a large number of various works on CV appears on the Internet sites of various expert and analytical agencies, recruitment portals (for example, the RosBusinessConsulting portal, HH.ru).

The history of CV abroad is about 50 years old, and the pioneers are large US corporations [12, p. 12]. The study of foreign experience shows that two approaches to CV have emerged in the world: global (development of signature projects or signature partnerships by transnational corporations, replicated in the countries of presence) and local (development by regional divisions of their own volunteer programs) [14]. The many times greater experience in organizing CV in foreign companies, as well as the presence of a significant backlog of research work (for example, the portal of the world-famous publishing house Springer contains more than 5 thousand works on researched and similar topics), allows us to talk about the existing systemic understanding of CV.

Due to the fact that the starting point of the study of domestic works on CV was adopted as 2007, in order to obtain comparable results of the study of the essence and content of corporate volunteering, the analysis of the works of foreign authors was carried out starting from the same year. In 2007-2009, many foreign researchers are united in the opinion that not only large, but also medium-sized enterprises, being under constant scrutiny of the media, have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to use CV as an instrument to increase their social attractiveness in society [15]. This became relevant, since the activities of the leadership in the media more often began to be viewed not from the point of view of a certain process, but from the position of a certain problem. In this context, studies by G. Mutz, M. Fischer, D. Schöffmann, presented to the public in 2008, made it possible to look

at CV as a method of creating sustainable corporate value [16]. In 2009-2012, the content of CV was revealed from the position of its capabilities in ensuring the legitimacy of organizations [17]. In addition, CV is seen as an innovative way to adequately respond to the challenges that arise in civil society. Until 2015, one of the most pronounced aspects of the study of CV had been the national aspect. J. Bellamy's 2015 study reveals a clear pattern: the more religious an employee is, the more likely he is to volunteer [16]. Since 2016, the following areas of research on CV in the works of foreign authors have been distinguished: change in the content of CV in connection with interaction with non-profit organizations [19], CV as a personnel management tool [20] and an element that interconnects all business processes.

Within the framework of the use of synchronous analysis, it was determined that CV can act as one of the forms of social innovation (SI) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Assessment of corporate volunteering as a social innovation.

SI signs	Compliance degree *	Characteristic of CV as SI
A fundamentally new idea, approach, method, technology	CC	Volunteering by itself is not a new phenomenon. The novelty is revealed in the application to the activities of the Russian companies
Orientation towards achieving a social goal	BC	CV is focused on helping those in need in the external environment and ensuring the stability and cohesion of employees in the internal one
Striving for cross-sector collaboration	BC	The sectors are business and society
Functionality of an innovative solution	CC	CV is gradually becoming a separate business process. However, the solutions themselves for interacting with the external environment differ in the level of functionality
SI contributes to solving socially significant problems	CC	CV is aimed at solving social problems at the local level, often targeted
SI causes significant social changes in society	CC	CV causes multi-level changes at the local level. Significant changes are achieved in the internal environment of the company
SI causes the revision of existing standards of activity	HC	CV does not significantly affect the transformation of established norms in society
SI defines a new order of interaction with society	BC	Those in need get help from a new source – company employees
SI change the form of activity	BC	CV make changes to the implementation of CSR

\* the following scale is used for evaluation: BC – high degree of compliance, CC – medium, HC – low

## 4 Conclusion

The results of the diachronic analysis obtained by the author suggest the presence of a pronounced evolution in the study of the essence and content of corporate volunteering as a form of social innovation. This is reflected in the transition of CV from one of the functions of corporate social responsibility, to CV as an independent business process. Moreover, this trend can be traced in the works of both foreign and domestic authors. The main distinguishing feature of foreign studies that allows thinking about CV as a social

innovation is the emphasis on the innovativeness of the volunteer activities of company employees. Taking into account this aspect of foreign studies, with the help of synchronous analysis, the analysis of CV as a form of social innovation based on a set of SI features has been carried out. It has been determined that according to the correspondence of features with a high and medium degree of compliance, CV is a form of SI by 89%.

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