

Philanthropy in the Workplace: How a Financial Institution Communicates Charitable Giving Values

Jennifer Mize Smith & Beverly Davenport Sypher

As corporations increasingly support America's philanthropic projects, employees are more likely to receive employer-constructed messages touting the importance of giving and volunteering. This case study employs qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, and archival data, to examine how one financial institution communicated its philanthropic values to employees. Findings reveal that the employer communicated giving values through repetition and consistency of philanthropic discourse and actions. As a result, employees viewed charitableness as an integral part of the organization's overall value system and used charitable values to make sense of other company practices, even those outside the conventional notions of corporate philanthropy.

The 2010 Haitian earthquake touched the hearts of people around the world, and Americans were quick to respond by giving time, money, and other resources to help alleviate and repair the devastation. However, the American people are generous even without national disasters, as evidenced by the \$307 billion given in 2008 (Giving USA, 2009). The ordinary, day-to-day individual giving helps sustain the work of 1.4 million nonprofit organizations across the country (Meehan, Kilmer, & O'Flanagan, 2004).

Individual donors consistently provide the lion's share of charitable dollars, giving approximately 75% of the total each year (Giving USA, 2009), yet society has come to

Jennifer Mize Smith, Purdue University; Jennifer Mize Smith is now at Western Kentucky University. Beverly Davenport Sypher, Purdue University. This research is based on the first author's doctoral dissertation. A previous version of this manuscript was presented at the 2008 National Communication Association Convention in San Diego, CA. Correspondence to: Jennifer Mize Smith, Department of Communication, 165 Fine Arts Center, Western Kentucky University, 1906 College Heights Blvd., Bowling Green, KY 42101. E-mail: jennifer.mize.smith@wku.edu

expect corporate America to give as well. A 2004 national telephone survey found that 89% of Americans believed charities and corporations should work together (Cone, 2004). Corporations are responding and gave \$14.5 billion in 2008 (Giving USA, 2009). Consequently, charitable giving is increasingly entering the workplace, and a growing number of employees are encouraged, asked, and sometimes even expected to participate in the charitable programs of their employers.

As part of a larger project that explores how employees experience, interpret, and are influenced by charitable giving at work, this study focuses on the ways in which companies espouse philanthropic values in the workplace. This research offers insight into how philanthropic-minded employers are communicating their charitable giving philosophies and how those values get integrated into the everyday micropractices of work.

Literature Review

Extant research illuminates contemporary trends in corporate giving and provides evidence of a relationship between corporate giving and leader values.

Contemporary Corporate Philanthropy

Corporate philanthropy or corporate charitable giving is the act of supporting nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and charitable causes with company resources (Choi & Wang, 2007). Acts of giving are socially desirable and go beyond any economic, legal, or ethical responsibility of the company (Carroll, 1998). Perhaps the most traditional avenue of corporate philanthropy is a company's direct contribution to a charitable cause (Kotler & Lee, 2005). Contributions may be cash or in-kind donations of products, services, and equipment, and they often play a critical role in the operating budgets and special projects of nonprofits (Kotler & Lee).

Although direct contributions remain important to NPOs, today's companies are finding more creative ways to lend their support to community initiatives. For example, companies may use corporate resources to address large-scale social issues, such as those related to health and the environment (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002). Others conduct promotional campaigns to garner support for a particular cause (Kotler & Lee, 2004), such as PetSmart using its retail and Web site space to raise money for animal shelters (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Corporations may also engage in cause-related marketing (CRM) where a percentage of sales revenues from a particular product or service is donated to a charitable organization that has been "adopted" by the company (Kotler & Lee, 2005). American Express is credited with beginning the CRM trend with its 1983 campaign donating a percentage of card purchases to the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Restoration Fund (Steckel, Simons, Simons, & Tanen, 1999). Since then, numerous companies have implemented cause-related marketing programs, resulting in an estimated \$1 billion in corporate spending in 2004 (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2004).

In addition to financial resources, corporate support may also take the form of volunteering. In a 2004 survey of 71 U.S. companies including 30 on Fortune's Top 100 list, 81% reported having a domestic volunteer program (Committee Encouraging, 2005). Typical programs include recruiting employees to visit classrooms and hospitals, collect food, participate in walk-a-thons, mentor youth, and build houses. Some companies, such as Timberland, even offer paid time off for community service work (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

In some cases, the proliferation of corporate giving practices has necessitated new organizational positions with titles such as Contributions Program Manager and Bank of America's Senior Vice President of Philanthropy (Association of Corporate Contributions, n.d.). Likewise, new philanthropy-related professional organizations, such as the Association of Corporate Contributions Professionals (AACP), have been formed to assist with these emerging employee roles (Association of Corporate Contributions, n.d.).

The amount of time and resources given to philanthropic issues and the creation of new positions and professional associations demonstrate corporations' commitment to support the nonprofit sector. By placing charitable giving alongside other business functions, corporations are espousing philanthropic values and legitimizing their importance.

Organizational and Leader Values

Shared values are essential to an organization's culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, 1999; Keyton, 2005). Organizational values, and thus organizational culture, are shaped in large part by organizational leaders. "Cultural leadership begins when managers search their hearts and souls for the values and beliefs that they are willing to stand behind," explain Deal and Kennedy (1999, p. 191). By espousing a specific vision and modeling role behaviors, a leader influences the development of a particular organizational culture (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Consequently, values become assumptions about what is important, what gets communicated, and how to behave.

Many scholars have explored the effects of a leader's values on decision making. As early as 1965, Guth and Tagiuri concluded that "personal values are important determinants in the choice of corporate strategy" (p. 123). Although decision makers bring their cognitive "givens" of knowledge, alternatives, and consequences (March & Simon, 1958), they also bring their personal values (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and will draw upon those values as criteria for choosing organizational initiatives (Guth & Tagiuri, 1965).

Standards and values will determine how a leader manages meaning (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996) and how members will make sense of organizational activities, as well as their own decisions and behaviors. In essence, leaders are "sense-givers" (Thayer, 1988). As DePree (1998) explained, "Leaders need to be concerned with the institutional value system which, after all, leads to the principles and standards that guide the practices of the people in the institution" (p. 131). In other words, in espousing personal values, leaders not only shape organizational values but also develop the moral principles of their followers (Howell & Avolio, 1992).

Because corporate philanthropic contributions are largely at the discretion of organizational leaders (Choi & Wang, 2007), a leader's personal values are often reflected in the company's philosophy of philanthropy. Top managers with benevolent values are "more likely to spread their intrinsic concern for others into the wider society in the form of corporate philanthropy" (Choi & Wang, p. 347). For example, Lerner and Fryxell (1994) found that the other-regarding values of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies were associated with corporate giving. Similarly, Thompson, Smith, and Hood (1993) found that the values of small business owners predicted company contributions, and Buchholtz, Amason, and Rutherford (1999) concluded that management values mediate corporate philanthropy in midsized organizations. Because a leader's values are embedded in the vision set forth for the organization (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996), those values have important implications for employees. As corporations increasingly support America's philanthropic projects, employees are increasingly asked to manage and participate in their employers' charitable giving initiatives (Byrnes, 2005).

In short, contemporary philanthropy encompasses numerous types of giving, and a company's propensity to give is often influenced by organizational leaders and their values. While extant research has documented the growing number of corporate giving practices and the relationship between leader values and giving, scholars have rarely examined corporate philanthropy from a communicative perspective or privileged the individual experiences of employees charged with supporting corporate giving efforts.

This research project seeks to extend both communication and philanthropy literature by examining how an organization's philanthropic values are communicated by and to employees in the workplace. Therefore, this study posits the following research question:

RQ₁: How does a company engaged in charitable giving communicate its philanthropic values?

Method

The theoretical underpinnings of this study and the research question of interest suggested the appropriateness of an organizational case study to explore how a philanthropic-minded organization communicates its charitable values in the workplace. Therefore, a qualitative study was conducted to examine a financial institution that has demonstrated and communicated philanthropic values.

Context and Participants

This investigation focused on a large financial institution located in the southeastern United States, hereinafter referred to by the pseudonym Patron Bank. A financial institution offers a rich site for examining the philanthropic discourse in the workplace. Banks have been among the leading institutions to support charitable

initiatives, largely because (a) they have direct contact with the public (Fry, Keim, & Meiners, 1982) and may use philanthropic activities to attract and retain customers (Kotler & Lee, 2005), (b) they rely upon the local economy and any contribution to local prosperity may garner future earnings for the bank (Useem, 1987), and (c) banks are bound by law to address the financial needs of low- and moderate-income neighborhoods (The Federal Reserve Board, n.d.) and may use nonprofit organizations to assist those populations.

Like other banks across the country, philanthropy was often a part of the work experience at Patron Bank. The company financially supported nonprofit initiatives in a variety of ways, including contributions to nationally known organizations such as United Way, March of Dimes, and the American Cancer Society, as well as local projects such as the Downtown Redevelopment Authority and the free health clinic. Patron's largesse was also demonstrated by its many volunteers, particularly in local schools where employees were allowed to use work time to read to children and to share their business experiences. Additionally, many employees were members of the boards of directors of various NPOs through which they chaired fundraising campaigns, recruited volunteers, and offered financial expertise.

Although Patron Bank's corporate footprint spans the southeastern portion of the United States, this study focused on a single institution and its employees in a midsize southern community. Thus, participants included the 80 employees working in the main office and the eight local branches. A total of 44 employees (55% of the local workforce) participated in the study. The total sample consisted of 34 women and 10 men, a direct reflection of the overall employee population. Employment tenure ranged from 5 weeks to 47 years, including 4 employees with less than 1 year at the bank, 20 employees with 1–5 years, and 20 employees with 5 or more years. Tenure for all participants had a mean of 6.7 years and a median of 4.5 years.

Interview participants were selected using stratified random sampling or what Patton (2002) calls criterion sampling. Three criteria were considered to have a potential influence on how employees make sense of charitable giving at work—gender, tenure, and position in the organization. First, considerable evidence suggests that charitable giving varies by gender. When compared to men, women give to a greater variety of charities (Andreoni, Brown, & Rischall, 2003), are more likely to support social service organizations (Ostrower, 1995), and are less responsive to changes in the cost of giving (Andreoni & Vesterlund, 2001), suggesting that women and men may respond differently to the charitable requests of their employers. Second, it seemed reasonable to speculate that employees' recall of corporate discourse and activities related to charitable giving could be influenced by their time with the organization, with those who have been with the organization longer and so exposed to more messages regarding philanthropy more likely to be able to recall and comment on them. Third, corporate charitable giving decisions have been found to be influenced primarily by organizational members at the managerial or executive levels (e.g., Lerner & Fryxell, 1994; Thompson et al., 1993). Because managers are generally expected to support corporate decisions

and often have more control over their work schedules than do non-managers (e.g., tellers), managers may be more encouraged, as well as have more time and opportunity, to organize and participate in the bank's philanthropic activities. Using these criteria, interview participants were selected to represent the total employee population in proportions of men and women; employment tenure (those who have been with the organization less than a year, 1–5 years, and more than 5 years); and managerial status (salaried and hourly employees).

After conducting individual interviews, employees were recruited to participate in one of three focus groups. Focus groups can serve multiple purposes (Morgan, 1997), and in this study, their purpose was three-fold: (a) to supplement the data gathered during individual interviews, (b) to gather additional insight that might be cued through the interaction of participants, and (c) to include a wider range of employee views while making efficient use of researcher time.

The focus groups were organized to be relatively homogeneous concerning employment tenure and managerial status, with one group having 1–5 years tenure, a second group having more than 5 years tenure, and a third group consisting of employees in upper management positions. Gender as a sampling criterion became less practical due to the bank's small population of male employees. Forethought was given to employee relationships so, for example, we didn't invite an employee and his or her direct supervisor or a department superior to the same focus group. Additionally, participant selections were kept to one employee per branch location to avoid placing any hardship on operations and scheduling. Given these constraints and employee availability, five employees who had participated in interviews were also invited to the focus groups. Although the research design did not necessitate their inclusion, their participation added unexpected richness to the conversation. Ultimately, groups ranged from 5 to 7 participants and involved a total of 17 employees, 12 of whom had not been interviewed. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, three data collection techniques—examining written documents, conducting individual interviews, and convening focus groups—were used to investigate the communication of philanthropic values in the workplace.

Archival data

Remnants of the “material culture” are a good source of information that cannot be observed (Patton, 2002) or that informants may not perceive as important or think to reference. Archival data were gathered from a variety of organizational documents including Community Reinvestment Act reports, 10 corporate news releases from November 2005 through January 2006, 117 local electronic newsletters from 2005, the employee handbook, the local bank's 2005 holiday card, and the February 2006

corporate newsletter. Other relevant archives were also examined, including the corporate Web site, a local newspaper ad, three promotional pieces for charity fundraisers, and a banking magazine that was displayed in the reception area. These documents not only provided a good background regarding the organizational context and corporate philosophy but also revealed organizational language and pointed to what was valued in the local organizational culture.

Individual interviews

Following an initial review of archival data and an informational interview with the local top executive, 32 individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. Open-ended questions focused on employees recalling the ways in which they had experienced Patron's communication of philanthropic values.¹ The predetermined interview guide enabled us to inquire about the same basic areas with each person, as well as to pursue other relevant topics as they emerged.

Participants were first selected at random (e.g., approximately every third name) from an alphabetical employee list. Characteristics of the initial group were compared to the study's demographic goals, and adjustments were made by choosing names at random until the sample reflected the total employee population. All interviews took place in a private room at the participant's work site and were conducted during regular work hours, with the exception of two participants who opted for other times. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours, with an average of 58 minutes and a total of 31 hours. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim, generating 579 pages of single-spaced text.

Focus groups

Participants in the three focus groups were initially contacted by telephone. Electronic mail messages were then sent to confirm the date, time, and place of the meetings. All focus groups were conducted in the bank's board room from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm on three different days, and participants were provided boxed lunches. Each meeting began with an overview of the purpose of the study and continued with questions focused on Patron Bank's charitable giving philosophy and related giving messages.² Focus groups were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The 6 hours of focus group discussion generated 102 pages of single-spaced text.

Data Analysis

The data from all sources (i.e., documents, interviews, and focus groups) were carefully read and analyzed for recurring themes related to the research question. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) began with the identification of 133 varied concepts. As concepts were operationally defined and modified, some were combined, and others were deemed not applicable to the focus of this study. The

remaining 17 concepts (e.g., generous support, supports multiple organizations) were then clustered into six larger, more abstract categories based on commonalities (e.g., organizational support). Properties or specific attributes were defined to give each category more precision (Strauss & Corbin). Using a constant comparative method of working back and forth between the data and the categories (Patton, 2002), categories were compared and contrasted, which revealed three larger themes that were relevant to the research question. Following Owen's (1984) prescription, a theme was characterized by recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. The data were again analyzed for any negative cases that appeared to not support the themes that had emerged. Finally, the relationships among the themes were interpreted, and the data were revisited to find further evidence to support or refute the assertions being forwarded.

Findings

In response to the research question of how a charitably-inclined organization communicates philanthropic values, employees identified numerous strategies used by Patron Bank to advocate workplace giving. During data analysis, these strategies were coded as categories and then organized into three overarching themes: *always spoken about*, *led by example*, and *charity begins at home*. All themes are in vivo codes taken verbatim from the data and best represent the meanings and interpretations articulated by most participants.

Always Spoken About

The *always spoken about* theme emerged as participants described how giving-related messages were regularly found in organizational discourse, albeit some more direct than others. During analysis, this theme was defined as communication that either explicitly or implicitly suggested that charitable giving was a valued part of organizational membership. Specifically, this theme captures the ways in which Patron advocated charitable giving (a) in its mission statement, (b) in the employee newsletter, and (c) by the frequency of charitable giving talk.

The mission statement

When describing how they knew of Patron's philanthropic values, participants most often referred to the corporate mission statement. Contrary to research suggesting that mission statements are both poorly implemented and undercommunicated (Kotter, 1995), almost half (42%) of the participants specifically pointed to the corporate mission statement as a source of learning the organization's philanthropic values. For example, local Vice President Sam explained that philanthropy is "built into our mission, to make our communities a better place. And you do that by not only making good financial institution decisions, you know, making loans, etc., but by donating time and dollars back to your community."

We might expect managers to evidence a greater affinity toward the mission statement than other employees because they are likely to have a more formal responsibility to manage its meaning (Fairhurst, Jordan, & Neuwirth, 1997). In this case, however, Patron employees at lower levels were no less familiar with the organization's espoused mission. For instance, Connie, a Relationship Banker located in one of Patron's branches, recalled how she learned that Patron Bank values giving: "It's right there in the mission statement of the bank that part of our purpose, our reason for being, is to help not only the individuals, our clients, but also to make our communities better places to live." Another lower level employee, Abigail, also recounted her first experience with Patron's view of philanthropy saying, "When you start working, you go through orientation, and it's drilled into you, our mission, our values. You know, the whole thing about [Patron] is that we're giving back to our community and making a difference in our community." Even Allison, a part-time teller of less than 1 year said, "I believe that [charitable giving] is a big part of the company because their mission is to make the community in which they work a better place to live."

Interestingly, charitable giving is not explicitly stated in Patron Bank's mission statement. The closest the mission statement comes to mentioning philanthropy are some general statements about making the world and the communities in which the bank does business better places to live. Participants, however, routinely interpreted giving as part of the organization's philosophy, and some explained how charitable giving may be read between the lines. "Charitable giving, they don't use those words, you know," explained Jason, "they say 'making the community a better place to live,' but I take that as charitable giving." Similarly, Jill said charitable giving "just kind of goes along with [Patron Bank's] philosophy of doing the right thing; they want us as employees to have integrity, and, you know, I think part of that does go hand in hand with helping others who need help."

To these employees, the mission statement was more than simply empty rhetoric. Rather, it was a meaningful reflection of organizational identity and company ideals. The mission statement summarized the kind of company Patron aspired to be and provided direction for the kind of activities it pursued and expected employees to follow. In short, the mission statement appeared to be a central feature in employees' understanding and articulation of the bank's philanthropic values and expectations.

Employee newsletter

Following the mission statement, participants most often cited the bank's local, internal e-newsletter as an important source of information about the company's giving expectations. The electronic publication originated from the local president and was distributed approximately three times a week to all local employees. Tonya described it this way:

Anything that [the president] feels like is important, such as a community event that he wants us to be involved in or volunteer time for or donating money, then he puts it out there in that publication. So we have a way of knowing what's going on.

Sam further explained how the president “will talk about events that we have been involved in, what a good thing that it does, and how pleased he is to see that the employees are participating.”

A content analysis confirmed participants’ responses and revealed that of the 117 newsletters distributed in 2005, almost half (49%) included one or more messages related to charitable giving. The frequency with which charitable giving messages appeared was surpassed only by the regularly occurring “thought of the day,” birthday announcements, and recognition of employee or branch achievements.

Along with upcoming events and volunteer opportunities, the internal newsletter also reported on the success of past charitable giving activities. For example, the first issue of the New Year celebrated the previous holiday season projects and included a personal thank you from the local president:

In addition to making the Christmas season a little brighter for some of the children . . . , we were able to help eight families (29 children) enjoy the Christmas season this year. We provided new coats, shoes, clothes, and toys for these children Thanks to each of you for your contribution to this worthy cause.

Because employee newsletters are typically controlled by those in upper management, Cheney (1983) argued that such periodicals are good sources of company policies, viewpoints, and attitudes. In this case, newsletter messages came directly from the local leader who represented and spoke on behalf of the larger corporate organization. The newsletter became the corporate voice and provided insight into organizational values and guidelines regarding appropriate behavior for organizational members. Employees can look to these publications for cues about what is important to the organization and its leaders, as evidenced in a spring newsletter when the local president took the opportunity to remind employees of the bank’s philanthropic stance:

I know that all of you are aware of [Patron’s] involvement in our community. We sponsor several large events (e.g., [the] Soap Box derby, [Patron Bank] Classic) and, also, we donate back to our community in other ways. Recently we made a donation to [the local] Junior High School for one of their projects in which they were able to raise \$2300 for the Make-a-Wish Foundation. I just want you to be aware of [Patron’s] community involvement and to be proud of working for an organization that takes such great pride in being a contributor to many worthy causes for our community.

Not all newsletter messages communicated Patron Bank’s corporate giving beliefs as explicitly as this one. Even so, according to participants, the internal newsletter was a continual and personal reminder of the bank’s philanthropic values. With this level of repetition and the use of collective personal pronouns, it would be difficult for employees to be unaware of what the bank valued and the charitable projects in which they were engaged.

Frequent communication

Aside from written communication such as mission statements and newsletters, several participants interpreted the bank’s giving philosophy from the sheer

frequency with which philanthropy-related messages occurred, both internally to employees and externally as corporate rhetoric. Seven participants described charitable talk as occurring weekly or biweekly, and 19 recalled it being monthly or bimonthly. Managers may be expected to be more aware of the company's philanthropic efforts, but non-management employees equally recalled the recurrence of charitable giving talk. For example, Amy, one of Patron Bank's newest tellers, said, "I've only been here a little over a month, and I've heard quite a bit about [charitable giving], I'd say probably... five or six times in a month, and that's pretty good."

Although there was some variation in participants' reports of how often charitable giving was talked about, the repetition was enough for 11 participants to describe it as a constant topic in the workplace. "It just seems like it's a constant thing," said Shelly. "I remember when I first started working here, it seemed like there was always something going on, always... it was just like a presence," she concluded. Jason agreed saying, "It seems like you can't hardly turn around here without there being something [charitable] that we are involved in locally."

These and other employees pointed to the repetition of philanthropy-related messages as a way in which they came to understand that charitable values were a part of the organizational culture. The notion of giving was talked about on a regular basis, and that talk became integrated into employees' daily work. To some, the recurrence and consistency of charitable talk were as important as the charitable talk itself when interpreting the bank's strong belief in giving. For example, Barb, a teller, put it this way: "I think it's the consistency that it's, you know, it's always there, and it's something that is always spoken about." Holly also underscored the importance of maintaining a consistent message, claiming, "It needs to be continuous, making it more or less of a tradition, a tradition that is habit-forming and you know what to expect." It is not likely that employees would have viewed charitable giving with the same importance if it were merely mentioned a couple of times a year.

Clearly, Patron's frequent discourse related to personal and corporate giving had led employees to make assumptions about the importance their employer placed on philanthropy. While most spoke favorably of the recurring messages, six employees, mostly tellers, described how philanthropic activities added to their daily tasks and admitted to sometimes feeling overwhelmed. Tellers are often asked to solicit money from clients. For example, at the time of interviews, they were simultaneously selling paper hearts for cystic fibrosis and collecting donations for a bowl-a-thon to benefit Big Brothers Big Sisters. Allison explained, "We've had three [fundraisers] going on in the past little bit; it gets to be a little bit much to remember what to do." Likewise, Ellie explained:

It seems like we're always doing something. I've heard people say that... Often it gets to be like, "oh, we're selling something else" or "we have to ask for something else." People just sometimes feel like we have all this other stuff to do plus this... It just at times can be a little bit overwhelming... It gets to where you feel like you're kind of harassing the clients.

Although these employees thought charitable giving was a good thing to do, they confessed that the frequency of Patron's largesse was sometimes too much and led some to feel "flooded" and "tapped out." Each message announcing a new philanthropic project required several employees working to implement it. So, although the efforts may benefit a good cause, they also add time and stress to some employees' workload, particularly those on the front line. Consequently, the more frequent the talk, the more overwhelmed some employees may feel.

In short, employees at most levels and with varying lengths of time with the bank were clearly aware of the organization's philanthropic values because it was "always spoken about." Patron talked the talk of giving as philanthropy-related topics figured prominently and consistently in employee-directed messages. The mission statement, internal newsletter, and the frequency with which charitable giving was discussed were significant ways in which Patron Bank communicated its philanthropic values.

Led by Example

Patron Bank not only talked about giving but also walked the talk of charitableness. The *led by example* theme clearly emerged in participants' responses and reflects their descriptions of how the bank's philanthropic discourse was put into action. More specifically, employees shared how philanthropic values were exemplified by (a) the organization's support of charitable projects and (b) the behavior of its leaders.

Organizational support

All participants recalled more than one example of how the bank was actively involved in the community and its charitable projects. Nearly half (48%) of total participating employees specifically noted that Patron Bank supported multiple causes, from large, nationally known charities such as United Way to small, local school projects.

A review of employee newsletters from 2005 confirmed participants' recollections. Local newsletters mentioned at least 24 different charity-related activities the bank had supported either with a corporate contribution or with employee donations of time or money. Quarterly corporate newsletters also touted Patron Bank's numerous philanthropic efforts; for example, the February 2006 issue featured donations made across the region to the American Red Cross, public television, universities, and the American Heart Association.

Other observed artifacts also illustrated the bank's dedication to its local community. For example, paper hearts with donor names were taped to drive-thru windows as tellers solicited clients for \$1 donations to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Invitations to a bank-sponsored charity auction were distributed at branch counters, and lobby bulletin boards displayed information about other Patron-sponsored fundraisers.

As participants continued to provide evidence of the company's philanthropic program, it became apparent that they interpreted the organization's charitable behavior as enactments of its espoused values. Connie made this explicit connection:

Either you have a generous, giving, and caring nature or you don't. And as a company, if you do, then you have the kind of value system that [this bank] has—care about the client, care about the employee, care about the community—so you give back.

Tonya also attributed Patron Bank's giving to its corporate philosophy saying this:

The company as a whole wants to support the community. The company, not just your local market, but the company, the big conglomerate of corporate people, wants to be involved in [giving].

As a company, Patron Bank not only talked about giving and encouraged employees to give but also engaged in charitable behavior that was consistent with its discourse. Along with communicating a corporate philosophy that emphasized making the community a better place, Patron Bank exemplified the talk by supporting numerous charitable organizations that contributed to the aesthetic, cultural, educational, medical, and economic development of the local area.

Leader behavior

A second way in which the company *led by example* to communicate its philanthropic values was through the actions of organizational leaders. Nearly half (45%) of the total participants discussed how local and corporate leaders set an example for charitable giving. Several participants spoke specifically about Patron's corporate Chairman and CEO. "Our chairman mentions often that he gives to United Way and gives a lot to United Way. So he's a big supporter of that," explained Jill, and "he just comes right out and lets you know that it's important to him." Other participants, like Tonya, echoed similar sentiments about the corporate management team saying, "I feel comfortable that they probably donate as much time and effort as I do . . . they're not expecting me to do something that they're not willing to do themselves." Similarly, explained Sam, "If it happens to be something, an event, that we're asking our employees to participate in, then it's led by example that management is participating in it."

Archival data again corroborated participants' perceptions. Short bios of the executive management team were listed on the corporate Web site. Several included charity-related activities with which company leaders were involved. Such activities included serving on the boards of educational institutions, philanthropic foundations, and United Way chapters, as well as participating in Boy Scouts, Junior Achievement, and various church organizations.

Likewise, participants also commented on the charitable example set by local leaders, particularly David, the local president. For example, Julie described David as doing "a lot in the community as far as being active in the civic groups" and participating in "charitable giving." Employees noticed David's support of community

projects and took comfort in supporting the causes with which he was involved. According to Elizabeth, “If he’s doing it and he’s a reputable person in our community, then that makes you feel good about what you’re giving.”

The local president said he felt it was important to set an example for others, not only by making monetary contributions on behalf of Patron but also by assuming leadership roles in various community organizations. For example, he had recently served on the board of the Free Health Clinic, Junior Achievement, the Capitol Arts Alliance, and other nonprofit organizations. “It’s something I would do anyway,” David explained, “but I’m showing examples of [giving]” to other employees.

The same kind of philanthropic mindedness was also exemplified by other local leaders. According to Sandy, “a lot of the managers [give] and so that really sets an example” for other employees. Tonya, who managed three Patron branches, was one of those who emulated the president’s community support and tried to pass her charitable interests along to subordinates. She explained, “[David] has influenced me a lot. He sets an example. I don’t feel bad about asking my associates to get involved because I’m involved.” Top leaders and managers clearly modeled the kind of behavior that was advocated in their talk. This congruence between leader behavior and company values is important because employees take behavioral cues from leaders as to what is appropriate and valued in an organization’s culture. In contrast, employees may become cynical or disenchanted about company values if they are contradicted by their own leaders (Cha & Edmondson, 2006).

In summary, participants identified important ways in which the bank demonstrated a willingness to walk the talk of charitable giving. The bank’s support of numerous charitable projects turned organizational talk into action, and the same charitableness was mirrored in the behavior of corporate and local leaders who exemplified the company’s espoused beliefs.

Charity Begins at Home

The first two themes showed the importance to employees of repetition and consistency in the bank’s philanthropic message and the enactment of that message in the charitable practices of the organization and its leaders. The third theme that emerged focused on the relationship between espoused company values and other business practices. The phrase “charity begins at home” was used by one focus group participant and captures participants’ talk about a sense of caring for others that was embedded in company policies and procedures not explicitly linked to the bank’s charitable giving efforts. Clearly, participants interpreted corporate philanthropy as being much more than traditional giving.

A good example of a business practice deemed “charitable” by participants was the bank’s recent stance on eminent domain. When asked about Patron’s charitable giving, nearly half (45%) of the total participants, including those in all three focus groups, mentioned the bank’s publicized decision to deny loans to investors who rely

on local governments to seize land from reluctant sellers. National news media noted that Patron Bank was the first major financial institution to adopt such a policy and did so despite the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that the use of eminent domain to seize private land for commercial development was constitutional.

Patron's opposition to eminent domain is not a conventional form of charity, but employees interpreted it as an act of charitable giving nonetheless. For example, Tori said:

I know it's not charitable giving, but [Patron] has said, "Your home is more important than us making money," and I think that shows the Bank has a heart It may not seem like a charitable thing, but it is, if a company has the heart to know that taking someone's home is wrong when they could be making money.

Connie made a similar association saying that it is Patron's underlying concern for others that "translates into our stand on eminent domain and our stand on charitable giving and giving our time and money to other things in the community."

According to participants, Patron Bank's philanthropic mindedness was not only extended outward to the community, but, as Wendy put it, Patron "also shows charity in other ways, like to their own employees." Kim explained, "It's nice to work for an employer that looks beyond its own doors; that same attitude will cross over in their human resource policies." Several participants agreed, and 71% of focus group participants identified company policies that they associated with being charitable. A popular example was the 40 personal days that employees received each year. Wendy made this connection to charitable giving:

Both of my parents right now are critically ill, and at a moment's notice, I might need to be off. I don't have to worry about being reprimanded for something like that, and to me, that's a good company to work for. I think that falls right along with charity.

Other focus group participants agreed. As they compared the amount of time off to that offered by other companies, they all concluded that Patron's policy is every bit as charitable as more conventional ways of giving.

In addition to 40 personal days, employees also received 8 hours per year for their children's school activities. Libby spent 8 hours volunteering at her child's school. Elaine took the paid time off to attend her children's awards programs, and Wendy used them to attend her son's college graduation.

One focus group explained how employee policies reflect charitable giving, saying:

Jana: Well, charity begins at home; charity begins at home.
 Holly: You have to take care of your own first.
 Jana: Yeah, you've got to take care of your people.
 Holly: Before you can branch out.

A second focus group had a similar discussion:

Tori: You can't give to one person without giving to others.
 Wendy: Right, what kind of company would it be like if they just gave to others and did not give to their own employees? That's where we're tying [charitable giving] in, so not only are they charitable to the community, but also to us.

In short, to the participants in this case study, the same ethic of care and compassion that underlies traditional corporate giving was (and should be) evidenced by the policies and practices affecting customers and employees alike. In other words, if an organization espouses philanthropic values, then those values should be reflected not just in charitable giving programs but in the everyday ways of doing business.

Discussion

Schervish (1998) argued that philanthropy often gets characterized as a commercial activity measured in large part by monetary values of contributions and benefits. This seems to be especially true of corporate philanthropy because much of the current literature details how and how much companies give to charity (e.g., Kotler & Lee, 2004, 2005; Porter & Kramer, 2002). Such economic conceptions may relegate corporate giving to being just one of many business functions. In contrast, the participants in this study viewed corporate giving as part and parcel of their employer's overall value system. As such, philanthropic values and, more specifically, the organizational discourse constructing those values, provided a lens through which employees interpreted a variety of corporate messages and practices.

Choi and Wang (2007) defined values as "fundamental elements in people's belief systems" (p. 348). In this case, messages about charitable giving that were "always spoken about" constructed charitableness as a fundamental organizational value, and that value became a basis for understanding other organizational rhetoric, such as the corporate mission statement. Participants repeatedly cited the mission as a source of knowing the importance placed on charitable giving in their workplace, even though the mission statement mentions neither charitable giving nor philanthropy.

The absence of an explicit reference to charitable giving in the corporate mission suggests that employees may have ascribed charitableness to the mission statement in an effort to frame or make sense of philanthropic talk and behaviors in the workplace. Framing allows one to determine the meaning and significance of something (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). Part of the mission's charge is to improve the communities in which Patron Bank operates. Equating that phrase to charitable giving enabled employees to understand and embrace the bank's philanthropic discourse and the ways in which that discourse got played out in their everyday work. For example, when employees were asked to solicit clients, to volunteer, or to make personal donations, the mission statement and the underlying value for philanthropy gave meaning to, and perhaps to some extent legitimized, managerial requests. In short, because charitable giving was constructed as a company value, the actions that grew out of that discourse became an accepted part of organizational membership.

Patron employees also used the bank's philanthropic values to make sense of individual behaviors. Patron's leaders regularly "led by example," advocating and exemplifying charitable giving on corporate, local, and individual levels. They did not just talk about charitable giving; they enacted it and did so not only by

committing the bank's time and resources to numerous philanthropic causes but by getting involved personally as volunteers, donors, and community leaders. According to participants, the congruent words and deeds of leaders were instrumental in shaping employees' interpretations and articulations of the bank's corporate giving philosophy. Participants seemed to describe the notion of integrity or the "consistency between an individual's values and behavior" (Choi & Wang, 2007, p. 348). Because philanthropic values were clearly instantiated in organizational discourse, participants attributed meaning and importance to leaders' philanthropic behaviors, and many adopted similar charitable talk and behaviors of their own. This finding supports DePree's (1998) argument that leaders are stewards of many things, not just organizational assets, legacy, and effectiveness but, equally as important, values.

Collins and Porras (1991) argued that a company's guiding philosophy is instilled by its leaders "not via rhetoric, but rather through their daily actions" (p. 34). Although these participants certainly paid attention to how leaders behaved, the constitutive relationship between discourse and action appeared to be most important to their understanding Patron's philanthropic philosophy. Without the frequent and consistent discourse constructing the value of charitableness, those same leader behaviors would have had little or different meaning to organizational members.

Perhaps more interestingly, employees perceived corporate philanthropy as evidence of a broader corporate philosophy and used the same philanthropic discourse to interpret and evaluate all kinds of corporate practices, including those outside the traditional realm of corporate philanthropy, such as human resource policies and the bank's opposition to eminent domain. In essence, employees were "using social values as beacons for business" (Cheney, Wilhelmsson, & Zorn, 2002, p. 97) and expected those values to be enacted in all company actions.

Participants seemed to have invoked a second element of integrity, and that is, "the adherence to the moral principle of fairness" (Choi & Wang, 2007, p. 348). Because charitableness was constructed as a fundamental organizational value in Patron's culture, employees assumed the same values would resonate in all corporate practices. Patron's espoused philanthropic mindedness was thus employed to understand traditional corporate philanthropy activities but was equally used to make sense of everyday business practices. Participants expected the bank to behave toward employees and customers in ways that reflected the same spirit of charitableness shown to the community. After all, "charity begins at home," so if Patron advocated and enacted giving to others, it was only fair that the bank, in the words of one participant, "take care of its own." This interpretation clearly extends the conventional boundaries of corporate giving and what "counts" as corporate philanthropy.

In short, Patron's corporate CEO, local president, and other managers constructed a dominant philanthropic discourse that permeated the culture, informed employee assumptions, and influenced the very jobs that employees performed. The value of giving became infused into the work environment through repeated philanthropy-related messages and the ways in which those messages, and employees'

talk about those messages, gave particular meaning to other corporate rhetoric, behaviors, and practices. Consequently, employees adopted charitable giving talk and sustained the normative value of giving by supporting Patron's charitable projects with their time and efforts, even when it meant altering their responsibilities or adding to their workloads.

From a critical perspective, Patron's philanthropic discourse and practices could be viewed as a means of corporate control, no longer sovereign but "dispersed into norms and standard practices . . . —what Foucault called 'discipline'" (Deetz, 1992, p. 22). Patron Bank's norms and practices included numerous philanthropic efforts and functioned to discipline employees' assumptions and behaviors. As a result, the organization's belief system, power relations, and the ways in which philanthropy was enacted went relatively unquestioned.

Different interpretations about the bank's mission and charitable giving behaviors might have foregrounded the relationships of power that have created and sustained a particular philanthropic discourse. For example, the mission statement's reference to improving communities was framed as charitable giving; however, it could have been framed as the need to maximize profits so the bank could provide more jobs and jobs that would be more stable. Alternate frames such as this may have enabled employees to question the bank's philanthropic support or the degree to which corporate largesse should alter work roles and responsibilities. Yet, little evidence of an alternate frame was found, perhaps in part because of the social desirability of charitable giving. Philanthropy, rooted in Christian beliefs, has long been a part of American culture (Bremner, 1988). The societal value of giving may have made it difficult for employees to question or express dissent toward the bank's charitable practices.

In this case study, the combination of talk and action, at individual and corporate levels, enabled philanthropic values to become embedded in the organization's culture and subsequently, in the hearts and minds of its members. These findings suggest important pragmatic implications for corporate donors—specifically that corporate philanthropy programs may be better received and supported by employees if those programs inform and are informed by the organization's overall culture.

In other words, if corporate giving is not independent of other business practices, as suggested by this case study, then philanthropic initiatives must be constructed and implemented in ways that are compatible with other organizational values and policies. "If values are to be maintained," explain Ginsburg and Miller (1992), "they must become an ongoing part of organizational life" (p. 24). Therefore, a philanthropic mindset should be evident in both the language and the micropractices that characterize everyday work experiences, including policies and practices that fall outside conventional notions of corporate philanthropy.

Both discourse and action are symbolic, and both constitute meaning as employees strive to make sense of the increasing presence of charitable giving values in the workplace. A value-based discourse of giving and the meanings available through that discourse will enable charitable giving to be encompassed in what it means to be an organizational member, and employees will be more likely to embrace the giving

expectations placed upon them. To the contrary, corporate philanthropy programs may neither be taken seriously nor supported by employees if the values driving those programs are contradicted by other organizational messages and behaviors.

Qualitative Research in Communication

By privileging the voices of organizational members, a qualitative case study offers a glimpse into the locally situated experiences of organizational life (Chen & Pearce, 1995; Sypher, 1997). A well-constructed case study brings to light a particular world that would otherwise take much time to experience and understand (Deetz, 1990). The participants' own accounts of local knowledge help us "make sense of their sensemaking" (Sypher, p. 1) and "allow us to 'experience the experience' of organizational life" (p. 3). Only the kinds of data collected through qualitative research can provide the depth and richness necessary to understand the lived experiences of others, that is, "how they construct what they construct, why, and with what effects" (Weick, 1995, p. 4).

Although communication research is often judged by objectivity, reliability, validity, and generalizability, case studies, and perhaps qualitative research more broadly, should be evaluated in terms of coherence, richness, comprehensiveness, probability, plausibility, and open-endedness (Chen & Pearce, 1995). The inherent incompleteness that characterizes most qualitative inquiry reminds us that there are multiple stories that can be told (Sypher, 1997); thus, communication research must continue to explore the everyday, taken-for-granted processes of communicating and organizing that constitute, construct, and shape the way we live and work.

This case study, although only one interpretation, foregrounds employees' perspectives and strives to offer an interpretive account of their understanding of corporate philanthropy in their workplace. Patron Bank employees experienced and interpreted corporate philanthropy values and discourse in particular ways—ways that may not be universal or generalizable—but nonetheless, ways that influenced how they made sense of their work and the people around them. Their experiences—and the experiences of many others in a multitude of communication contexts—can only be apprehended through qualitative research and are, for their own sake, worthy of study by communication scholars. It is our hope that this study will exemplify how qualitative inquiry and case study research, in particular, can generate contextually situated knowledge about important and interesting life experiences.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study extends organizational communication research by providing a much needed exploration of how employers are talking about charitable giving in the workplace, it is not without limitations. First, this study was conducted in a community in the southern United States where charitable projects are routinely supported by local businesses. Therefore, the avenues for and frequency of charitable talk

at work may be greater than in other geographic areas. Second, this study relied heavily on interviews and focus groups. Although these methods were supplemented by archival data in an effort to offer multiple sources of evidence, several interpretations were based primarily on participants' recall of messages and policies. Third, the study was conducted with management approval, and interviews and focus groups were held on bank premises. The biases of management and location may have caused some employees to be reluctant to articulate dissenting frames for fear of employer or coworker reprisals.

Finally, this study was conducted during a relatively stable economic climate. The recent economic downturn is being blamed for a 2% decrease in total giving from 2007 to 2008 and, more specifically, a 4.5% decline in corporate contributions (Giving USA, 2009). It appears that traditional corporate donations are decreasing in response to shrinking profits, but little is known about the other, less tangible ways in which corporations support charitable efforts. Future research should explore the influence of economic conditions on companies' philanthropic values and the ways in which those values get communicated, or not, to organizational members.

Despite these limitations, one thing is certain: Corporate philanthropy programs are largely dependent upon the support and participation of employees. Therefore, organizational communication scholars should continue to examine employee interpretations of charitable giving in the workplace, how employees make sense of philanthropy-infused messages, and ways in which employer and leader values may influence employees' own philanthropic identity and constructions of charitable giving.

This study also raises questions concerning power relations and the privileging of some values and interpretations over others. Researchers should cast a more critical eye toward corporate philanthropy and the ways in which a philanthropic culture may, presumably unintentionally, create negative effects for employees, particularly those who have little power to resist managerial requests. These lines of research would further extend current thinking about corporate philanthropy and the ways it is shaping organizational cultures, as well as give voice to those who increasingly experience charitable giving in the workplace.

Notes

- [1] A complete interview guide is available upon request from the first author.
- [2] A complete focus group guide is available upon request from the first author.

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