
**C&A BRAZIL
EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME (EVP)
INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL EVALUATION**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
September, 2016

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An independent external evaluation was commissioned to assess the implementation modalities, results and long-term impact of the Employee Volunteering Programme (EVP). The evaluation was conducted between March and September 2016 and focused on the outcomes produced in the last program Cycle (2013-2015).

1. EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME (EVP) DESCRIPTION

The EVP has existed since 1991, starting out as a series of individual employee volunteering initiatives and gradually being consolidated into a formal program structure. Its main objective is to train the volunteer employees of C&A to participate as citizens in the education of children and adolescents in all communities where the company is present. The EVP is present in almost 300 C&A units in 120 cities around the country, engaging approximately 2500 employees.

The program establishes partnerships with local, mainly civil society or community-based, organizations that provide education for children and a smaller number of public schools and shelters. The organizations are spread throughout 25 of the 26 Brazilian states. The methodological proposal is composed of 4 strategies, making up the EVP Volunteer Trail, in which each step contains a number of activities to be implemented by all the volunteer groups: internal volunteer mobilization, training, partnership with the community organization, and social action in the community. During social action, the volunteers implement activities with the children and offer to support institutional strengthening of the partner organizations.

The program has a governance structure of one C&A manager per region acting as EVP counsellor, who is responsible for the operation of the program in the company units. These managers are supported by the volunteer trainers, one per unit, who are selected annually to take responsibility for capacity building for the other volunteers, internal mobilization and the practical running of the EVP.

The EVP Theory of Change involves two interconnected fields, the C&A Company and the Community, where the program operates to produce its expected results. The aim at the Company level is to achieve the *impact* of “employees engaging actively in their communities and being co-responsible for guaranteeing collective social rights and promoting systemic changes in favor of the common good” and two general *outcomes* are aligned to work towards this impact. The first, “Volunteering culture enhanced,” lies within organizational boundaries, while the second, “social participation increased and improved,” targets the individual employees.

The Community field of the TOC puts forward a clear and challenging *impact* statement: “improved child development”. To achieve this, two intermediary outcomes are proposed by the EVP: the development of organizational capacities in partner organizations and improvement of the quality of education provided by their services, thereby creating a better environment for children to grow and develop. Organizational capacities are defined as a higher degree of organizational visibility, diversification of funding sources and improvement in management skills and resources. The “access to quality education strengthened” outcome aims to provide diversified results of pedagogical activities; premises that are safe, well-organized and adequate for children’s activities; and increased and better-informed family participation.

2. EXTERNAL EVALUATION KEY QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The EVP Theory of change (TOC) was reconstructed during the inception phase of the evaluation (its main elements are described above), becoming the main point of reference for establishing the focus, scope and methodology of the evaluation. The process was guided by 8 main questions aiming to ascertain the extent to which EVP has enhanced a volunteering culture within the C&A company; contributed to well-qualified social participation of employees, contributed to increased access of children and adolescents to quality education and strengthening of the institutional capacity of community partner organizations. Other questions concern the extent to which the internal and external strategies of the EVP have contributed to the generation of outcomes, which are the main driving force behind the success or failure of the program, as well as the main lessons learnt.

The evaluation methodology adopted a non-experimental and mixed-methods approach. Ten (10) case studies were conducted¹, two following an exploratory approach aiming to inform the reconstruction of the EVP TOC and eight to collect the principal data used for testing and validation. In each case study, data collection was focused on interviews with store managers, program leaders, and EVP trainers, and focus groups with volunteers and non-volunteers. At the community level, partner organization managers and educators were interviewed, and where possible and appropriate, focus groups and/or interviews with children and their families carried out. At the company headquarters, additional interviews were conducted with the current Instituto C&A and company leadership/managers and also with relevant former managers. Finally, an interview was carried out by phone with one of the family members. In all 234 people were involved in qualitative data gathering. The data from the case studies was then used to inform the development of two quantitative survey tools. The first focused on the partner organizations and the second was applied to C&A employees (both volunteers and non-volunteers). The response rates were: 54 partner organizations (out of 114); 1639 volunteers (out of 2642) and 1430 non-volunteers (out of 11,216).

3. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

Key finding 1. The EVP has contributed to the social engagement of employees, producing results in terms of personal and professional development that positively influence working environment and team development in the company.

The volunteers' participation in the program increases their understanding of children's rights as well as their awareness of social injustices that are present in the communities. The contact with children from underprivileged social backgrounds has a large impact on the volunteers and is a main factor contributing to their positive perception of the significance of the EVP. The volunteers believe that EVP engagement results in their personal as well as professional development. Both volunteers and non-volunteers (principally managers), reported that the program improved communication, leadership skills, teamwork and the working environment, with the program being recognized as introducing a spirit of collaboration in an otherwise competitive environment. At the same time as these outcomes were identified, the employees established a clear understanding that participation in the EVP does not determine decisions regarding promotion within the company.

¹ Rio de Janeiro – Distribution Center (RJ) ; Rio de Janeiro – Baixada Fluminense (RJ); Porto Alegre (RS); Brasília (DF); Guarulhos

Recommendation 1: C&A should internally acknowledge all aspects of employee and company strengthening by including them in the EVP Theory of Change but avoid externally communicating the program for marketing reasons.

Key finding 2. The program has successfully sustained high levels of internal mobilization but the pressures of the business have limited the volunteers’ opportunities to participate in social action in the community.

The levels of internal mobilization activities already prominent in the previous cycle (a combination of efforts to inform new potential volunteers about the program, stimulate and improve capacity of the already active employees and prepare them for external social action), increased further in 2013-2015. These regular internal activities have become a way of engaging many employees, including those who would not be considered “volunteers” in the strictest sense of the term (carrying out social action in the community). Many of the employees choose to participate in the EVP through this “internal alternative”, for example by organizing the donations of presents to the children or by producing the toys that are used during the visits to the partner organizations and they also benefit from the personal and professional effects of the program. However, the external action in the community is the main aim of the EVP and the survey indicated that less than 40% of the volunteers had actually had the opportunity to participate in the activities with children during the last 12 months. This was recurrently mentioned by volunteers and non-volunteers as a cause for frustration and demotivation. The reason for limiting the numbers of volunteers on the visits is directly related to the company’s capacity to temporarily run business in the units without the presence of these volunteers. Staff cuts during this period have clearly created more tension, principally in the smaller units, and, although the managers generally help to enable the program, it was acknowledged that the current situation is imposing challenges on the external visits. This tension between the business operation and the EVP, in relation to participation in external social action, will only grow with the increase in the number of employees engaging in the program.

Recommendation 2: The EVP must strive to offer opportunities for external social action to as many volunteers as possible, but also recognize and promote a diversity of internal opportunities for engaging in the program, valuing the broad understanding of volunteer work that already exists among the employees.

Key finding 3. The bazaar has proven to be successful and allowed partner organizations to improve premises and purchase equipment and pedagogical material. The volunteer intervention with the children is also highly valued by the partner organizations, but the EVP had a limited contribution to results in terms of improving teaching practices or institutional strengthening of its partners.

The bazaar sale of clothes donated by C&A organized by the volunteers at the partner organization has proven to be a successful strategy for EVP community intervention. It combines the resources and competencies of a retail company with the recurrent financial needs of community-based organizations. The average sum raised by the bazaar in 2015 was US\$ 2,534 or US\$ 2,710, depending of the data source. However, if outliers are removed, the average falls to US\$ 642.70², which is still a highly significant sum for most of the partner organizations. The bazaar funds were used mainly for the improvement of premises for the

² There is no available data on the amount raised in 2013 and 2014.

children, followed by the acquisition of equipment, toys and pedagogical materials, and also the purchase of food, thereby contributing to providing a safe, well-organized and suitable space for children to play and study and consequently promoting positive educational development. Beyond its financial contribution the bazaar also plays a role in increasing visibility and strengthening the relationship between the organization and the community it serves, and in some cases the children’s families are encouraged to participate directly in organizing of the bazaar, e.g. by mending and preparing the clothes to be sold. Although a core EVP strategy, not all of the partner organizations have enjoyed this opportunity, with only slightly more than half of the organizations reporting having implemented an EVP bazaar in the survey.

The partner organizations are not positive about the various EVP contributions to children’s access to quality education envisioned in the Theory of Change. The main activities developed by volunteers with children are playing, reading, gift donations during holiday celebrations and theater and, even though the organizations’ managers and educators said that these activities contribute by providing something new and different for the children, they generally gave low ratings in the survey to volunteers’ contributions. The volunteers are highly valued by the organizations but EVP activities have not had any deeper influence on the partners’ educational approach, such as contributions to standard lesson plans and teaching activities.

The regularity of the visits proved to have a direct influence on the outcomes in the partner organizations. Those with monthly visits achieved more significant results than those that received less frequent visits.

Recommendation 3: The program needs to prioritize the bazaar strategy at all partner organizations, focus on hands-on and positive play activities with children and remove the aspects of institutional development, making the program more suited to the level of capacity and availability of the volunteers.

Recommendation 3b: The EVP needs to improve aspects of the volunteer training in order to convert the activities-oriented approach into a results-oriented one. The volunteer trainers should be used for continuous capacity-building of volunteers by establishing clear roles for them and train them to be trainers. The existing volunteer platform should also be better utilized for educational purposes.

Key finding 4. The EVP has succeeded in becoming part of the daily routine in company units and demonstrates institutionalization of a volunteering culture. But while the company recognizes the value and importance of the Instituto C&A’s management leadership of the program, it does not perceive the EVP as a ‘company volunteering program’ as well, and even though it is conceptually relevant to the objective of “Sustainable lives” it is at present is not explicitly integrated into the C&A global sustainability strategy.

The EVP has a marked presence within company operations across Brazil and has been integrated into the operation of the units and employee mobilization in all sectors and at all levels. The company promotes the program among new employees as part of the integration process and allocates employee working hours for program engagement. Regular dedication of time and space to the program is included in the company agenda and all units

have a reading room for employees, which is one of the EVP's internal strategies. Employees are generally aware of the program and it is given priority internally, with the involvement of leaders in its governance structures and events, as well as the direct engagement of managers in the running of the program in the units and as counsellors.

However, the EVP has not been given a prominent role in the "Sustainable Lives" global sustainability policy, where it appears in the focus area of Employee Engagement. The EVP is not formally mentioned by the company as a KPI to be achieved, which indicates that it will not be given high priority in terms of management. The lack of integration into the global sustainability strategy seems contradictory, considering the funds invested by the company in the EVP in the form of clothes donated by the company to bazaars and the value of employees working hours dedicated to EVP. Instituto C&A is recognized as the "owner" and leader of the EVP and the evaluation did find that Instituto C&A management is of great importance in conferring internal and external legitimacy, through its social values and technical quality, as well as keeping the EVP identity separate from the business and marketing side of the company. However, one aspect does not exclude the other regarding the relationship between the company and Instituto C&A and the issue of ownership of the EVP. The evaluation points to the importance of both Instituto C&A management and the active involvement of C&A, (also under the new global policy) for ensuring the sustainability of the program and fostering a culture of volunteering in the company.

Recommendation 4. The company should, through the Investment committee and EVP counsellors, acknowledge co-ownership of the program, involvement in governance and strategy, and also include program outcomes within the global sustainability strategy, but the EVP must remain under Instituto C&A management to ensure internal and external legitimacy, and operational and technical quality.

Key finding 5. The EVP proposal for the 2013-2015 cycle established unrealistic expectations for outcomes, in terms of both the social participation of volunteers and their capacity to impact the community. The strategies envisioned regarding volunteer training, the implementation of partnerships with community organizations and the frequency of social action were not sufficient to create the conditions necessary for achieving all the expected results and impacts.

The EVP Theory of Change envisions an ambitious impact at both company and community levels. The outcome of a creating a volunteering culture within the company has been successfully enhanced and the EVP translates C&A social values into practice. Positive results have also been produced in the volunteers, but they do not meet the more sophisticated expectations of social participation presented in the program's technical proposal. Likewise, the expectations for outcomes at community level have turned out to be higher than what the program is actually capable of delivering. The results for organizational strengthening were poor and although the EVP contributed to providing much-appreciated new experiences for the children, the levels of actual results, compared to the Theory of Change, are rather low. At the same time, analysis of the implementation of the strategies shows that the program is just too complex and demanding for the current program capacity. EVP training strategies are unable to provide the necessary skills and competencies and, as already mentioned, the frequency of visits also falls short of what is needed to effect deeper transformation of the community organizations. It was thus neither realistic nor fair on the program to expect the proposed high-level outcomes. With the bar set so high, actual accomplishments risk being overshadowed by shortcomings.

Recommendation 5: The program’s Theory of Change and technical proposal for the next cycle need to be revised to reflect the business’s operating pressures, in order to establish clear and realistic expected outcomes and impacts, particularly with regard to the action and expected results with community organizations.

4. COMPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATIONS (CR):

CR 1. Relations with partners: Clear criteria for selection of partner organization should be established, with enough flexibility to allow for variations in regional context and availability of organizations. Autonomy of local volunteer groups regarding decision-making is mandatory and should be reinforced, but more precise guidelines are needed to help them make better choices.

CR 2. Structure of partnerships: The partnership with organizations should be structured around a fixed cycle of intervention, for example three to five years, with objectives, strategies, expected results and exit strategy along with appropriate monitoring and evaluation. The program needs to develop a clear set of operational guidelines (flexible enough to address local and regional contexts) and to assist volunteers and partner organizations in transitioning towards a fixed ‘program cycle’.

CR 3. Interaction with organizations’ educators: Opportunities for more substantial interaction between volunteers and partner organizations should be promoted by involving educators in planning and implementation of EVP activities with the children. The ideal long term should emphasize the important of ‘play’ as a key educational intervention.

CR 4. Communication with volunteers: The Instituto C&A should move forward on improving the internal communication strategy, striving for the use of simpler and more direct language and the use of modern communication channels and tools that are easily accessed by the volunteers and other employees. There is also a need for clear communication on the practical functioning of the EVP, including criteria and limits of participation in external social actions, in order to avoid frustrated expectations on behalf of the volunteers.

5. MAIN DRIVING FORCES BEHIND SUCCESS AND PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES

The following section establishes a set of driving forces and challenges that have contributed to or limited the outcomes of the EVP during the 2013-2015 cycle. This exercise aims to identify factors that have proven to be important and influential in the EVP in Brazil as a way of providing input for reflection and inspiration when considering new corporate volunteering initiatives in other contexts.

6.1 DRIVING FORCES BEHIND SUCCESS

D1. Program identity distinct from the company but closely related to C&A culture and values. The EVP, with a marked presence both within Instituto C&A and the company, has contributed to its potential and sustainability. It is integrated into daily operations at retail and non-retail units and is very much in keeping with the company DNA but management under the Instituto C&A program umbrella has guaranteed legitimacy as a social intervention in favor of the common good and helped to strengthen C&A's volunteering culture.

D2. Promoting social action at local partner organizations, in direct contact with children through educational interventions of a concrete and practical nature. Social action in the community is fundamental for establishing the importance of employee engagement and participation in the program and the combination of direct contact with children from the community and the development of hands-on educational activities, such as reading, playing, music and theater, has proven to be a successful recipe for volunteer mobilization and raising the awareness of educational challenges across Brazil. The focus on educational organizations is locally relevant and strategic in ensuring the availability of and reasonably easy access to partner organizations for all company units.

D3. Development of the clothes bazaars as a strategy for skills-based volunteering directly related to the retail operations of the company, fund-raising, improvement of conditions for children's education and community involvement. The bazaar is a key strategy that combines a variety of aspects of the EVP (such as skills-based volunteering, fund-raising and involvement of the community) to produce results. As it is an activity directly related to the core of the business and application of the professional skills of the employees, it has proved to be a significant motivating factor. The activity in itself has provided important funds for the organizations to improve premises and equipment and thus contributed to children's access to quality education and increased the visibility of the program through direct family and community involvement.

D4. Promoting continuous internal mobilization and a high degree of employee involvement in the local running of the program. Investment in continuous internal mobilization through a range of activities and events, engaging counsellors, managers, trainers and volunteers in the organization of these activities has proven to be a successful way of engaging new employees and constantly "keeping people fired up" about the program.

D5. Providing opportunities for a range of types and levels of employee involvement in the program. The possibility of participating in the program through external social action by promoting or participating in internal activities, by contributing to the campaigns and donations, or simply by covering for colleagues who are visiting the children, makes the EVP attractive to a variety of employees who have different wishes and levels of availability. The "open" volunteering concept makes everybody feel part of the program and strengthens its presence in company units. It has also become a way of keeping the volunteers active in the program, in view of the fact that the external volunteering opportunities are more limited.

D6. Organizing regular national meetings to exchange experiences and acknowledge and celebrate the work of the volunteers. The annual meeting contributes greatly to the

identity of the program. Bringing together volunteers from across the country with Instituto C&A and C&A managers and top leaders to share experiences, hand out awards and celebrate is an important moment for valuing and strengthening the company's volunteer culture.

6.2 CHALLENGES TO SUCESS

D7. Internal pressures from the business operations that limit levels of volunteer external engagement, training opportunities and outcomes in the community. Although the company's position is one of valuing and supporting the EVP, the immediate pressures in the retail units have a significant influence on program strategies and outcomes. The staff situation in the unit and level of sales pressure directly influence the availability of volunteers in terms of visits by supervisors or managers, the frequency of visits to the partner organization, and availability of employees for volunteer capacity-building. This negatively affects the quality of volunteer work and reduces the possibility of establishing frequent and regular interventions in the community.

D8. Lack of clear criteria and agreement regarding partnerships with local organizations. The potential of the EVP in the community was markedly hampered by the lack of criteria and established guidelines for social action partnerships. The partner organization is selected at the discretion of each volunteer group and there is no policy regarding the recommended duration of partnership, expected final results, timing of program phase-out, monitoring or self-evaluation. This has led to insecurity on the part of volunteers, some frustration on part of partner organizations, and a general loss of potential for sustainable community outcomes based on a clear entry and phase-out timeline with measurable objectives and targets.

D9. Introduction of complex institutional development strategies as part of the expected volunteer action. The institutional development strategies adopted by the EVP from the Instituto C&A Institutional Development Program: Identity, Management and Fundraising, to be implemented in the partner organization, have proven too complex and demanding for current volunteer capacity and availability. Apart from the bazaar (one facet of the fundraising strategy), very few groups managed to deal with these strategies, showing that the proposal was too ambitious for the EVP.

D10. Volunteer training combines different strategies but has limited ability to enhance volunteer skills to be applied at partner organizations. EVP training faces the challenge of delivering knowledge and skills development for volunteers across a large geographical area. Learning strategies are usually diverse (workshops during the annual meeting and distance learning) but have not been effective in developing the capacity of volunteers to achieve the EVP's desired outcomes.

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