

Engagement, impact and purpose in the CSI space

 By [Andy Hadfield](#)

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Employee engagement is making a comeback - and this time, it's playing out in the CSI space. Employees, especially millennials, want to know and experience the purpose of the brands they work for. Reports indicate that there is real value in providing staff with the means to engage and be involved in things that happen outside their cubicle.

To date, this has not been leveraged on any grand scale in South Africa, but we are seeing a renewed interest in employee volunteering programmes and their direct HR benefits; which include increased employee productivity, retention and morale. CSI teams' focus is no longer just on communities external to their business and they are starting to recognise the benefits of engaging staff directly in their projects.

As this happens, we will see a greater consolidation of the teams managing social investment, stakeholder engagement and employee satisfaction. I predict the following trends for CSI in 2017:

The volunteer bus will cease to be the only strategy

Events in which employees gather to take part in a generic activity are great for team building, easy to organise and have immediately visible output. However, they are not great for long-term impact, or even intermediate outcomes.

The thinking behind the forgood business product was to tap into the huge potential for more personalised volunteering. Through the platform, employees can select from a broad set of opportunities, engaging their individual skills and passions, while also contributing to CSI projects. This unstructured type of volunteering produces higher engagement rates and additional benefits, such as skills development – it's a win for all.

Boundaries between CSI, Sustainability and HR will blur

The link between CSI and sustainability is perhaps most established in the current landscape in South Africa. Under new shared value strategies, the two will become increasingly linked and eventually converge.

Perhaps less clear is the link between CSI and HR. Although these teams seldom sit in on the same meetings, employee wellness, engagement, performance and purpose are becoming increasingly integrated under the goal of business success.

CSI will fixate less on funding

Effective CSI requires strategy and deeper involvement in social projects – teams are starting to wake up to that. They are no longer able to just be reactive to incoming proposals, but are required to actively seek and create opportunities that are relevant to their brand and the communities they support.

While the old-school approach of writing a cheque to a non-profit involved in technology empowerment (for example), is still around, more corporates are moving towards putting their name on the construction of 50 new ICT centres instead.

CSI will see pressure from enterprise and supplier development requirements

CSI projects and their budgets are coming under growing pressure from enterprise and supplier development-based strategies. In South Africa, investing in the sustainability and support of black-owned businesses (especially in the supply chain) promises higher BBBEE points than CSI initiatives do.

This trend is likely to result in shrinking budgets for CSI teams, unless they tap into other budgets. Approaching HR divisions through a tactic like employee volunteering and employee engagement may be one area where future social impact budgets lie. Getting this right will reduce the competition between BBBEE and CSI projects, producing greater social value overall.

ABOUT ANDY HADFIELD

Andy Hadfield is the CEO of volunteering platform and CSI management tool forgood. He launched his first startup aged 19 before going on to hone his skills in a number of tech ventures, sales apps and one of the first digital engagement programmes in the country, The Deloitte Way. In 2015, he joined forgood, heading up the team that are rolling out the most advanced large-scale employee volunteering and CSI management tool in the country.

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