

Talent Management

Corporate Volunteering Can Increase Skills, Intelligence, and Employability in the Era of AI

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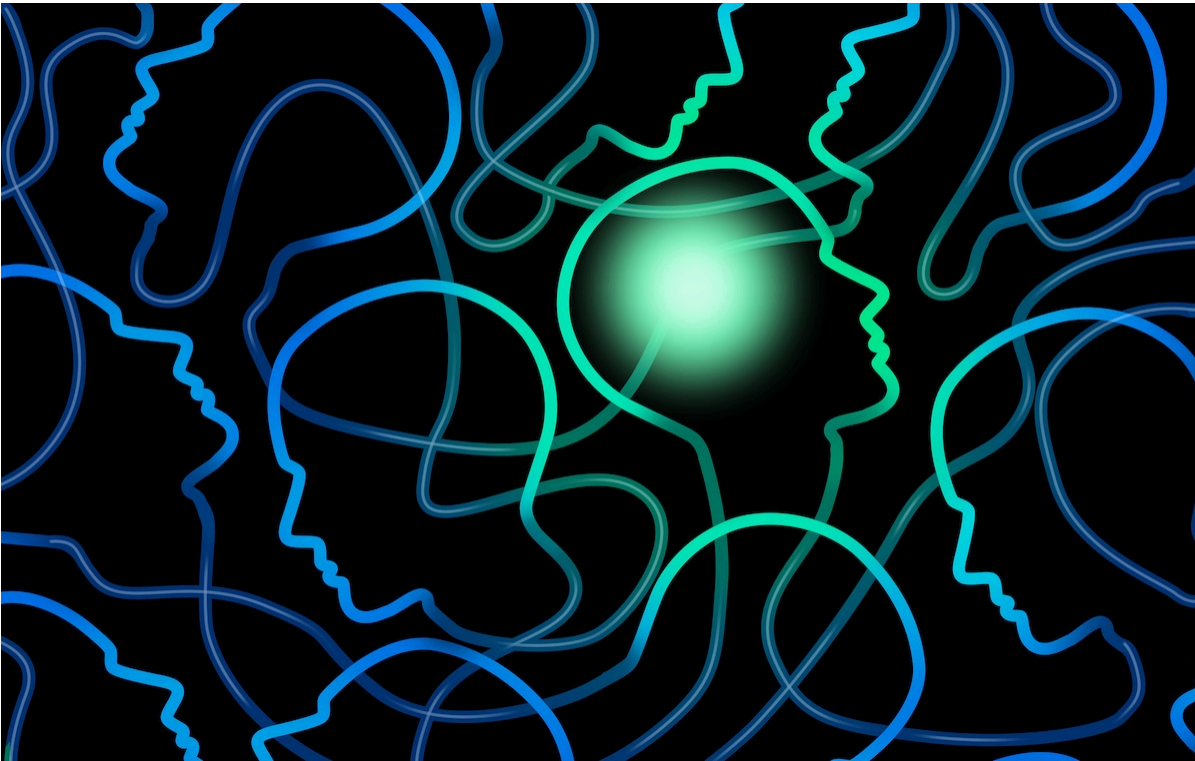


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Corporate volunteering can be used to build new skills and intelligence urgently needed as AI is biting into people's jobs.

Approximately **90% of the Fortune 500 Companies have corporate volunteer programs**. How can these programs help secure employability when so many jobs change and might even disappear due to AI?

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As **organizations increasingly integrate generative artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning** into their operations, the need for employees to adapt and acquire new competencies becomes paramount. Corporate volunteering, traditionally seen as a means of giving back to the community, is **a powerful tool for professional development and future employability**.

This is particularly important now, as, according to **Goldman Sachs**, AI and automation could lead to the loss of up to 300 million jobs worldwide in the coming years and profoundly change many others. While some jobs will disappear, many will evolve, and entirely new roles will emerge. **The World Economic Forum predicts** a net positive job growth, with 69 million new jobs created by 2027, focused on technology, sustainability,

and human-centric roles. Current employees must adapt themselves in order to still be employable in these new circumstances. We argue that corporate volunteering can offer a unique way of helping them do this.

Companies need to be more strategic and proactive in supporting their employees to stay employable. They should support employees' transition into the AI era, either by assisting them to redefine their roles, work more efficiently and effectively with AI, find a new job (in the same or another company), or even retire.

To address this **global employability** challenge, **companies are focusing on proactive strategies like upskilling, reskilling, human-AI collaboration**, and job transition support to prepare employees for the potential changes AI will bring. These efforts aim to ensure that workers remain competitive, adaptable, and supported as technology evolves, thus increasing the employability of those who want to stay in the workforce and reducing their replaceability by AI. To remain relevant, workers must build **adaptability - always learning new skills while focusing on unique human skills like creativity, empathy, and critical thinking**. They need to know how to work **with and against AI** by acquiring the skills to work with machines or outdo them. These are the new fundamentals of **employability**. All these technical and human skills can be enhanced by corporate volunteering. If done well.

We suggest using **corporate volunteering** to help employees face the new reality with stronger prospects. Corporate volunteering occurs when people volunteer through their workplace, often organized by the employer with paid leave to volunteer. Companies offer corporate volunteer programs because they benefit the company (for example, via enhanced reputation and CSR), their employees (giving them a sense of pride and meaning at work), and the communities they serve.

We believe there is more to add to this business case in an era of AI. While the relationship between **volunteering and finding a job** is well established, AI necessitates new skills and signaling personal characteristics. Therefore, we offer the idea of *skill-developing corporate volunteering*. In contrast to **skill-based volunteering**, where employees use the same skill set from their paid job to help the community more effectively and efficiently, skill-developing

volunteering aims to deliberately help employees build and develop (new) skills, competencies, and intelligence to expand their learning. Still, relative to the latter, skill-developing corporate volunteering is hardly spoken about in the corporate world.

Skill-developing volunteering leans on insights from **service learning in business education** and transformative learning. Service learning starts with a learning objective set by the business school to be achieved by experiential learning via volunteer work and reflection. It always begins with deliberate and well-planned learning objectives, determining the nature of the volunteering and the learning experience. Students are often required to integrate their volunteering with deep reflection, journaling how this exposure changed them, developing their perspectives, helping them to enhance new skills, and understanding what they need to learn more about.

Skills and Competencies: What Humans Have That AI Doesn't (Yet)

AI has advanced significantly, automating numerous tasks and processes. However, there are areas where AI still cannot easily replace people due to the complexity and inherently-human aspects involved. According to an **HBR article**, to maintain a good level of employability, humans will need to learn skills to work with AI (e.g., data-centric skills, AI literacy, or algorithm communication) as well as competitive skills that 'cannot be replicated by machines' (including emotional competencies, strategic thinking, creativity, and morality). In this article, we focus specifically on the skills that cannot be easily replaced by AI, which we group into:

1. **Emotions and relationships:** AI still cannot *fully* understand or respond to human emotions at the same levels as humans, and it lacks *genuine empathy*, which is crucial in fields like counseling, therapy, and customer service. Consequently, humans can still outdo AI in building relationships and having meaningful communication, as they require understanding social dynamics and cultural nuances that AI cannot fully grasp.
2. **Ethics and cultural sensitivity:** AI excels at data processing and pattern recognition but struggles with *ethical considerations and moral judgments*, making humans better at

handling complex decisions. AI operates on data and algorithms, while humans consider broader implications and societal values. Recognizing and respecting cultural differences is another area where humans excel. Therefore, humans can make ethical decisions better with empathy and moral imagination that are more sensitive and culturally appropriate.

- 3. Flexibility and innovation:** Further, humans can quickly adjust to new situations and learn from experiences, *a flexibility* AI hasn't fully developed yet. While AI can assist in the *creative process*, particularly in the ideation part, it still lacks the intrinsic human ability to innovate and create *original works* driven by personal experiences, emotions, and cultural contexts.

However, we argue that these skills are only the manifestation of the deeper types of intelligence humans develop throughout their lives, including via volunteering. Focusing on these can help employees establish unique long-term employability.

The Five Types of Intelligence That Corporate Volunteering Can Develop

To develop a workforce ready for the future, companies must investigate how to create various types of intelligence in their employees. While we all know of cognitive intelligence (IQ) and its importance for many current jobs, other intelligences have been discussed and offered in the last few decades. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is another commonly used one, followed by adaptive, cultural, and moral intelligence – all of which can play a vital role in creating an employable person who is also agreeable, ethical, and sensitive. Additionally, we offer here the concept of societal intelligence that can help companies and people be more responsible and impactful.

Each of these intelligences details related skills and competencies that are still unique and which AI cannot easily replace, playing a critical role in increasing employability and reducing replaceability (the ability to easily replace an employee using AI, machine learning, robots, or automated work).

These intelligences can all be enhanced via corporate volunteering. When employees are encouraged by their company to donate time and do meaningful work, they can develop empathy toward others (EQ), the ability to adapt to novel situations (adaptive intelligence), or the competencies required to understand and work with other cultures. Employees learn to develop ethical behavior and intelligence when working in alignment with their and the employer's values. Finally, volunteering can often teach people about societal issues and raise their social responsibility (societal intelligence).

1. Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

The widely accepted and used idea of **EQ** was developed by Daniel Goleman in the 1990s, showing that people with the ability to understand and manage their own and others' emotions can do better in the workplace. Goleman popularized the concept of EQ, breaking it down into five key elements: **self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills**. These elements are essential in leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, and customer engagement and can be seen as skills still difficult to replace by AI. Corporate volunteering, particularly when tailored and designed for this purpose, can help employees develop the five elements of EQ by focusing on hands-on help, primarily to other people, in which empathy and social connectedness play an important role. The ability to navigate difficult emotional situations can help to promote awareness, understanding, sensitivity, and social competencies. To do this well, companies can incorporate methods from service learning, such as reflection and journaling.

2. Adaptive Intelligence

Adaptive intelligence is the ability to adjust effectively to new situations, environments, or challenges through real-world problem-solving, flexibility, and learning from experience. Adaptive intelligence is increasingly valuable in a fast-changing world driven by technology and uncertainty, as it can help employees navigate technological changes and disruption. It involves **cognitive skills, emotional regulation, and social awareness**, which can be developed by well-designed corporate volunteering. When starting with these learning goals in mind, companies can design experiences where employees can help. In India, **SPJ IMR Business School** sends all its MBA students to do service learning

with children in slums hit by severe poverty. The experience shattered students' preconceived notions of poverty and helped them to adapt to a different environment and develop their (responsible and conscious) leadership.

3. Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is the ability to understand, relate to, and work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. It includes awareness of cultural differences, sensitivity in communication, and the flexibility to adapt behavior across diverse settings. As diversity and inclusion policies have been challenged recently, companies must stand even more intensely on developing cultural sensitivity and appropriateness. AI can help us understand cultures before immersing in/experiencing them (e.g., prompting it to advise on cultural norms or etiquette). However, volunteering helps to bridge the theoretical and actual.

For example, in building houses for **Habitat for Humanity**, working 3-5 days in unknown environments in Europe, Africa, or the Middle East, and challenging themselves in new cultural environments. When employees are well prepared for their trip, guided by local cultures, and helped with humility, they can develop their CQ, which can be applied in their employing company when returning to work. To deliver on the intended learning objectives, a personal learning reflection is needed.

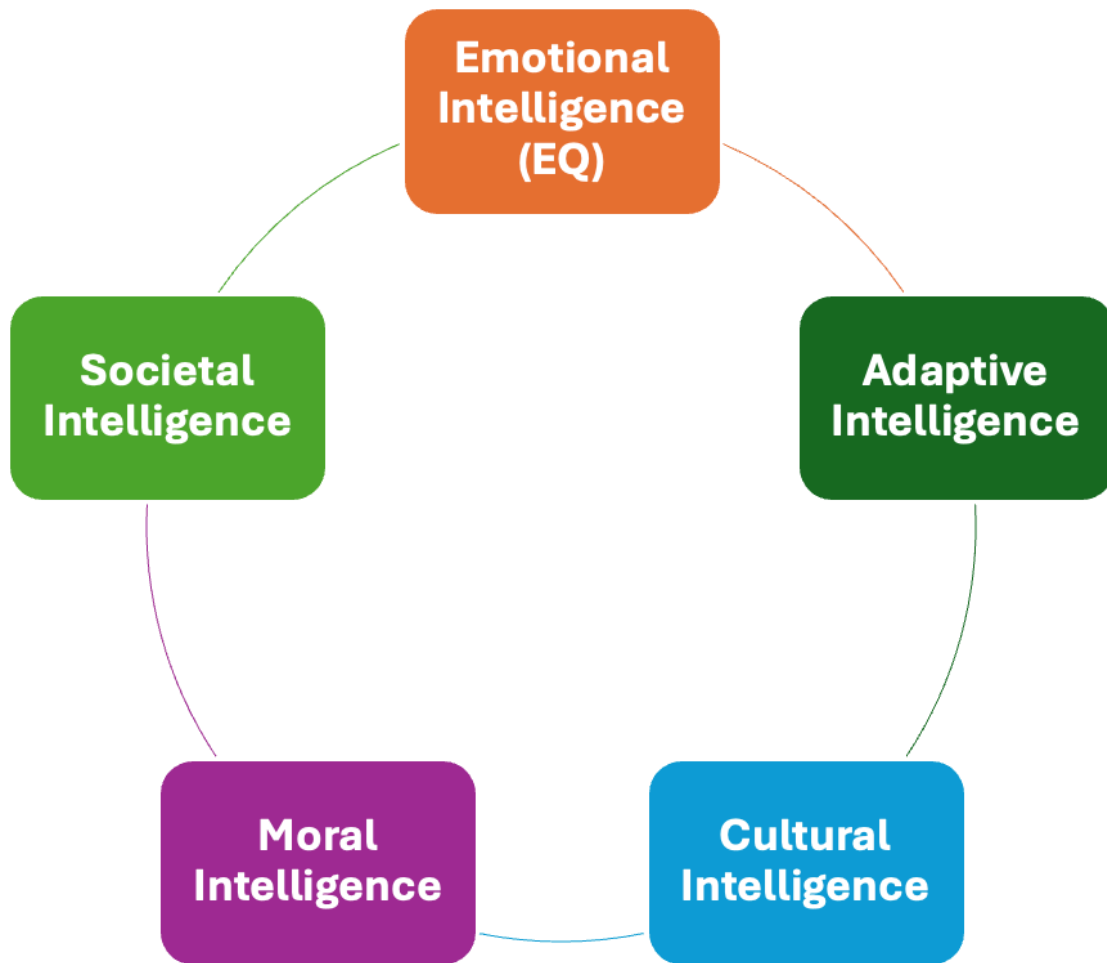


Figure 1: The five intelligences framework for corporate volunteering

4. Moral Intelligence

The concept of moral intelligence was popularized by Lennick and Kiel, who co-authored their influential book in 2005. Lennick, a former executive at American Express, and Kiel, a leadership consultant and psychologist, defined moral intelligence as applying universal moral principles (including integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness) to personal goals, values, and actions. Corporate volunteering that places employees in situations requiring compassion, integrity, and moral decisions and behavior can help develop their business ethics, values, and the ability to make better decisions. Volunteers

learn to show up, follow through, and take accountability, all strengthening moral character. Once more, these skills are critical to increase their employability in the era where machines and technology replace jobs.

5. Societal Intelligence

Employees nowadays are also expected to become global citizens, understanding the society in which they live and operate, the international community, and the ecological environment. When employees have a well-developed awareness of the global issues and wicked problems humanity faces today, from climate change to poverty, they are more likely to become active change agents. Here, we offer the concept of societal intelligence, which provides a deep understanding of complex and systemic challenges and harnesses the power of the individual and the corporation to address them. This requires consciousness, empathy, and the desire to act to create a net positive impact and transform today's grim reality into a better tomorrow. In a future dominated by AI and machine learning, we need people who can connect with society, translate societal needs into beneficial AI prompts, and judge the quality of the solutions.

What Companies Need to Know and Do

Companies need to be more strategic and proactive when it comes to engaging their staff in volunteering. Each of these five intelligences has several aspects, skills, and competencies that can play a critical role in preparing employees to increase their employability and create new pathways for meaning through work. But how?

Utilizing **models from experiential service learning**, we present the four-step model for skill-developing corporate volunteering to support employability within the era of AI. It suggests starting with defining learning objectives based upon current deficiencies and future needed skills, designing experiences that offer a learning opportunity, actively supporting reflection by learning experts, and performing evaluation or even assessment on the learning objectives to start the circle again. Each of these steps should be done in partnership with the non-profits or programs the company wants to work with to ensure that the volunteering experiences do not only meet the employee needs for skill

development but also the social demands of the recipients. This is even more important as skill-development volunteering inherently means that corporate volunteers do not yet possess the skills needed. Figure 2 presents the model, detailed next.

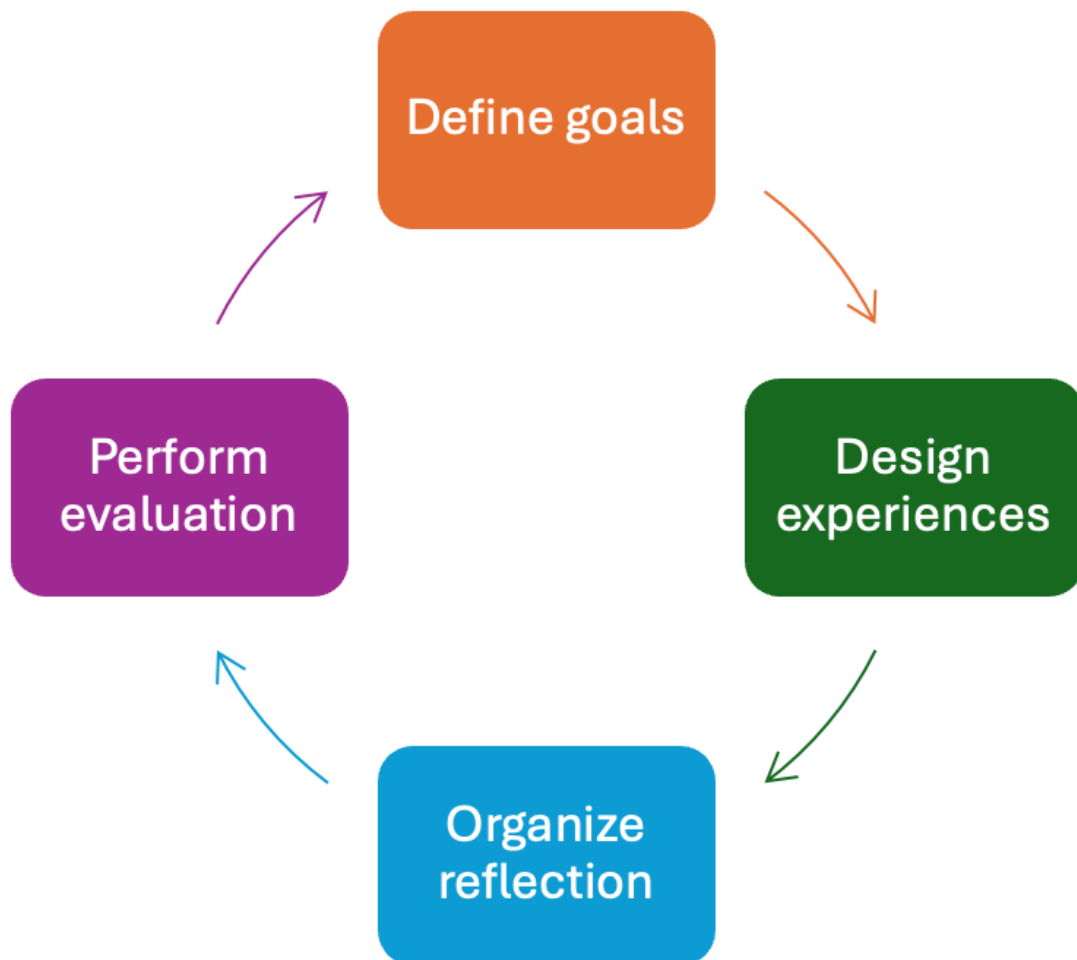


Figure 2: The four-step model for skill-developing corporate volunteering

1. Define Goals

Experiential and service learning should always begin with the learning goals. Similarly, this should be the starting point for those leading, managing, and designing skill-developing goals that people can use to work with and against AI. What intelligences are essential for your employees to develop? What skills will increase their employability in the era of AI and help them secure their role or find another role? What competencies can

help them to better adapt to the rapid changes in technology and work? Start with defining the key learning and skill-development goals and assess participants' existing skills before considering what experience can help achieve them.

2. Design Experiences

Working with your non-profit or community partners and with employees, you can use social innovation to design experiences that create dual-purpose volunteering to meet the community's needs and address the learning goals identified in the previous stage. What should the employees do when they volunteer to help develop these skills? Should they volunteer in a team or on their own? Episodically or as a one-off opportunity? Should they engage in skill-developing volunteering where they can build on and refine existing skills or in a complex and new setting where new skills will be learned? Companies can use design thinking methods to generate novel programs that are not only useful for employee skill development but also impactful for society. Therefore, mutual learning can occur between companies and communities (and perhaps also business schools) in designing meaningful experiences.

3. Organize Reflection

Reflection is an inherent part of skill development and service learning, essential for connecting practical experiences with academic learning. It encourages critical thinking by prompting students to analyze their actions, challenge assumptions, and consider the impact of their service on the community. Service-learning courses usually require students to reflect on their learning experiences, benefits, challenges, and how they affect their learning and skill development. Reflection and critical thinking are imperative skills that many leaders and employees need to develop. The reflection can then be made as part of the evaluation when the entire company can reflect on its corporate volunteering program and how it can be improved.

4. Perform Evaluation

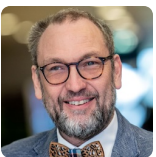
Finally, evaluation is key. Most companies that report on their corporate volunteering efforts tend to share how many people volunteered, for how many hours, and for which activities. These are just inputs, not outcomes or impact. To assess the effectiveness of employee volunteering designed for learning, companies should still measure the positive impact on the community and - as highlighted in this paper - the skills employees could achieve. Moreover, long-term evaluation can check if this was achieved and if the goal is to help employees secure jobs or retire meaningfully. It takes more time and effort compared to only reporting on inputs and activities. Still, it is critical to help us use corporate volunteering in a meaningful way and to help employees and the company alike face the challenges ahead.

Corporate volunteering is a powerful tool for enhancing employee skills and employability in the AI era. Companies can foster continuous learning and adaptability by integrating skill-developing corporate volunteering into professional development programs. This approach benefits employees through real-world experience and professional growth while enhancing societal well-being. As AI transforms the job market, leveraging corporate volunteering will better prepare the workforce to remain competitive and adaptable to ongoing change.



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