Communication in Employee Volunteering Programmes

Cross-sector dialogue: A strategic or idealistic approach?

Hanna Olovsson
Abstract
Recent years have brought the private and non-profit sectors closer together in terms of cross-sectional collaborations. As businesses have become more involved in communities, initiatives such as employee volunteering (EV)—where employees are encouraged to volunteer by their employers—are becoming more popular and are receiving more scholarly attention. However, the question still remains as to whether the main reasons behind cooperation are related to strategy: does interaction and communication in EV mirror a more ideal- or strategic approach? As EV programmes (EVPs) bring together actors with different world-views and perspectives, much can be learned from studying their interaction. The present study examined the nature of communication in EV and whether this communication reflects a strategic (based on self-interest) or ideal (corresponding to Habermas’s ideal speech situation and stakeholder dialogue) approach. In addition, the study looked at factors that, according to participants, facilitate improved communication and understanding in EV. The findings indicate that communication in EVPs largely reflected the strategic approach. However, the ideal approach is still apparent in some situations and can successfully be used given the right conditions—for example, in situations of long-term collaboration with increased experience when participants invest time, resources and motivation in building relationships. Time and honesty was also important factors. However, a range of barriers made collaboration more difficult. Pursuit of strategic short-term solutions and shortage of resources and time may hinder important dialogue and understanding.

Key words:
Employee Volunteering, Stakeholder Dialogue, Habermas’s Ideal Speech Situation, CSR, CCI, cross-sector collaboration, changes in sectors, non-profit organisations, transformation.

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Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1
Aim and Research Questions ................................................................................................................... 2
Literature Review ................................................................................................................................... 3
   Employee Volunteering (EV) ............................................................................................................... 3
   Reasons behind increased Employee Volunteering ........................................................................... 4
   Motives and Consequences of Employee Volunteering .................................................................... 7
Stakeholder Dialogue .............................................................................................................................. 10
Habermas’s Communication Theories ..................................................................................................... 11
The Ideal Approach ................................................................................................................................ 13
Methodology .......................................................................................................................................... 15
   Literature Search ............................................................................................................................... 15
   Qualitative Methods ........................................................................................................................... 16
   Selection and Context ......................................................................................................................... 17
   Participants ........................................................................................................................................ 18
Ethical Considerations ............................................................................................................................ 19
Data Collection ....................................................................................................................................... 20
Analysis .................................................................................................................................................. 21
Reliability ............................................................................................................................................... 22
Findings ................................................................................................................................................... 22
   Is the Strategic or Ideal Approach More Dominant? ....................................................................... 22
      Strategy as a Survival Mechanism .................................................................................................. 24
      Increased strategy for Non-Profits .................................................................................................. 25
   Factors in Increased Dialogue .......................................................................................................... 26
   Main Challenges to Increased Dialogue ........................................................................................... 29
Discussion .............................................................................................................................................. 30
Conclusions ........................................................................................................................................... 34
Reference List ......................................................................................................................................... 35
Appendix ............................................................................................................................................... 38
   Appendix 1. Information Letter to Participants ............................................................................... 38
   Appendix 2. Interview Guide ............................................................................................................. 40
   Appendix 3. Examples of Coding ....................................................................................................... 42
Introduction

During recent years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained massive attention, resulting in a number of community involvement initiatives (CCI) where companies help communities with social and environmental issues. One of these initiatives is employee volunteering (EV), where companies support and encourage their employees to become involved in their communities, for example, by paying their salaries during volunteer hours. EV-programmes (EVPs) have increased in popularity; however, initiatives and research are still evolving. The drivers, benefits and challenges connected to engagement in EV often differ between businesses, not-for-profit organisations and employees, in particular due to different world-views and objectives. Therefore, collaboration can be seen to benefit from intersubjective understanding through interaction. Actors can gain from increased communication about their objectives, opinions and needs within EVP. The aim of this study is to highlight factors that facilitate dialogue and understanding and to map out barriers that might hinder positive outcomes and increased communication. By addressing two dominating views within academic literature—the often-used economic strategic view, and the more theoretical, idealistic view—the author seeks to determine which of these approaches dominates collaboration in EVPs, and what impact this may have on communication.

In literature, the strategic approach represents strategic goals and self-interest, which are claimed to create stronger relationships (Porter & Kramer, 2006). In contrast, the utopian view suggests that mutual understanding, open dialogue, shared solutions, consensus and equality improve collaboration and dialogue. The idealistic approach can be found in stakeholder dialogue, strongly influenced by Habermas’s (1984) critical theory, and Freeman’s (1984) stakeholder theory. Stakeholder dialogue promotes paradigm change and transformation rather than strategic gains, which in turn mirrors Habermas’s communicative action and the ideal speech situation. As the settings for the public, private and voluntary sector are changing, communication in collaboration is likewise affected. Findings show that the strategic approach is more dominant; however, indicators suggest that ideal long-term collaborations and partnerships can have positive impacts on dialogue, leading to relationship-building, increased trust, honesty and intersubjective understanding. However, barriers such as strategic short-term solutions, lack of understanding, and shortage of resources and time may hinder such positive outcomes of increased communication and dialogue.
Aim and Research Questions
The aim of the present study is to examine communication in relation to EVP and whether interaction is influenced by self-interest and strategic goals, or whether a transformation in sectors and roles has led to a more widespread stakeholder dialogue—shaped by Habermas’s ideal speech situation. This idealistic approach suggests open, dialogical communication that requires actors to be honest about their reasons for participation and allows them to adapt to one another. By examining the views of businesses, non-profit organisations and employees (stakeholders in EV) and focusing on their experiences from collaboration, the study seeks to determine whether involved parties understand each other’s objectives, how they perceive each other’s agendas, and whether their objectives affect collaboration and communication in EV.

The study’s aim is structured around three research aims and corresponding research questions:

1) Examine which approach that is more dominant in connection to stakeholders’ communication and behavior—the strategic approach of self-interest, or stakeholder dialogue influenced by Habermas? The research question is as follows: “Does communication in EVP reflect a greater application of negotiation and self-interest or of stakeholder dialogue and Habermas’s ideal speech situation?”

2) Examine factors that allow for improved communication and better understanding by seeking an answer to “What factors do EVP-participants highlight as important in facilitating open dialogue and understanding?”

3) Examine whether there are any barriers to dialogue by seeking an answer to “Are there any significant barriers to increased communication and understanding and, if so, what are the challenges?”
Literature Review

Employee Volunteering (EV)

Employee volunteering (EV) is a specific type of corporate community involvement (CCI), a term used by many scholars to explain business involvement in communities. EV can be defined as an activity that involves an employee being supported by their employer while engaged in volunteering activities. It includes situations where employees take part in regular volunteer programmes while being supported by their employer, although such volunteering is not necessarily directly organized by the employer. The nature of EV can differ, and it can either be employee-led from the bottom up, or initiated from upper management in a top-down approach (Lee, 2013). The practice is given a variety of names, for example, employee volunteerism, employer-supported volunteer efforts, staff volunteering and workplace volunteerism (Lukka, 2000). All EV programmes (EVPs) are workplace-based initiatives where employers provide support actions to facilitate opportunities for staff to volunteer in the community (Lee, 2013). EVPs are often included in human resources (HR) incentive practices (Pajo & Lee, 2011), and Lee (2013) states that EVPs can comprise different activities, approaches, philosophies and management structures, for example, activities such as team projects, individual mentoring and skill-based volunteering.

EV can sometimes be difficult to conceptualize, as its nature changes depending on how it takes place and why. Henning and Jones (2013) describe employee volunteering as a concept still lacking a clear definition; nonetheless, they outline four common designs of EV strategy undertaken by most companies, either as a single model approach or a mixture of different approaches. The first model is the large-group approach. It focuses on large groups of employees who spend time volunteering on special days, for example, helping out with manual labor once a year. The second model is a grant-based approach where the company uses financial grants to encourage employees to participate in volunteering; for example, the company might donate money to the not-for-profit in the names of their top employee volunteers. The third, own-time-based model, supports employees who wish to volunteer outside of work hours. Finally, the fourth model consists of the increasingly popular paid volunteerism approach. This method allows employees to spend a specific number of their paid work-hours on volunteer activities. The design of these four models can vary, and it depends on whether any partnerships exist between businesses and not-for-profit organisations and on whether these partnerships are short- or long-term (Henning & Jones,
2013). In the present study, EV refers to the first and fourth of Henning and Jones’s (2013) definitions: the large-group approach and paid-volunteerism.

Regardless of type, discussion of EV initiatives has become prevalent in corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature (Muthuri, Matten & Moon, 2009). Simultaneously, research indicates that the prevalence of EVPs is rapidly expanding among businesses’ philanthropic actions in the United Kingdom, Western Europe, and North America (Booth, Park & Glom, 2009). Additional research indicates that the popularity of such programmes is also growing in countries such as New Zealand (Lee, 2010; Lee, 2012; Pajo & Lee, 2011). The global business sector has welcomed EV—multinational companies (MNCs) especially—and EVPs are emerging in companies all over the world (Henning & Jones, 2013). Today, EVPs are among the most popular approaches used by companies to position themselves as good corporate citizens, and both governmental and non-profit sectors have expressed a growing interest in EV as its role in society expands (Cihlar, 2004; Lee, 2013). Two main factors can be said to have led to the development and popularity EVPs: (a) the fact that they can bring benefits to companies, employees, and non-profit organisations, and (b) a recent political neoliberal change in society, which has led to a reformation of the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

**Reasons behind increased Employee Volunteering**

EV can be viewed as a result of increasing collaboration between private and non-profit sectors, emerging from a change in ideology and political philosophy. Today’s global society is strongly influenced by neoliberal ideology, and this has affected the dynamics between the three sectors, from how they interact with each other to how responsibility is distributed. Civil society and the corporate sector seem to have moved closer to each other, resulting in new means of cooperation, such as cross-sector partnerships and EVP collaboration (Levall & Prejer, 2013; Lee, 2010). Peet (2012) highlights New Zealand as especially interesting in this respect “because of its well-deserved reputation as a social democratic, welfare state that went neoliberal with a vengeance in the mid-1980s” (p. 151). Peet (2012) continues to describe this change as a response to the economic crises and major changes in the global economy—changes that, combined with increased neoliberal influences, have affected how global society works today (Matten and Crane, 2005). States influenced by neoliberal ideology only address the most necessary functions in society, for example, defense, police and the legal system.
Other services, such as infrastructure, social benefits and health-care should, according to the neoliberal perspective, be solved by the free market and by citizens themselves (Harvey, 2005). Therefore, volunteerism today can be viewed as a response to neoliberal governments’ withdrawal of services that they previously provided but that they no longer consider their responsibility. As the public sector withdraws from traditional tasks in society, these activities are further outsourced to the private and non-profit sectors (Salamon & Anheier, 1996; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). As a result, private and non-profit sectors are working together to fill the remaining gap, helping out in communities and using collaboration and EV as a means to “complement each other and better allocate resources for the common good” (Lukka, 2000; Jamali & Keshishian, 2009, p. 279). The changes in the respective roles of different sectors have also resulted in greater responsibility and power for businesses and non-profit organisations alike (Smith, 2003; Peet, 2002).

Changes in the Not-for-profit Sector
In the late 20th century governments began to outsource more tasks to NGOs (Salamon & Anheier, 1996). According to Smith (2003) outsourcing was a consequence of governments failing to solve social problems, which led to increased workload for non-profits. Today, many non-profits still maintain their traditional role as confrontational critics; however, a rising number of NGOs have started to collaborate with companies in undertaking EV and other CCI-initiatives (Austin, 2000). Why non-profits decide to enter partnerships has mainly been explained by two factors: a desire (on the part of the non-profits) to achieve common goals in relation to community benefits, and a need for financial support in order to continue activities and remain afloat (Wadham, 2009; Jamali & Keshishian, 2009). As not-for-profit organisations do not rely on private giving and public funding to the same extent as they did in the past, they find new ways to support their activities (Gou, 2006). As a result, collaboration with businesses has increased, turning EVPs into a “significant part of community-business partnerships” (Zappalà, 2004, p. 191).

The recent changes in the not-for-profit sector have affected the way many non-profits operate: Researchers suggest that they are becoming more strategic to achieve their goals in their work with businesses (Gras & Mendoza-Abarca, 2013). Moreover, outside forces such as companies and management scholars advise non-for-profits to become more professional and strategic in the ways they cooperate with companies (Austin, 2000). As skills-based
employee volunteering is becoming more common, Herman and Renz (1999) suggest that management tools provided by employee volunteers might result in professionalism of non-profits; however, the strategic and professional approach does not seem to have affected every not-for-profit. Results from a recent study by Samuel, Wolf and Schillings (2013) did not reveal any evidence that non-profits had developed any best practice or specific strategies in how they handle business proposals connected to EV. Nevertheless, the idea that strategic changes are affecting the non-profit sector is still prevalent in academic literature: Strategic partnerships, new business models for collaboration, and social alliances are all receiving more attention (Heap, 2000; Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2004).

Changes in the Private Sector
EV and other CSR-initiatives developed as a response to the decline in legitimacy for businesses and because of increased public pressure resulting from great corporate scandals (Pirsch, Gupta, & Landeth Grau, 2007). Public trust in the private sector remains at an all-time low, forcing businesses to find new ways to regain trust (Porter & Kramer, 2011), and businesses are adapting to media and public attention as the public express higher expectations and demands for CSR (Levall & Prejer, 2013; Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013). The role of a socially responsible company requires “the firm to strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical and be a good corporate citizen” (Carroll, 1991, p. 43). Corporate citizenship involves giving back to society and being a responsible member of the surrounding communities, and researchers have found this be one of the most important drivers behind company and employee engagement in EV (Matten & Crane, 2005; Pajo & Lee, 2011). A positive correlation between social responsibility and financial performance has been suggested by Orlitzky et al. (2003), and Lukka (2000) argues that paying attention to social problems is actually good business sense. Therefore, EVPs can be viewed as a business solution aiming to solve social problems and making profit simultaneously (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2008). Samuel, Wolf and Schilling (2013) note that academic literature within the field of EV often argues that private companies view collaboration with NGOs as a “strategic necessity” (p. 165), and that companies, rather than non-profits, initiate collaboration.

Strategic reasons behind CSR initiatives such as EV have divided researchers into two camps. On the one hand, many scholars suggest that these strategies are beneficial, creating stronger
relationships between businesses, the community, and other stakeholders (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Caroll & Shabana, 2010; Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2009). On the other hand, thinkers such as Fleming, Roberts, and Garsten (2013) claim that CSR has been “captured by the area of strategy” (p. 249) and argue that social responsibility has been transformed into a business tool in which the main purpose is to continue with ‘business as usual’ and increase profit. In summary, it is important to remember that EV is a small part of the greater domain of CSR and CCI, phenomena that arose for multiple and complex reasons. Factors such as globalization, political powers, chance in responsibility, strategic goals, the desire to create a better society and inter-sector collaborations can all be viewed as reasons for the development of EV and its rise in popularity.

**Motives and Consequences of Employee Volunteering**

Three main motivations for companies to engage in CSR strategies such as EV exist: instrumental, relational, and moral motivations (Henning & Jones, 2013). Instrumental motivation is described as “the desire to gain competitive advantage” based on the belief that there are “tangible business benefits” in connection to the design and implementation of EVPs (Henning & Jones, 2013, p. 115). Relational motivation is when corporations are trying to derive social legitimacy and long-term growth of a collective identity. As a part of this process, business firms are working to create value for important stakeholders, for example, their employees, partners and shareholders. Businesses can also be driven by moral motives, where volunteerism is part of the firm’s organizational culture. However, even this can function as a way to differentiate a company from its competitors (Henning & Jones, 2013). Although these drivers are explained in different ways, research suggests that CSR implementation is often driven by a combination of the three motivations (Aguilera et al., 2007).

Within academia, there are several debates over which of the three motives behind EV is the strongest. According to Lee’s (2013) findings, EVPs are mainly viewed as a strategic assets. She warns that instrumental views risk taking priority over equal or more important motives. Other critics claim that if a firm’s EVPs are driven by instrumental motives alone, there are potential dangers involved in relation to how stakeholders perceive the firm, which might lead to cynicism and distrust (Pajo & Lee, 2011). According to Henning and Jones (2013), when CSR initiatives such as EV are based on instrumental approaches, this can damage the
relationship between the corporation and its employees. Moreover, Yim and Fock (2013) suggest that CSR initiatives undertaken for strategic reasons could turn into a “double edged sword”, risking negative effects alongside the desired positive outcomes. Vlachos, Theotokis and Panagopoulos’s (2010) findings suggest that instrumental motives are negatively correlated with employees’ level of organizational trust. Moral motives, on the other hand, were positively correlated with organizational trust. The findings can be compared with Porter and Kramer’s (2006) contrasted view that strategic implementation of EVPs results in higher levels of effectiveness and success for both corporations and society.

A recent study by Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac (2015) found that corporate employee volunteers hold different attitudes towards EV depending on what they perceive as the underlying reasons behind the introduction of the programmes. If employees think of EV as a way for their employer to create value for the company, driven only by self-interest, this will have a negative effect on EV as an emotionally binding process between employee and company. The results suggest that companies that introduce EVPs to push their publicity and self-image goals risk having employees seeing them as less pro-social and compassionate, which might lead to less organizational commitment (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015). Under other conditions, though, such as communal relationships, EV can be well perceived. Gatignon-Turneau and Mignonac (2015) suggest that businesses should shift their focus, building relationships out of a genuine concern rather than expecting returns, as doing so is viewed more favourably by employees. The authors also advise companies to pay attention to how their true intentions might affect employees, and they suggest that corporations should be transparent with their intentions: they will benefit from employees perceiving their social agenda as trustworthy and honest.

Further Research Needed

Although there have been studies connected explicitly to EV, the field is still relatively small. Lee (2013) calls for additional research, identifying particular areas of need as follows.

Critical research is needed that acknowledges and examines the intricate and ambiguous nature of employee volunteering social settings, for example, power differences between business and non-profits with respect to resources and organizational capability, social structures within organizations, dominance of the instrumental view of the employee as a human resource, and differences in interests and values between business and nonprofits.
- Lee (2013, p. 937)

Henning and Jones (2013) also seek a broader theoretical framework on EV. Although social identity, social capital, and social exchange theories have been used successfully before, such theories tend to over-emphasize the view of EV as a business tool (Muthuri, Matten, & Moon, 2009). Muthuri, Matten and Moon’s (2009) studies have successfully shown how companies and not-for-profit organisations can share resources and collaborate for the public good; however, due to research lacunae and increasing requests for other theoretical lenses (Tschirhart, 2005; Henning & Jones, 2013), additional research is required to examine the “complex social milieu” of EV (Lee, 2013, p. 937).

Management research often highlights EV as a win-win-win concept for employers, employees and non-profits alike (Lee, 2010). This optimistic view of EV has been viewed as an important reason behind corporations’ decisions to become involved in EV (Lee, 2010; Lee, 2013); however, the positive way in which the win-win-win discourse is presented has raised some concerns. Brewis (2004) and Lee (2010) claim that this discourse has not yet been scientifically explored, and thus no general conclusions should be drawn with regard to the truth of the win-win-win claim. Much of the research on EV has been conducted from an instrumental business perspective that focuses on benefits in relation to profit, human resources, and public relations (Lukka, 2000). Research has successfully shown that EV does in fact bring positive outcomes for its participants; however, there have been calls for researchers to go beyond the business perspective and pay more attention to the perspectives of non-profits and employees (Lee, 2010). Furthermore, in New Zealand, research suggests that there are challenges connected to the implementation of EV: from corporate, not-for-profit, and employee viewpoints alike (Lee, 2008).

Lee’s (2008) findings suggest that businesses struggle with information sharing, communication, and consultation with community organisations. Her results show that community organisations face challenges as well, for example, in how to create meaningful volunteer events for employees, despite having few resources to fall back on. Lee (2008) also found that non-profits often perceived EVPs as closely tied to needs and goals of businesses, rather than to their own goals. To avoid problems in EVPs, Lee (2008) highlights the importance of communication in fostering a wider understanding of all participants. In similar
ways, the present study will seek to examine how the main stakeholders in EVPs communicate and whether they understand and adapt to each other’s objectives and needs. In addition, it will also seek to highlight factors that either have a positive or negative impact on dialogue in EV. To answer the research questions, a mixture of stakeholder dialogue and Habermas’s ideal speech situation will be used as a theoretical frame.

**Stakeholder Dialogue**

Stakeholder dialogue originates from stakeholder theory. The latter was first introduced by Freeman (1984) to challenge shareholder theory and the view that the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits (Friedman, 1970). Stakeholder theory suggests that the success and survival of an organisation is contingent not just on economic value, but on other values as well (Pirsch, Gupta & Landeth Grau, 2006). The theory highlights the needs of various actors (stakeholders) that are affected by a business’s activities—interests otherwise easily neglected. In order to take stakeholder’s needs into account, companies have to identify key stakeholders and outline their expectations, which is crucial for positive outcomes (Maon, Lindgreen & Swaen, 2009). Therefore, communication and dialogue is seen as essential. This has given way to stakeholder dialogue, which “represents an interactive process of stakeholder engagement” where stakeholder organisations and companies interact and listen to one another in order to learn from each other (Burchell & Cook, 2013, p. 506).

Research findings suggest that interactions between businesses and stakeholders are increasing, although the interactions continue to be difficult to manage due to diversity and conflicting expectations (Bowmann-Larsen & Wiggen, 2004). Austin (2000) argues that there is need for better communication and an open mind-set for all actors affected by partnership between sectors. He suggests that good communication can lead to increased trust, which he believes is vital for a successful partnership. However, cross-sector-communication is a complex matter: Shared understanding and dialogue are highlighted as key elements in successful collaboration (Wadham & Warren, 2013).

Dialogue can involve multiple types of communication, and Golob and Podnar (2014) describe the concept as “a flow of meaning between two or more individuals, out of which some new understanding may emerge”. The authors state that dialogue “is often used uncritically, without any real questioning of its meaning or its implementation”. Finally, they
highlight how “its increasingly wide use has both expanded and weakened its meaning” (p. 249). Heath et al. (2006) argue that the concept of dialogue can be problematic as it can hide power inequality among stakeholders, and stakeholders can have agendas about which they are not honest. O’Riordan and Fairbrass (2008) state that stakeholder dialogue plays an important role in business strategies, as it can function as a “key vehicle for the ‘exchange’ of CSR offerings between the firm and its stakeholders” (p. 748). Phillips (2003) suggests that dialogue can be viewed as an essential tool to solve problems between the firm and its stakeholders.

Golob and Podnar (2014) highlight two streams in the stakeholder dialogue literature. The first relates to solving large political problems, connected to war-times, environmental damage and sustainable development. It focuses on dialogue in relation to governments and political organisations and will not be discussed further. The second stream, however, has relevance to EV and collaboration between sectors. Developed from normative stakeholder theorising, it is heavily influenced by Habermas’s discourse ethics and his dialogical approach, which focuses on mutual understanding (Golob & Podnar, 2014). Dialogue and intersubjective understanding can be viewed as an alternative to strategic goals and self-interest. Researchers such as Foster and Jonker (2005), Wehrenfennig, (2008) and Unerman and Bennett (2004) have previously examined stakeholder dialogue using theoretical frameworks inspired by Habermas. This recent adaption of his ideas offers a new theoretical framework in which transformation of sectors’, widening of mutual understanding and change in business behavior are highlighted.

**Habermas’s Communication Theories**
Habermas’s (1984) ideas are based on the belief that ethical and moral challenges can be resolved through communication and interaction. According to this view, moral norms are constructed and can therefore be changed. However, in order to achieve such change, claims and arguments regarding norms must be valid, and true validity exists only in the realm of inter-subjectivity. The author claims that participants can collaborate to develop an enhanced understanding of once another: they can acknowledge possibly affected actors, come to mutual agreements and build relations (Habermas, 1984). With a background in critical theory, which opposes reality as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable, Habermas aim to highlight alternatives to dominant paradigms. In critical theory, the social reality can be
transformed into another type of society that focuses more on democracy, socialism, and emancipation. Questioning the instrumental and technocratic world views dominant in Western societies today, critical theory stands in contrast to the instrumental view, which represents power, domination and efficiency, and which ignores other equally or more important values, such as human value and reflection (Held, 1980). These utopian ideas of transformation have given way to Habermas’s (1984) communicative action and the ideal speech situation.

The Ideal Speech Situation
Habermas’s (1984) theorizing has given way to two main concepts: Strategic action and communicative action. Strategic action is described as an instrumental approach mainly focusing on how to reach success for a single actor, serving that actor’s self-interest. Communicative action, on the other hand, exists within communication where actors are seeking to understand one another on a more genuine level. The difference between strategic action and communicative action is that the former consists of purpose-oriented, strategic rationality, whereas the latter involves attempts at mutual understanding through communication-based agreements (Habermas, 1998). Within the domain of communicative action, the participating actors strive to shape their behavior in accordance with others and their interests. They adjust to each other, work towards a mutual comprehension of the situation and strive to reach consensus through mutual understanding. Within this discourse, participants must have the right to present their opinions and potential critique; they must be able to accept or disclaim validity claims and simultaneously reflect on the working process. For consensus to be formed and re-established, it is important that participants are included in dialogue so that all valid arguments can be heard (Habermas, 1998, as cited in Wehrenfennig, 2008).

Cooperation and honesty are vital parts of the consensus process: to reach mutual understanding, all parties have to express their opinions in an honest way so that all other parties may understand. In the context of collaboration and communication in EV, this view suggests that participants need to share an understanding of each other so that they know what to expect from other participants in terms of their behavior and goals. Habermas (1992) uses a set of rules to clarify his ideological thoughts, which were first suggested by Alexy (1978).
The rules, outlined in figure 1 below, should be fulfilled in order to create an ideal speech situation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterium</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(A) Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever. (B) Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse. (C) Everyone is allowed to express [their own] attitudes desires and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising [their own] rights as laid down in (1) and (2).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Criteria for the Ideal Speech Situation. Based on Alexy (1978, p. 40) as quoted in Habermas (1992, p. 89)

Habermas’s (1992) adaption of Alexy’s (1978) procedural rules for reaching the ideal speech situation was aimed at fostering a solid base for understanding: All participants should be able to agree on the best argument.

**Critiques of the Ideal Speech Situation**
Scholars such as Wehrenfennig (2008) and Cooren (2000) have been critical of the ideal speech situation. Although they acknowledge that the theory is interesting and thought-provoking, they label Habermas’s theories of communication as too unrealistic and utopian to be practiced in daily life, especially with regard to negotiation within management practice. Scherer and Palazzo (2007) also argue that Habermas’s theories are difficult to apply in a practical way. Furthermore, Cooren (2000) highlights that the communicative action and the ideal speech situation do not correspond to the effects dominating paradigms may result in.

**The Ideal Approach**
*Reapplying Habermas within Stakeholder Dialogue*
At times, actors have conflicting world-views and interests, which can result in situations where stakeholders avoid collaborating. An example of this is when not-for-profit organisations aim to maintain critical outside pressure on powerful actors by deciding not to work with large corporations (Burchell & Cook, 2013). However, actors can also decide to
engage in dialogue and collaborate. In those cases, conflicting interests can turn into obstacles. The type of conflict management commonly employed in such situations is negotiation influenced by strategic self-interest: Influential actors bargain when handling differences (Wehrenfennig, 2008). When viewing this from a Habermasian perspective, influenced by neo-Kantian ideas, the strategic process simply postpones real change. Habermas (1988) claims that true transformation and conflict resolution does not occur if lack of understanding and/or absence of other alternatives hinder the process. Furthermore, he argues that such a system may lead to agreements in the short term but fails to address differences and conflicts that might occur in the future. As short-term agreements fall apart, unsolved problems can resurface and continue to challenge collaboration (Wehrenfennig, 2008).

As researchers try to highlight the importance of mutual understanding in communication and dialogue, Habermas’s ideas are being reapplied in modern context (Foster & Jonker, 2005; Wadham & Warren, 2013; Unerman & Bennett, 2004; Phillips & Rahman, 2005). Wehrenfennig (2008) states that as multiple people and groups are affected by business decisions, the process of interaction becomes more integrated and complex. Complexity requires increased communication, and to meet arising needs, new approaches have been developed in relation to stakeholder theory, stakeholder dialogue and the collaboration between the private sector and the non-profit sector (Rasche & Esser, 2006; Unerman & Bennett, 2004; Wadham, 2009). For example, Unerman and Benett (2004) make use of Habermas’s Kant-inspired ideas of universalism. Habermas (1992) stated that “for a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects of its general observance for the satisfaction of each person’s particular interests must be acceptable to all” (p. 197), and this is reflected in Unerman’s and Bennett’s (2004) attempt to create conditions for a “universally accepted moral consensus through discourse, as ideal theoretical criteria for conducting a debate aimed at reaching intersubjective understanding” (p. 688).

Wadham (2008) and Rasche and Esser (2006) both suggest that the influence that Habermas’s places on stakeholder dialogue can foster increased understanding and allow for shared perceptions of goals so that all parties may benefit from collaboration. In addition, Jonker and Foster (2002) state that Habermas’s “theoretical framework can provide useful means for analyzing the nature and form of the dialogue and provide insights into the essence of the
misunderstandings and disputes that so often arise” (p. 193). The use of Habermas’s theoretical framework was also identified by Crane and Livesey (2003), as their reflections on language are similar to those of Habermas. In a review of their work, Smith (2005) states that “they contend that critical, or genuine, dialogue leads to discrete action and is not simply a forum to exchange ideas” (p. 718). In other words, “parties to genuine dialogue should be open to transformative effects of their communication” (p. 718). If a transformation is taking place in which businesses are turning into participants in a broader network of engagement (Burchell & Cook, 2013), Habermas’s background in critical theory may be of use, as it seeks to highlight alternatives to dominant paradigms. In this respect, the way Habermas’s ideas can be interpreted can help to foster transformative effects of communication between stakeholders. However, this is not without its challenges.

**Power Imbalance**

It is important to notice that resource imbalance may have an impact on communication. Unerman and Bennett (2004) highlight the fact that if Habermas’s idealistic ideas are to be applied, situations might occur where economically powerful stakeholders have more influence than economically weaker actors. Although powerful participants might act in the interests that they perceive others have, such interests might differ from the way that stakeholders themselves perceive their own interests (Unerman and Bennett, 2004). The risk of power imbalance is also discussed in a study conducted by Burchell and Cook (2013), which investigated recent transformations in business–non-profit relationships through the lens of stakeholder dialogue. The authors found that non-profits are “gaining an influential role as a key stakeholder” (p 508) as their knowledge, reputation and public support are needed by businesses; however, resource imbalance and trust still remain a problem in collaboration (Burchell & Cook, 2013).

**Methodology**

**Literature Search**

Searching for significant peer-reviewed articles from well-respected journals is very important. The search aimed to find well-cited, up-to-date articles and books within the field of EV and related fields. EV as a research field is still quite new, and the literature is still evolving. Therefore, other concepts in relation to EV also became important, such as
employee volunteering (EV), corporate volunteering (CV), cross-sector collaboration, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate community involvement (CCI). These keywords were combined with ‘New Zealand’; however, the literature review also includes information from other parts of the world.

After mapping out the research field, the subject of the study became clearer. The second step in the literature search came to focus on communication, dialogue and stakeholder dialogue. Within stakeholder dialogue, Habermas’ theories were popular, in particular his ideal speech situation. Bringing together stakeholder theory, dialogue and Habermas’s ideas resulted in the theoretical frame used to address the main topic of the present study. After research questions were determined, the literature research continued: additional articles, books and key words were found through the examination of references and earlier findings.

**Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative methods are often used to facilitate a deeper understanding. Such methods involve examining the way participants express themselves through the analysis of key words and quotations. The present study aims to highlight three different perspectives (companies, non-profit organisations and employees). Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of all participants’ perspectives: they should all be given the opportunity to express their views.

Within qualitative research, researchers commonly initiate contact with participants and study them in connection to surroundings and roles. When undertaking qualitative methods, it is considered advantageous if the research process is somewhat flexible. As new facts and aspects can become apparent, it is important to be able to adjust the process so that it may better suit the findings. Occasionally, this will led to a change in the initial plans (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the flexible approach showed itself to be particularly useful in terms of the time limit and research approach as the design and method changed over time. The initial approach was to focus on three EVPs and interview respondents from each group (company, non-profit organization, and employee) within these programmes, making use of snowball sampling to contact other participants. Although the initial approach seemed to be the best option, problems occurred that made it necessary to change the approach. Although snowball sampling proved successful to some extent, it became difficult to find stakeholders who were
all involved in the same EVPs and who had time to participate in the study. The complexity and different styles of EV also proved to be a challenge, as several different approaches could exist within the same company. Ultimately, the combination different factors lead to a final decision: Participants were allowed to express their views and experiences on communication on all of the collaboration processes that they had experienced during their involvement in EV. Although participants talked freely of their general experiences, the study still focused on organisations that had previous experience working together in EV. As such, three connections between the participating organisations existed: The organisations had either collaborated with each other before, or were currently involved together in on-going EVPs.

The decision on a more general approach resulted in a more complex image of communication; however, the new approach made it more practical to preserve participants’ anonymity. The non-profits and businesses were never revealed to one another. In terms of employees, these were known by business managers, but all efforts has been made to secure their anonymity, as the purpose was to avoid constraining participants’ willingness to reveal difficult aspects of collaboration. Furthermore, the adapted approach was well-suited to match the wishes of three of the participating organisations, who either had negative experiences from earlier, or who wanted to make sure not to damage important, on-going relationships. Due to potential inequality in power relations between businesses and non-profit organisations, as mentioned by authors such as Burchell and Cook (2013), the researcher did not want to risk participants feeling pressured to present their views in a favorable light in relation to other participants, as that would have defeated the purpose of honest perspectives on communication in EV. Participants were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences, both positive and negative aspects, and this was especially stressed in terms of employees, due to their direct connection to employers.

**Selection and Context**

Bryman (2011) states that selection of participants should be undertaken in such a way that theories and ideas can be examined: the selected participants need to represent relevance, variation and purpose. To fulfill the criteria of relevance, variation and purpose, the selected organisations were chosen because they had experience with EV programmes. Representatives from both the private- and the non-profit sector participated along with employees who had first-hand experience with EV-participation. Organisations were
contacted by mail or telephone, and employees were in turn contacted by these organisations, which forwarded information sheets to them (see appendix). Information collected from three different groups provided variation in the study, their first-hand involvement in EV provided relevance, and their views on dialogue provided purpose. The study involved representatives from each of the six organisations.

To find companies and non-profits that were involved in EV in New Zealand, an initial search on the Internet provided contact information from the organisation’s homepages. In addition, two contacts were provided by a professional involved in volunteer networking. In some cases, snowball sampling was used, as participants offered suggestions on other individuals and organisations (Morgan, 2008). Since the study was conducted in New Zealand, one main criterion was that the organisations should be active within that geographical context; however, several organisations also operate outside the country’s borders.

Participants
Participants were interviewed in their capacity as participants and/or stakeholders in EV programmes. Participants were businesses, not-for-profit organisations and employees and the research focused on describing their views on, and experiences of, communication in relation to EV. The decision to include all three perspectives was made to highlight different views and objectives as these can make collaboration and understanding more complex. As the business perspective appears to have dominated much of the current literature on EV, the present study aimed for a more balanced reflection that includes the perspectives of not-for-profit organisations and employees.

In total, nine individuals from six organisations were interviewed, three participants for each groups of businesses, non-profits and employees. Three women and six men were interviewed—all with various experiences and attitudes in regards to EV programmes. Six interviews took place in New Zealand: five face-to-face and one through a video link provided by the business. An additional three interviews were conducted by phone from Sweden. Although the types of interviews differed, all provided relevant information and the citations given in the findings reflects views of all participants. All interviews were recorded with full permission.
The non-profit managers were connected to conservation projects in New Zealand at the time of the interviews, including restoration of native forests, wetlands and wildlife populations. The representatives of businesses worked in CSR- and CCI-related positions that included managing sponsorships, partnerships, relations to stakeholders and community programmes. The first business was a multinational bank with several branches across New Zealand, and the second and third businesses were both multinational corporates operating within the industry. The employees who were interviewed were all working for the businesses in question at the time of the interviews.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical guidelines used in this study can be traced back to the “Ethical Code of Conduct” published by the Swedish Science Council. The codes within the conduct are designed to guide researchers in their work and create positive norms for the relationship between researcher and participants (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The Council is by Swedish law encouraged to build, stimulate and obtain an awareness and discussion about ethical behavior (SFS 2009:975, 13 §). Four ethical aspects of humanistic and social science were considered when the present study was conducted. The participants must be given information about the study, they must grant their approval, they must be assured of confidentiality, and they must understand the ways in which the collected data will be used (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). In order to uphold these codes, all participants were given information about the study and its purpose, both verbally (through phone calls and personal meetings), and in writing (in emails and detailed sheets of information about the ethical codes and how they would be applied). Participants were given contact information in case of additional questions, and told that the researcher would respect their anonymity and that efforts would be made to ensure that neither organisations nor personal information would be recognizable in the final result (see appendix). In order to provide confidentiality, the collected information was written down such that participants were unidentifiable, and data such as audio files and documents were stored safe. The gathered information was treated with confidentiality and was only used for the present study. Moreover, all data that could identify participants were deleted after the completion of the study.
Creswell (2013) has presented useful information on ethical considerations and procedures that have been applied in the present study: how anonymity is secured, and the notion of a power relationship between researcher and participants. When individuals and organisations work closely together, there is always a risk that they can identify each other more easily. For this reason, the researcher had to take particular care. The findings are presented such that no organisation or person should be recognizable.

**Data Collection**

The purpose of this study is not to generalize but to explore, and draws on previous studies from New Zealand, as well as on exploratory qualitative methods. Individual interviews have been used as empirical data. The samples were small and purpose-chosen, rather than large and random, and the size of the samples was determined by the time limit. Organisations were chosen on the basis of their involvement, size and position.

According to Creswell (2013), the quality of the interview data depends on the selection of participants, what type of interviews are employed, how the information is captured, how the interview guide is constructed and where the interviews take place. Charmaz (2006) states that open questions, as used in the present study, are practical when there is a need for detailed, honest and rich descriptions. Questions that allow the respondents to explain and describe their experiences and express their views, feelings, intentions, reflections and actions are also preferable (Charmaz, 2011; Charmaz, 2006). Interviews are useful when the researcher is looking for a flexible method as questions and additional ideas have a tendency to develop during the interview process (Charmaz, 2011). In this study, in-depth interviews were used, described by Bryman (2011) as conducted through an interview guide and which focus on specific themes, later brought to life by participants’ own words and experiences.

The themes for the interview guide were shaped from stakeholder dialogue and by Habermas’s ideal speech situation, following Alexy’s (1978) criteria for open dialogue (see appendix). In addition, the researcher also examined other interesting aspects of communication, such as the strategic approach and situations where participants had positive experiences of communication and collaboration.
Analysis
The present study sought to understand whether communication in EV, and whether this process takes place in a strategic manner, or in a manner more in line with the ideal speech situation. As such, the data analysis process was inspired by qualitative research designs that aim to find deeper meaning in data (Johansson, 2011). Interviews were based on themes derived from Habermas’s ideal speech situation, communicative action and stakeholder dialogue, which are set in contrast to more strategic approaches to EV. The study is largely influenced by deduction where previous research becomes the foundation on which the study is based (Isaksson, 2012). Qualitative, directed content analysis was used in order to identify, code and categorise the empirical data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002). The categories into which data were sorted were later used to broaden the understanding of the discourse, so that results and conclusions could be derived from the material (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

To provide a deeper understanding of whether the strategic approach of self-interest or stakeholder dialogue influenced by Habermas, is more manifested in how stakeholders communicate and behave, two previously selected themes were used: the strategic approach and the idealistic approach, as described in the literature review. During coding, the researcher searched for data that supported either one of these themes. The method used were derived from qualitative-directed content analysis, in which it focuses on the latent information within the data. However, the procedure was reversed, in line with Carol Rivas’s (2011) recommendations for research where previously defined themes, based on previous research, are being applied on data.

A more open approach was applied to explore the second and third research question on factors that either hindered or facilitated dialogue. Coding resulted in different categories that were divided into main themes. In order to find these themes within the material, a latent analysis technique was employed in which the researcher interpreted the underlying meaning of the content. Although the research questions were informed by previous research literature, the themes for this research objectives were not determined in advance but derived from a more open coding process (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).
Reliability
To be reliant and trustworthy, Bryman (2011) describes how research studies should represent the participants in a fair way. The study should contribute to increased understanding of the phenomena and should offer opportunities for participants to reflect on, and potentially modify, their behavior in regards to the findings. Moreover, in qualitative study, there are two main criteria for quality: the validity and reliability of the study—the study needs to be trustworthy and representative. The research should be able to be repeated in new contexts and settings, and the collected data should be relevant and processed in a way where the most important aspects are highlighted in a systematic and scientific way (Bryman, 2011). In the present study, attempts were made to avoid research errors, by contemplating every step of the research process: from how the theoretical base and literature were gathered and selected to how the data was collected and what type of analysis that was used. Such careful contemplation allows for potential errors to be noticed, and the validity can be tested through reproduction and falsifying (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud, 2012). In the present study, the researcher has thoughtfully contemplated such recommendations, and has sought to effectively implement the different criteria in the research process.

Findings
Communication processes in EV are multidimensional and depend on a range of different factors. Henning and Jones (2013) stated that the design of EV programmes varied depending on whether partnerships between organisations existed or not and on whether collaboration was long- or short-term. The nature of communication processes in EV may vary for some of the same reasons. Communication is complex, and different situations and factors determine the frequency of communication, the levels on which it occurs, and the degree to which different participants are included. Three types of EV were identified in the present study: EV formed within a partnership, EV that developed into a partnership, and EV that existed outside any partnership. It should be noted that these different models are not always separate—they can exist and develop in parallel within the same organization(s).

Is the Strategic or Ideal Approach More Dominant?
Habermas’s ideas of consensus and the ideal speech situation are supposed to allow actors to be open with their objectives, to understand each other and to agree on the best possible solutions (Habermas, 1981; 1984). In terms of the criteria for the ideal speech situation, the
participants all felt that they could be honest with their intentions, that they could take part in the conversation, and that they were allowed to question and raise concerns without hindrance. All these factors would suggest that the criteria for the ideal speech situation were fulfilled within the discourse. However, when focusing on intersubjective understanding and long-term solutions, contrasting aspects occurred, revealing that the strategic approach was more dominant, which further supports the findings of Lee (2013) and Samuel, Wolf and Schilling (2013). However, it is important to note that EV is not undertaken for strategic reasons only—neither by businesses nor non-profits. Two out of three companies described their motives as two-sided: the will to strengthen their local community and the feel-good factor for them and their employees, on the one hand, and the strategic and corporate benefits—where companies wanted returns on investments—on the other. The findings correspond to Aguilera et. al’s (2007) suggestions that EVPs are, in line with more general CSR initiatives, driven by the combination of instrumental, relational and moral motives, with emphasis on tangible business benefits, stakeholder involvement and social legitimacy.

Whether the strategic approach was dominant or not also showed in how EVPs programs were designed, and in how participants talked about their objectives, and in participants’ understanding of the interests of other participants. Much of the communication between companies and non-profits consisted of a mixture of long-term and short-term arrangements. However, in the case of short-term arrangements, employees and non-profits rarely had time to develop any deeper relationships. One of the non-profits stated that “most of our volunteer employees come out one day a year, and to be honest, a lot of the people that come out, we try to give them a nice day out and try and get some work done as well, but we will probably not see them again.” Both businesses and non-profits often described collaboration in terms of exchange, which also points towards the strategic approach (O’Riordan & Fairbrass, 2008). Actors had different world-views and tried to benefit from collaboration while at the same time making a positive impact. One of the non-profits noticed that “often the business that are coming can be completely unrelated [to the not-for-profit]. We are in conservation, and why does a bank come and help out? Often, when staff arrive, they might not know the first thing about our goals. What is beneficial to them is to actually raise their profile and all those other things, so I think that our goals can be completely different. We are trying to get benefits, but in different ways.” This further suggests that there might be a lack of understanding between
actors in EVPs, corresponding to Habermas’s (1984) ideas of strategic action where self-interest is dominant.

**Strategy as a Survival Mechanism**

Participants described a need for companies to position themselves as responsible corporations in order to survive in the business world, and two out of three companies were very clear about this. Not-for-profit managers also recognised this and highlighted that businesses, through CCI and EV, were seeking the social license to operate.

CCI and EV was also used to stay on top in the global business world, to receive high ranking in Dale Jones and sustainability indexes, and to adapt to a competition-based environment, viewed in terms of recent neoliberal changes in the social system (Harvey, 2005). Furthermore, the benefits of EV and other CSR initiatives were described by a business manager as “a bit like getting brownie points—good brownie points—in the bank. If something goes wrong, or if we get some negative publicity, your bank of positives helps to neutralise the negatives. So if we have an incident, and if it is blown up all around the media, we want people to say that, ‘oh no, that is really unfortunate what happened to [business x]. Normally, you know, they have been such a good company—they must be devastated!’ So we want them to say that; we don't want them to be like ‘oh, another global company just raping and polluting the earth, and why don't they just move out of here’. We want that positivity in the community so that they know who we are. So it is not just doing it all because we are nice people—of course we are nice people, but that is one of the reasons, that we want to have a good profile.”

In contrast to everything stated above, one of the company managers highlighted that their company did not implement EV for any company returns and did not believe that there were any hidden agendas behind their EVP. The manager explained that “there’s definitely not any economic benefits from it; it’s basically a chance for us to give back as a company. We’ve got some staff and give them some time each year to go out in the community and help—that is something that’s relatively easy for us to do”. The desire to give back was a reason also recognised by other participants, but they did not identify it as the single driver behind business involvement but perceived that businesses also had strategic reasons. In the case of that company, it appears that how the company perceived and/or presented its motives did not
correspond to how other actors perceived the company’s motives; however, in all remaining cases, actors agreed on strategic reasons as an important driver in the implementation of the programmes. Opinions were divided with regard to whether strategy was the main driver or not, as employees usually were less skeptical of businesses’ objectives than were non-profits.

**Increased strategy for Non-Profits**
All non-profits in this study had positive views on the idea of collaborating with companies as long as they wanted to help out with the real cause and not were too extreme. However, the non-profits in the present study stated that they only represented one of two not-for-profit groups. A conservation manager expressed that “we've got groups that are more lobbying and more political. They would be the people who are kind of pulling discussion and confronting, and you need that, and then you need groups that are more in the middle debating. We can be the reasonable conservation NGO. It is kind of cynical in a way, but I think that is how things can move, and that is how we position ourselves. That is close to the mandate that we have been given, which is focusing on the conservation aspect that we need to talk about things, we need to be there”. A second not-for-profit manager also expressed “there are groups that do the advocacy and they do it very well, but that is not our focus; the connection and on-the-ground outcomes is what we do, so that makes it safe for a corporate to work with us.” The findings support earlier research from authors such as Smith (2003) and Burchell and Cook (2013), that non-profits often actively decide whether to work with businesses and if so, with which businesses.

All not-for-profit organisations in this study described how businesses are needed in society: Ordinary people make use of the products that corporations produce, and everyone is interlinked in the same system, highlighting that companies need to give back for the resources they use. A non-profit manager stated the organization was “very pragmatic, always has been; if we have a company with a profile that aligns with our goal and mission, then we will talk to them. For very green companies, you are working with the enemy but, like it or not, we all benefit from these operations of these guys, using cars, energy [etc.]. We all know that what they do causes some environmental damage, but there is no one better who should be paying for it, in terms of off-setting that cost.”
In terms of strategy, non-profits were often aware of how the business world functioned, and findings suggest that at least two out of the three non-profits tried to customise their profile to suit businesses. This was manifested in the strive for a clean brand and reputation, in consultation with business representatives, in acting professionally, and in highlighting what businesses could gain from collaboration, for example, team-building activities, free PR, low risks and visible outcomes. Furthermore, all non-profits wanted to position themselves in a more competition-based world. One of the non-profits in the study explained that they “always had a very business-like approach to [collaboration]—that has always been our strength. We have talked corporate language for 20 years, so you don't have this kind of language barrier; you are talking their language and that is really important”. Another not-for-profit expressed that “we have limited resources, we struggle, and other organisations with us. We struggle with resources and skills that other people take for granted, and for conservation groups, to access these resources, we are competing”. The increased competition and work load was mentioned by all of the non-profits, which supports earlier research that states that outside forces have a large impact on these types of organisations (Austin, 2003).

**Factors in Increased Dialogue**

Findings suggest that situations existed where more equal and honest dialogue took place, somewhat in keeping with the idealistic approach mentioned by Unerman and Bennett (2004) and Golob and Podnar (2014), among others. Businesses, employees and non-profits all highlighted positive outcomes of long-term agreements, partnerships and relationship building. In such situations, deeper relations seemed to form and trust developed, allowing participants to take part in more inclusive dialogues. Results also suggest that participants’ understanding of each other’s objectives and needs increased with time and experience. Key words such as understandings, openness and long-termed relations have all been highlighted in stakeholder dialogue, and are also discussed in Habermas’s communicative action (Burchell & Cook, 2013; Habermas, 1984). This section will narrate the findings that correspond to these concepts and explain why and how participants found them beneficial.

All participants highlighted the importance of being honest and upfront when communicating in EV. For non-profits, this meant declining collaboration offers when the timing was bad and when the business profile did not match the non-profits’ objectives, as it was important to be “prepared to say no to the money if that does not fit with what you do.” Although they knew
that it could lead to frustration for businesses, the non-profits felt that most companies were realistic and realised that the non-profits could not create EV events that did not match with their own objectives. All non-profits highlighted that it was important to “stay true to your mission and your capability”. In addition, one of the employees also described that being upfront was essential in regards to what participants wanted to achieve through EV engagement.

Other interesting indicators highlighted by participants were that open communication, long-term relationships and ongoing reporting led to increased trust between companies and employees. In ongoing collaboration, businesses relied more on the judgement of their employees in terms of workloads and hours spent away, and employees in turn developed a better understanding of the community. For some employees, volunteering became such a meaningful activity that they wanted to continue regardless of whether they had the support of the company; however, they still said that EVP made it much easier to engage in volunteering.

Building relationships between actors was also highlighted in the interviews. One of the business managers described how long-term collaboration in EV resulted in “a really good bond—like-mindedness. We have a really nice relationship with them, but I mean, that doesn’t just happen either; it has been formed during a number of years. I think it's based on knowing each other and having worked together for a long time. I know that if there ever were any issues they would let me know, because we have such a good relationship with them”. A not-for-profit manager also expressed that building and maintaining relationships required time and effort, commenting that “you can't take these relationships for granted, 'cause you need to invest time in them. It’s the same with employee volunteers—you need to treat volunteers with respect; you need to tell them what they can and can't expect”. In situations where relationships had formed, it appeared to be easier to discuss problems and to be upfront with opinions.

The importance of partnerships was also highlighted by participants, especially by non-profits and employees. Where ongoing partnerships were in place, participants also appeared to invest more time and effort in the relationship. One of the non-profits expressed that “in terms of approaching employers and companies, we probably would not see that as a priority—we are quite happy to work with them as it comes up. I put [business x] in another category
because we have a long-term relationship”. Partnerships also appeared to be well-developed, as one business explained that “there have been partnerships where it has been a little bit more organised and the relationships grow with the people in the external organisations”. The not-for-profit organisations viewed long-term partnerships positively because they provided continuous support, increased opportunities to achieve objectives and improved dialogue. Findings suggest that participants could commonly speak more freely after they had established a relationship as they understood each other better. One not-for-profit manager stated that “it is sort of the start of something, the involvement in the projects is an incitement, and they feel like they want to help out more and more. The great thing about employee volunteering is that it is direct contact—it’s not only giving money: It’s seeing what is involved, and that is so much more interactive and engaging”. Another of the non-profits explained that “in a partner situation, I think you can actually be able to sit down and say ‘look, this is a bit over the top, what really is important is this and that’” and one of the companies described that “a good partnership is where each group wants to help each other [sic], and have a really good understanding [of] why you are working with each other. The community group gets more of an understanding of what we do [and] why we do it, and we get more of an understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it too. It’s just a good engagement between the two groups, and we get a lot of close connections happening, a closer understanding. I think it is good to be not too insular as a business, that you can think a bit beyond your boundary fences”.

The findings suggest that communication about objectives and outcomes were more likely to take place within partnerships on a more formal level, between organisations. More practical employee-organised work happened at the ground level and required strong employee engagement to form partnerships from the bottom-up. Reporting and meetings seemed to function as an important connection between the two levels. Employees and non-profits at the ground level could send information to the upper management level, increasing understanding between actors. Managers were given a chance to listen to the objectives and ideas of employees and non-profits and to engage in a more inclusive conversation with key stakeholders. Therefore, reporting was highlighted by both employees and non-profits as essential and was described as a channel to reach more influence in terms of establishing long-term relationships. However, increased reporting could also bring more administration into EVPs, which neither companies, non-profits nor employees necessary wanted. Instead, the participants were seeking more flexibility and less administration and control.
Main Challenges to Increased Dialogue
Although participants highlighted benefits of partnerships and long-term collaboration, they described some barriers to collaboration as well. The two different layers of communication—the more formal upper level between organisations and the more informal level involving employees—meant that participants were not “not necessarily always on the same page” at all times. In line with statements made by Bowmann-Larsen and Wiggen (2004) and Unerman and Bennett (2004), conflicting interests and world views were described as challenges, and power imbalance and control was highlighted as a problem: “The general understanding is that they [businesses] are doing an enormous favor, which they are, but that favor can also be enhanced a lot more if they are thinking what more they can do to be more beneficial to the host, who is providing quite a lot”. Non-profits occasionally felt micro-managed if businesses tried to decide too much in the collaboration process. Resource imbalance could become a problem as many non-profits depended on the help they received from businesses, and expressed that they “would not cope very well without it”. The non-profits described a lack of understanding from businesses in regards to how much time, effort and resources they spent organising an EV event. At the same time, businesses did not receive very much information from non-profits about their needs, and one business manager expressed that non-profits only once had given the company “a bit of briefing on what they wanted”. Going further, this manager commented that “we are asking the questions rather than them [sic]; it is us that actually go that extra mile—we are generally a little bit more organized—most of these groups are not set up for it”. At times, companies also experienced lack of understanding from the non-profits, as their partners did not fully understand that businesses were “involved in something because you do need a return on it. You're not just doing it because it's a nice thing to do—everybody needs to have a return on their investment.”

While all participants believed themselves to be open and honest about their objectives, one of the main obstacles seemed to be that businesses and non-profits were not always involved in deeper dialogue about their objectives. Often the conversations took place on an informal level involving practical solutions, unless they were engaged in a long-term partnership or relationship. However, participants did not always uphold contact long enough for a deeper relation to develop, in particular between businesses and a non-profits. Increased communication and relationship-building required time and resources: The greatest challenge for all participants, especially non-profits who already struggled with an increased workload
(Smith, 2000). One of the non-profits stated that “it always comes down to resources. If we had more, we could engage better and more, but we don't, and it is not going to happen anytime soon, so I don't want to upset myself thinking about it. It's just being realistic about what we have got”. The lack of resources was also highlighted by a business manager, who expressed that “like every company, everybody is just flat out—there is no fat in the system. I think that we are doing a good job, we could do better, but we just don't have the resources for it—it’s just life. It’s about doing your best knowing that you could always do better, but in reality you can’t”. Participants talked about doing things to the best of their ability, although they were struggling. Lack of understanding and money threatened one of the partnerships. Other barriers were lack of available employees, problems with information sharing and the fact that large partnerships ended for various reasons, for example, due to more of non-profits searching for funding.

**Discussion**

The present study found, in line with Aguilera et. al (2007), that the underlying motives for EV are a mixture of instrumental, relational and moral motives. The study also found that the strategic approach was more dominant than the ideal approach in EV communication but that space remains for positive transformations to take place.

Crane and Livesey (2003) have highlighted that good communication in cross-sector collaboration can serve as an instrument for change, and Burchell and Cook (2013) suggest that dialogue can position a business as one participant in dialogue rather than the dominant actor within the discourse. True transformation through communicative action should allow for more equality (Habermas, 1998). However, the findings of the present study support Unerman’s and Bennett’s (2004) claim that power inequality remains a problem that can hinder such positive transformation. Non-profits may have gained a more influential position (Burchell & Cook, 2013), but the author of the present study, as along with other scholars (Gras & Mendoza-Abarca, 2013), suggests that non-profits adapt to the strategic business world—with its rhetoric regarding exchange, risk management, and “talking the business language”—rather than the converse.
Although the non-profits in the present study avoided becoming too influenced by business needs by staying true to their objectives, they all described a danger inherent in collaboration in EV: Business offers of increased resources could result in non-profits adjusting to business in ways that do not necessarily suit their own interests. Furthermore, as the non-profit- and the private-sector are move closer together, competitive behavior can increase among non-profits—they might adapt to the private sector, changing their traditional roles in order to keep up. An interesting question for future research is that of to what extent non-profits are becoming more strategic in the way they handle EVPs and other CCI initiatives.

The recent shift toward more strategic behavior on the part of non-profits has been viewed both positively and critically. In management research, the strategic change is often welcomed. Actors that share similar approaches to collaboration may understand and communicate more easily if they “speak the same language”. Furthermore, such change could facilitate exchange, understanding and increased dialogue. However, such strategy-based dialogue might also hide power imbalances (Heath et al., 2006) and assumes that all participants succeed in staying true to their objectives. In addition, if businesses are not required to adapt to the extent that non-profits are, this might allow businesses to continue with ‘business as usual.’ Regardless of whether businesses are changing to better respond to needs of stakeholders, the result of EV and CCI can be somewhat of a paradox: Although companies might strive to listen and adapt to others’ interests—here represented by non-profits and employees involved in EVP—power imbalance may result in stakeholders adapting to the private sector instead, which can contribute to the maintenance of neo-liberal, market-driven hegemony.

However, the author of the present study wish to problematise both the positive and critical views of non-profits’ strategic behaviour. The power imbalance and neo-liberal hegemony is problematic as the interests of business color much of the interaction between actors in EV and other CCI. The fact that participants do not adapt to one another equally suggests a problem with Habermas’s (1984) definition of communicative action. Habermas highlights that actors should adapt to each other, but he does not explain to what extent they should adapt or whether the extent of adaptation should be equal. All participants in the study did adjust to each other, but they did so in different ways and to various extents. Habermas’s ideal
approach also offers more complexity: The ideal speech situation appears to take place and develop from strategy. For example, collaboration can lead to opportunities for non-profits to publicise their objectives and influence corporate behavior from the inside, bringing opportunities for transformation. Furthermore, some transformation appears to already take place in the private sector, which can be viewed as promising; however, for major change to occur, the business sector needs to become more involved in deeper and more long-term collaborations and dialogues, outline the true needs and perspectives of stakeholders and offer them opportunities to raise and define their objectives.

The findings of the present study showed that reporting was an important factor for employees and non-profits to be able to show positive outcomes of EVPs. Engaged individuals at ground level, or already existing partnerships, were essential to facilitate EV in long-term collaborations. Increased and honest dialogue could bring a deeper understanding of the stakeholders. Furthermore, it could highlight resource imbalance, contribute to better understanding of the local community and employees and result in a more relationship-based, open communication and an open mind-set to potential transformative effects of collaboration. Long-term collaboration, partnerships, honesty and equality are all highlighted as important factors in which participants should invest more time, motivation and resources. Some of these concepts are essential within the ideal approach. In the present study, they have all have been highlighted as factors that facilitate better collaboration.

However, there are several challenges within EV that make it difficult to reach and uphold a more ideal approach to collaboration and communication. As sectors and roles change, actors find themselves in a more market-driven world where competition, exchange and self-interest dominate much of the social reality. Businesses, employees and non-profits are all affected as they need to adapt to the system. As a consequence, the arena in which transformation is supposed to take place does not necessarily foster the foundation that allows for other, more ideal alternatives to the market-driven paradigm. If efficiency, short-term solutions, bureaucracy, control and maximization of profit are becoming more common due to barriers such as time shortage and lack of resources, this may place in jeopardy the positive effects of long-term solutions. The findings in the present study suggest that lack of understanding and conflicting interests may also be a threat to long-term collaboration. Less long-term
collaboration can be viewed as a danger in itself: The alternative of short-term solutions does not appear to offer enough time for participants to form deeper relations with each other. This in turn risks creating a negative spiral where lack of understanding causes even less understanding.

The fact that EV is often presented as a win-win-win situation can be problematic. Describing EV in such a way implies that actors benefit in equal terms. For collaboration to be a win-win-win situation for all involved, honesty, transparency and understanding are all very important. If the arena in which collaboration takes place suppresses these factors rather than supporting them, this can bring serious challenges. For example, if powerful actors act according to interests that they perceive others have, rather than knowing other actors’ real objectives (Unerman & Bennett, 2013), there is a risk of misunderstandings and disputes arising (Jonker & Foster, 2002). The findings of the present study support these claims, highlighting that participants need understand each other to know what to expect from each other in terms of behavior, motives and expectations. If they do not understand each other, previous research has highlighted a range of potential dangers: risk of damaging the bond between employee and company, reduced organizational commitment and creating an undesirable image, distrust and cynicism (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015; Yim & Fock, 2013; Vlachos, Theotokis & Panagopoulos, 2010; Pajo & Lee, 2011). In addition, lack of understanding may risk important business-community relations and can create difficulties for the involved participants in deciding on whether to collaborate or not, for example, whether the other party suits their needs and interests or not. In terms of interests, not-for-profits and employees should be aware that businesses may want returns on their investments in EVPs, for example, publicity, employee satisfaction and other tangible outcomes. Businesses and employees should be aware of that most non-profits lack extra resources and may need additional support in organising EV events.

Although Critics such as Cooren (2000) and Scherer and Palazzo (2007) have highlighted difficulties with Habermas’s theories and suggested that it is too hard to make use of them in empirical settings, scholars such as Wadham (2009) and Phillips and Rahman (2014) have successfully used Habermas as a theoretical framework before and inspired the present study. Although the ideal approach is idealistic, and at times difficult to apply in management
research, the present study seeks to contribute to a more balanced image of communication and collaboration. The strategic approach in EV has been discussed in earlier studies (Lee, 2013; Henning & Jones, 2013; Gatignon-Turneu & Mignonac, 2015), but with little or no examination of whether other alternatives and types of communication took place or had any potential to develop within EV. Therefore, the findings of this study are interesting as they highlight situations and factors that allow for a more open, honest dialogue. As the present study is small and exploratory in nature, more research is required to map out a range of interesting and relevant factors in relation to communication and EV, such as the power imbalance, non-profits' change towards more strategic approaches and what further impact collaboration and EV might have on the participants and their understanding of each other.

Conclusions
The central conclusion of the present study is that communication among parties in EV is a very complex area in need of further research. The study has shown that communication and interaction in EV is dominated by a strategic approach; however, in long-term collaborations in which there is an emphasis on relationship-building, honesty and understanding, more ideal alternatives—approaches more in line with stakeholder theory and Habermas’s critical research theories—may be observed. Challenges to these alternatives, however, are many. For example, short-term solutions, resource imbalance, and lack of understanding may hinder deeper dialogue and postpone change and intersubjective understanding. To foster better communication and understanding, parties involved in EVPs are advised to be open and honest with their intentions, be aware of what effects power imbalances may bring and to strive towards long-term relationships where mutual benefits for all actors alike can be developed.
Reference List


SFS 2009:975,13 § *Instruktion för Vetenskapsrådet.* Stockholm: Riksdagen


Appendix

Appendix 1. Information Letter to Participants

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and I thank you for considering my request.

Background and aim of the study
Research in New Zealand on employee volunteering has shown that the programs bring both benefits and challenges. For example, benefits for businesses can be seen in opportunities to function as good corporate citizens, establish legitimacy, reach greater understanding, improve public image and recruit and develop employees. Benefits for non-profit organisations are expressed as increased people power, increased awareness, broadening of network, and financial support, and benefits for employees are for example to be able to contribute to the community, increased job satisfaction, broadening of network and skills development. However, challenges also exist in connection to the programs: for businesses difficulties to reach out to their employees and on-going communication and promotion of volunteering opportunities; for non-profit organisations pressure on resources and existing staff and inadequate information sharing; and for employees lack of information, time management and inadequate support.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of good communication and dialogue between participants, so that the beneficial outcomes of employee volunteering can continue, and the interests of all involved parties can be acknowledged and discussed in order to minimize problems. This study aims to continue along the same lines, and aims to examine how the communication process unfolds between private companies, non-profit organisations, and employees. Your experiences and perspective as [participants role], who is handling these employee volunteer programs, would therefore be highly valuable for this study.

The study is being undertaken as part of the requirements for my postgraduate diploma in ‘Leadership and Organisation’ at Umeå University.
What you will be asked to do
Should you agree to take part in this project, participation will involve an interview with me, Hanna, a masters’ student and an international visiting scholar at University of Otago. The interview will take approximately one hour. During the interview you will be asked open-ended questions about your experiences and your thoughts on how you, private organisations, and the employees sent out to help, communicate with regard to employee volunteering. The interview may take place at a location convenient to you, and if geographical distance is a hindrance, the interview can be conducted by phone.

Collected data or information and its purpose and use
The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcript will, together with the other interviews, be analyzed by me, and will be part of the empirical foundation on which I base my results. You will be anonymous, as both the analysis and the results will be presented in such a way that no one can identify you or the organisation you work for. Both personal information and material from the interviews will be kept safe, separate from the other research material, and accessible only by me. After the study has finished, any personal information will be erased.

The information collected will be used only for the purposes of this study. If you wish to be given a copy of the finished result, this will be sent to you by e-mail. The results of the project may be published, and will be available online at Umeå University’s homepage (Umeå, Sweden); however, every attempt will be made to preserve the anonymity of you and the organization that you work for.

This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning will relate to your experiences working with, or in, employee volunteering programs, and your perspective and experiences from communication and dialogue in connection to these programs. The precise nature of the questions that will be asked has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable, you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s)
and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage or time without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

If you have further questions
If you have any questions about this study, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact

Hanna Olovsson
[Contact Information]

Thank you for your time!

Kind regards,
Hanna Olovsson

Appendix 2. Interview Guide

Themes
(G) Introduction and general questions
A) Allowed to speak?
(Participation/Inclusiveness)
B1) If allowed to speak, can they question?
(Questioning, equal rights, freedom to raise issues and critique)
B2) Can participants express their true attitudes, desires and needs?
(Express interests, be honest with intentions)
C) If not allowed to speak, why? (Hindrance [power])

Information
Participation is voluntary and you can quit at any time. The material will be treated confidently and no one but me is meant to take part of any reviling information about you or your organisation.
Questions
Tell me about the programs that you are involved in? (G)
Tell me about how you became involved in these programs (G)
- Role and participation (G)
What does participation in these programs mean to you? (G)
What is your reason for being involved in employee volunteering program? (G)
What do you think other participants reason’s for employee volunteering are? (B2)
How would you describe the communication between you and others involved? (G)
- Your opinion, good and bad aspects? (G)
How do you make decisions around these programs? (A)
Do you discuss your expectations? (B2)
Do you feel included in the decision making process? (A)
If yes: In what way (A)
If no: why not (C)
Mention a few benefits and challengers connected to these programs (G)
Do you feel like you can talk honest about (B2)
- What you want (B2)
- Challenges you face (B1)
- Do ever feel like questioning the decisions and behaviors of others? (B1)
- If yes: do you? (B1)
- If no: why not? (C)
Is there anything that can be done better in relation to how you communicate around employee volunteering? (G)
Is there anything that you would like to add? (G)
Any questions? (G)

Thank you very much for your participation in this study!
### Appendix 3. Examples of Coding

**Table 1. Examples of the coding process.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic approach [pre-determined]</td>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>not only charity, return on investment, economic drivers</td>
<td>You're not just doing it because it's a nice thing to do, everybody needs to have a return on their investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealistic approach [pre-determined]</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>being upfront, feedback, being honest about challenges</td>
<td>We talked about it, that we had problems, and the feedback was that it was great to get an honest report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors facilitating communication [open coding]</td>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>repeated volunteering, relationships, real connection</td>
<td>Repeated volunteering, the same organisations, is quite nice: It gives you that connection, that real partnership with one of our key groups in the community. We do start to form really good relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors challenging communication [open coding]</td>
<td>Lack of understanding</td>
<td>Not realising, making assumptions on others objectives and needs, lack of knowledge</td>
<td>They do not realize that it is very much a two way thing. In their point of view, they sort of say, we are doing you this massive favour by bringing you our staff for free; but it is actually a lot more than that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>