



Ane Casajús

Wanneer maakt corporate philanthropy echt verschil?

Hoe bedrijven zich kunnen inzetten voor maatschappelijke vraagstukken



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Filantropie Interview

Ane Casajús onderzoekt hoe corporate philanthropy verandert van geld geven naar actief bijdragen aan maatschappelijke oplossingen. Ze gaat in op de rol die bedrijven kunnen spelen en ook waar de grens ligt tussen maatschappelijke waarde en bedrijfsbelang.

What is the main focus of your research, and why does it matter for philanthropic organizations?

‘My research focuses on how companies engage with societal issues through philanthropy. I am especially interested in how corporate philanthropy is moving beyond traditional donations toward more strategic, collaborative, and long-term forms of engagement. This matters because companies are no longer just funders in the background; they are increasingly involved in shaping programs, partnerships, and priorities. For foundations and firms, understanding this shift can help design philanthropic strategies that are more credible, better aligned with real needs, and more likely to create lasting value.’

How can academic research help philanthropic organizations navigate today's social challenges?

'I strongly believe in making research useful for practice. Much of my work is about turning academic insights into practical guidance for organizations working on philanthropy and social impact. Foundations and firms are facing complex social challenges, and research can help them ask better questions, make better choices, and reflect on their impact more carefully.'

What is one common misconception regarding corporate philanthropy that your research challenges?

'A common misconception is that corporate philanthropy is mainly a reputational tool for companies. My research shows that it can be much more than that. When strategically targeted, philanthropy can shape the broader environment in which firms and communities operate, for example, by supporting new social practices, strengthening local infrastructure, or contributing to emerging policy discussions. This means corporate philanthropy matters not only for how it is perceived, but for what it actually changes.'

Can you share an example of corporate philanthropy creating value beyond donations or reputation?

'The Innovation Foundation's work, empowered by the Adecco Group, is a good example. The foundation builds on the Group's expertise as a talent and technology advisory company and develops solutions for structural challenges in the labor market. It uses an in-house, accelerator-like model to identify systemic barriers to employment, develop and test early solutions, and then partner with nonprofit organizations on the ground to reach beneficiaries and lead the implementation.'

'Under this model, the foundation becomes a space for learning and experimentation. It helps the Group better understand emerging social needs, identify new partners, and explore practical solutions around the future of work. In that sense, corporate philanthropy can become a kind of testing unit: it allows the firm to engage with complex labor-market challenges, build knowledge, and strengthen its position within the broader employment ecosystem. While creating social value, too.'

'For me, the broader lesson is that impactful corporate philanthropy requires more than good intentions. It depends on understanding what the firm is well-positioned to contribute, how this connects to societal challenges, and which potential partners are active in the space. We explored this case in two teaching case studies (published at the Case Center) and a managerial article in MIT Sloan Management Review (find it [here](#)).'

From your research perspective, what societal role can corporate philanthropy play?

'Corporate philanthropy can play an important bridging role between business and society. Companies often have resources that are valuable for addressing social issues, including data, networks, logistical capabilities, and innovation capacity. When these resources are combined with the knowledge and legitimacy of nonprofits, public actors, and communities, corporate philanthropy can support solutions that would be difficult to achieve by one sector alone. Its societal role is therefore not only to give, but to organize resources and relationships around shared societal challenges.'

What tension or dilemma do companies that engage in corporate philanthropy struggle with most in practice?

‘A central dilemma is how to make corporate philanthropy strategically relevant without making it too company-centered. Firms often want their philanthropy to reflect their values, capabilities, or business context, which can make their contribution more focused and credible. But if corporate priorities dominate too much, philanthropy risks losing sight of the social problem and the needs of partners or communities. The challenge is to find the right balance: connected enough to the company to be meaningful, but independent enough to be trusted and useful for society.’

What gives you optimism about the future of philanthropy?

‘I observe philanthropy has become more reflective in the last decade. I see more organisations asking not only how much they give, but how they give, with whom, and with what consequences. There is also growing awareness that complex social problems require collaboration across sectors and that impact depends on good design, strong partnerships, and continuous learning. This creates space for organizations to move from generous intentions to more thoughtful and effective philanthropic strategies.’

What is one assumption or practice in philanthropy that needs rethinking?

‘One assumption that needs rethinking is that corporate philanthropy is mainly about financial giving. Of course, funding matters, but companies often have other resources that can be highly valuable for social impact, such as logistics, data, industry expertise, employee skills, networks, or process know-how. These are precisely the kinds of capabilities that many social organizations may lack. The opportunity is to move from “how much can we give?” to “what are we best positioned to contribute?” This can open the door to more meaningful partnerships between firms and social-sector organizations.’

Deze interviewreeks wordt inhoudelijk ondersteund door Giving Insights. Giving Insights Exchange brengt onderzoekers en professionals uit de filantropische sector samen om de uitwisseling tussen wetenschap en praktijk te versterken.

Meer informatie: <https://givinginsights.nl>

Ane Casajús is PhD-onderzoeker aan de University of Geneva. Haar onderzoek richt zich op *corporate philanthropy* en strategie. Ze publiceerde onder andere in *Harvard Business Review* en ontwikkelde verschillende teaching cases op dit gebied.

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