

Climb High, Sleep Low: The Unique Learning Environments of International Volunteer Placements

ABSTRACT

International volunteering has traditionally been viewed as a pursuit that, while admirable, provided little benefit for the volunteer beyond altruistic satisfaction. Yet several recent studies suggest an international volunteer placement can fast-track the development of valuable management capabilities. To date no research has offered a systematic explanation for this. This paper presents a framework outlining the unique characteristics of international volunteer placements that contribute to them being fertile learning environments. In doing so, it draws data from a longitudinal study of the learning experiences of a sample of international volunteers from Australian and New Zealand.

‘Climb high, sleep low’ is a well-known mantra that mountain climbers use to warn against the dangers of altitude sickness during arduous climbs. It refers to the process of climbing to high altitudes for short periods during the day to acclimatise before returning to a lower altitude to sleep as a way to prevent the potentially deadly effects of altitude sickness. This paper presents findings from a study which suggests that an international volunteer placement (IVP) may be a way for ambitious managers to ‘climb high’ before embarking on the rest of their career. The extreme conditions thrown up by an IVP are akin to the high altitudes that climbers experience, and enable volunteers to develop capabilities that will serve them well in the lower altitudes of the domestic workplace or the global business arena. This paper aims to identify and explain the unique mechanisms of an IVP that contribute to volunteers developing these capabilities.

LEARNING DURING INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

Workplaces have always been sites of learning (Thompson, 2006), yet only in recent years have they become recognised as environments where valuable skills and understanding can be enhanced (e.g. Billett, 2001). Most learning in the workplace is informal (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), occurring naturally in everyday situations where learning is not the main aim: through, for instance, social interaction, trial and error experimentation, or as a by-product of other activities (Eraut, 2004). No single theory exists to explain how people learn informally, although research into the area draws on a range of general learning theories that emphasise learning from and through personal experience (Kolb, 1984), reflective practice (Schön, 1983), and the context provided by the work, the organisation and its ‘community’ of workers (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Other studies highlight the importance of trigger events which prompt ‘a progression of meaning making’ and spark action or response (Marsick & Watkins, 2001: 29).

With businesses (and workers) becoming more globally focused and competition for talented staff increasing in intensity and scope (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001), international work assignments (IAs) are commonly used as a way to develop skills in employees and managers (Caligiuri, 2006). Several studies in recent decades have identified various capabilities that expatriates develop during IAs. Early research

tended to highlight the development of cross-cultural communication skills and/or knowledge of the firm's global business operations (e.g. Adler, 1981; Oddou & Mendenhall, 1991). More recent studies suggest that IAs can precipitate a 'larger transformational process' in expatriates as they 'let go' of particular behaviours and mindsets in order to cope in the new culture (Osland, 2001: 138). Among the skills and knowledge that IAs can contribute to are cross-cultural communication, management skills like supervising and motivating, tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty, and knowledge of the host culture and the international business environment (e.g. Antal, 2000; Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroh, 1999; Bolino & Feldman, 2000). Implicit in most of these studies is that expatriates learn either experientially, through the greater autonomy, responsibility and variety that IAs tend to provide (e.g. Oddou & Mendenhall, 1991), or through the changes required when adjusting to a new culture (e.g. Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Osland, 2000).

Yet not all IAs are equal in terms of the learning opportunities they offer. Some IAs afford limited scope for expatriates to develop skills because the assignment and organisational environment provide little contrast from that experienced at home (Caligiuri, Lazarova, & Tarique, 2005). MNEs often promulgate homogenous cultures within their global subsidiaries, and businesses often limit operations to countries where cultural and linguistic barriers are low (Ghemawat, 2001), or in developed countries for strategic or risk management reasons (Almeida & Phene, 2004). As McCall notes, IAs are not necessarily developmental, 'especially if what a person does overseas is "more of the same" and the challenges presented by the location are mild' (1998: 78).

Recent research suggests that a 'standard' IA may just scratch the surface in terms of learning potential. Numerous studies have identified an array of capabilities that international volunteers develop during IVPs extending well beyond those reported in expatriate literature. IVPs involve individuals with specialist expertise undertaking roles with specific development objectives like 'alleviating poverty and achieving positive sustainable development' (Thomas, 2002: 21). While the term suggests that volunteers

receive no financial compensation for their service this is generally incorrect; most volunteers are paid development workers (Brook, Missingham, Hocking, & Fifer, 2007), albeit receiving substantially lower remuneration than their expertise would demand in their home countries or as paid expatriate workers.

If the financial returns for volunteers are less attractive than non-volunteer expatriate placements, the reported learning outcomes are not. Table 1 summarises learning outcomes reported in recent studies of international volunteers. These are categorised into eight broad areas, adapted from a typology of learning in the workplace developed by Eraut (2004), and separated into learning outcomes consistent with studies of non-volunteer business expatriates (centre column) and those that are relevant to international volunteers (right-hand column) as identified by recent IVP studies.

TABLE 1 GOES ABOUT HERE

These studies cut across cultures and contexts, including various home and host countries, professions and demographics. Moreover, convergent validity is strong; for instance at least five recent studies incorporating employers, human resource managers, and returned and current volunteers, all identify advanced communication skills as a key learning outcome (Brook, et al., 2007; Cook & Jackson, 2006; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Jones, 2005; Thomas, 2002).

Many of the learning outcomes unique to IVPs are often referred to as ‘soft skills’ (Black, Morrison, & Gregersen, 1999), although as one recent study highlights ‘tough skills’ might be more appropriate because they are ‘hard to learn and develop, and often difficult to find in people’ (Brook, et al., 2007: 23). It is also clear that these capabilities are critical to the success of global managers, who operate in a business environment characterised by change, complexity and ambiguity (Osland, Bird, Osland, & Oddou, 2007). Research suggests that future global managers will need to be creative (Harvey & Novicevic, 2002), adept at managing uncertainty (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2006) and managing

information (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2003), and possess sophisticated interpersonal and communication skills (Osland, et al., 2007). In addition, global leadership requires a unique mindset that combines self-awareness (Thomas & Inkson, 2003) and ethical foundations (Deresky, 2006), and the ability to recognise, retain and integrate disparate perspectives (Osland, Bird, Osland, & Mendenhall, 2006). With international businesses struggling to meet the demand for suitably skilled managers and leaders (Bikson, Treverton, Moini, & Lindstrom, 2003), IVPs may prove to be valuable conduits for fast-tracking global management capabilities. In brief, while ‘standard’ IAs might equip future managers with entry-level skills, those capabilities that international volunteers develop during IVPs may well define successful global managers of the future.

At present little is understood about why IVPs might be such hotbeds for learning and development (Polonijo-King, 2004) and no study has yet provided a holistic framework to identifies the features that make IVPs particularly conducive to learning. As a result there exists ‘a lack of understanding about what international volunteering involves and how it incorporates professional skills’ (Thomas, 2002: 28). Several authors have called for more research to understand the processes that volunteers experience as a way to better recognise and utilise these skills in the broader workforce (Brook, et al., 2007; Cook & Jackson, 2006; Hudson & Inkson, 2006).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

This study explores the learning experiences encountered by volunteers during IVPs. The overarching objective is to develop a cogent framework that describes the types of learnings that occur during IVPs, and explains how such learnings take place. Qualitative research was seen as best suited to providing the local grounding and detail required to understand the context and its influences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004), while using multiple, varied cases in diverse settings - in this case individual volunteers working in different cultures and contexts - enabled data to be triangulated and findings generalized beyond particular cultures, organisations, industries or professions (Yin, 1994). The study incorporates a longitudinal panel

design by ‘tracking’ volunteers over a twelve-month period, commencing at pre-departure. Panel studies, in which data is collected from respondents in multiple waves, are resource-intensive and therefore rare in expatriate research (Glanz-Martin, 2005), despite calls for more (Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001).

Sampling

International volunteers are diverse in terms of professions, backgrounds, age, motivations and destinations (Thomas, 2002). Consequently, a heterogeneous sample was sought to enhance the findings’ generalizability. Respondents were recruited through Australia’s largest international volunteer agency, Australian Volunteers International (AVI), a non-profit organisation which has overseen more than 8000 volunteer placements in 79 countries (Australian Volunteers International, 2007). Respondents were drawn from volunteers attending three-day pre-departure briefings at AVI’s Melbourne office in 2006. Attendees were sent background information about the study prior to the briefing. At the briefing the lead researcher explained the project in detail and answered questions. At this time, and again throughout the data collection process, confidentiality of responses was highlighted as a means of minimising response bias. Participants signed consent forms and were free to withdraw at any stage during the project.

A total of 86 Australian and New Zealand volunteers participated in the study. Table 2 presents information about the respondents. Ages at pre-departure ranged from 20 to 68 years (mean = 41.5). Sixty two percent were female and just under a quarter were management, business, human resource or marketing professionals.

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Respondents undertook assignments ranging from eight to 24 months in 18 countries. As Table 3 shows, most were based in Asia (45%) or the Pacific (38%).

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Sample attrition. Despite efforts to reduce attrition (Trivellato, 1999), 30 respondents (35%) withdrew during the study, although several of these provided up to five waves of usable data prior to withdrawing. More than half of withdrawing participants were forced to evacuate from the host-country due to political or military upheaval. For others who withdrew, the main explanations given were premature return (i.e. placement ‘failure’ or illness), poor access to communication in the host country, or too busy to continue participating. While overall attrition was high, the rate compares favourably with similar longitudinal studies which report attrition rates above 50%, even in highly localised, domestic contexts (e.g. Hechnova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002).

Data Collection

The study incorporated 2 separate data collection methods: (a) bimonthly written surveys, and (b) semi-structured interviews.

Bimonthly surveys. Respondents completed six bimonthly surveys. Each survey asked respondents to detail a salient ‘learning incident’ they had experienced in relation to their work in the preceding two months, including the lesson learnt (learning outcome), the main influence (trigger), the background activity or situation in which the learning occurred (learning context), and how the learning had influenced their work. This variation of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) is similar to other approaches used to examine management learning (e.g. Akin, 1987; Cseh, Watkins, & Marsick, 1999) and expatriate learning (e.g. Osland, 1995). By grounding responses in real events (Billett, 1994) the approach aimed to overcome validity threats to self-report data through selective recall, self-presentation, or post-hoc rationalisations (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). However, the learning incident approach has been criticised because it fails to account for incremental learning stemming from recurrent situations or gradual change (Eraut, 2004). For this reason, respondents were also asked to report general changes they

noticed in themselves or their work performance over the reporting period, including the reasons for, and impact of, any changes.

Some respondents used journals to record learning incidents and changes, an approach rare in international business studies but more common in longitudinal research (Ruspini, 2002). These enabled respondents to record events contemporaneously, in many cases as they unfolded over several days, and thus reduce recall and memory errors. Journals were provided to all respondents at pre-departure. Twenty participants reported using journals regularly (average two hours per week).

Four survey response options were made available: fax, post, email and Internet. Table 4 shows the number of responses received and the method of response. More than half of the 325 surveys were returned electronically.

TABLE 4 GOES ABOUT HERE

Interviews. Fundamental changes are not always immediately evident (Nicholson & West, 1988), and people may need some distance to reflect on significant transformations they experience (Kohonen, 2005). For this reason, a sub-sample of respondents was interviewed at the end of the study period. The semi-structured interviews ranged in duration from 30 to 90 minutes and covered three aspects of the respondents' IVP: (a) life outside work, including interactions with host country nationals (HCN) and other expatriates, (b) life at work, including organisational characteristics, and (c) the personal and professional influence the IVP. Thirty-two interviews were conducted via telephone and Internet video-phone. Interviewees were encouraged to discuss experiences they felt were pertinent. In several cases, learning incidents described in surveys were clarified. All interviews were electronically recorded except two, during which the interviewer took copious notes. Formal interview notes and transcripts were

prepared within 24 hours of interviews being completed. Transcripts ranged from 4,611 to 12,336 words in length (average 7,904).

Data Coding and Analysis

In total 402 learnings were reported, incorporating 221 specific learning incidents and 181 descriptions of individual change, each ranging in detail from a few bullet points to over 1600 words. In addition, each interviewee reported an average of 12 learning outcomes that they attributed to their IVP. Standard content analysis procedures were employed (Eisenhardt, 1989) using *QSR NVIVO 7* software. Each learning incident was coded according to outcome, trigger event, and context (Cseh, et al., 1999). Following this the content of each descriptive category was thematically coded, starting with learning outcomes which were categorised as per Eraut's taxonomy and then 'reverse engineered' in order to identify common learning contexts and triggers. Patterns were identified through an iterative process of grouping, re-naming and, where applicable, re-coding. A full audit trail was maintained to ensure the origins of groups could be traced. Coding was cross-checked by both researchers. If consensus could not be reached on the coding of data strips, the item was removed from analysis; such cases were rare. Reflective notes were captured in case memos that summarised each individual's experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These memos were used to confirm the overall framework in the following section, which integrates the findings with literature from the domains of international volunteering, expatriation, cross-cultural studies, and informal learning.

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING – THE ACCIDENTAL SKILLS FACTORY?

Two sets of learning outcomes were drawn from the data: (1) those reported in learning and change incidents, and (2) 'overall' outcomes reported by interviewees. Table 5 outlines the proportion of learning outcomes in each of the eight categories identified earlier.

TABLE 5 GOES ABOUT HERE

Ninety-seven percent of learning incidents occurred informally and incidentally (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), with only three percent resulting from planned learning initiatives.¹ Contributing to these learning outcomes were several unique characteristics of IVPs that provided the ‘value add’ in terms of learning. These can be delineated at three levels. Firstly, volunteers undertake a hands-on role, highlighted by regular interaction and skill exchange with HCN, which enables volunteers to deepen and broaden their repertoire of experiences and knowledge both directly and vicariously. Secondly, most volunteers work in resource-poor organisations that strongly reflect the local context and culture; these factors influence the work they perform and the stakeholders with whom they interact. Thirdly, the macro environment, or the wider cultural and social context in the host country, presents more acute disparities that challenge and broaden volunteers’ view of the world, themselves, and their host communities. These features of IVPs are outlined on the left of Figure 1. Each contributes toward the potent learning environments of IVPs, indicated by the horizontal arrows that lead to enhanced capabilities and understanding (right hand side). The following discussion examines each component, and its impact on volunteer learning, in more detail.

FIGURE 1 GOES ABOUT HERE

a. The Work Role of International Volunteers

Like most expatriates the volunteers reported that their work roles provided high levels of autonomy, responsibility and challenge (e.g. Martin & Bartol, 2003). There was also significant variety (Oddou & Mendenhall, 1991); 61% of learning incidents occurred during ‘non-routine’ activities outside the volunteers’ normal day-to-day work. However, two features not common among reports of business IAs make IVPs particularly supportive of learning: the volunteers’ reliance on expert, rather than legitimate, power, and the capacity building function that they perform. Each is considered further below.

Expatriate managers generally undertake IAs in order to perform a control and coordination function where local staff lack requisite skills (Harzing, 2001), and hence hold both legitimate and expert power (French & Raven, 1959). On the other hand, volunteers generally lack legitimate power, coming to the host organisations as outsiders and operating within a negotiated space between a (normally HCN) superior², HCN staff and the volunteer agency. As many volunteers work in high power distance cultures (Hofstede, 1997) and in cultures that emphasise relationship-orientations (Aycan, 2004), the lack of formal power presents challenges, especially as their function is fundamentally to facilitate change. Other studies have highlighted the learning power of such experiences; McCall, for instance, identifies having to influence others without direct authority as one of three task-related characteristics that make up a core of powerful learning experiences for executives (McCall, 1998). Our research would support this. The volunteers in our study found themselves interacting, negotiating with and persuading a range of stakeholders at different organisational levels on an almost daily basis in an attempt to garner the ‘buy-in’ needed to perform their work. Common communication patterns that volunteers reported included having to consult more frequently, listen more actively, and develop strategies to communicate more subtly. One off-shoot of this is that volunteers become much more conscious of their communication patterns. High level communication skills accounted for 13% of learning outcomes, and increased awareness of ‘recipient-centered communication’ several more. Not only did volunteers report being more reflective and effective communicators, their responses suggest that they communicated more strategically, often as a way to facilitate change. They planned, tested and used different approaches for different contexts and recipients; for example, adjusting emphases, using multiple channels, delaying requests and suggestions, and even exploiting differences by feigning cultural naïvety. Some were explicit about using social situations strategically, both at work and outside of work, to achieve organisational outcomes. The following responses represent just some ways that volunteers consciously adapted their communication approach:

Ideas and questions must be couched in terms that in no way question the leadership. Even questions seeking more information appear to be a threat, so need to be worded very carefully. –

Survey response, e-business manager, Pacific.

I have altered the way I offer suggestions/criticism, which includes making sure I focus it on (HCN colleagues) – asking them to think critically about whether the idea is useful, and how they think we could work on it together. It also gives them more ownership of the idea. – Survey response, development worker, Asia.

I quickly learned that work developed by e-mail is impossible. You really have to go out and meet people, so you're constantly going to meetings. And it may only be one hour of talking about something generally and then two hours of morning tea. That actually works in your favour. –

Interview transcript, government adviser, Pacific.

A second feature of IVPs is the central role of capacity building, defined as ‘developing competencies and capabilities in individuals, groups, organisations, sectors or countries which will lead to sustained and self-generating improvement’ (AusAID, 2004). Approaches to capacity building arise from organisational development theory and stress change by leveraging strengths rather than correcting deficiencies (e.g. Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The process is highly collaborative, requiring volunteers to identify and use local expertise and solutions. Twenty-four percent of learning incidents occurred while volunteers were undertaking capacity building. Almost all volunteers led some form of structured training or skills transfer (e.g. workshops, presentations, written manuals). In many cases this was extensive; one volunteer reported ‘somewhere in the vicinity of 700 hours of direct tuition’ for a counterpart, ‘and another ten staff that I was directly involved with got in the vicinity of 300 hours each’ over a 12-month period (interview transcript). However, most capacity building that volunteers undertook was informal, through mentoring, coaching, supporting and empowering HCN colleagues, usually embedded into day-to-day work activities. This process required volunteers to make significant changes to their work approach. Nine percent of reported learning incidents and 40% of change incidents stemmed directly from volunteers needing to

adjust their work through, for example, delegating more frequently than usual, explicitly ‘role modelling’ best practice, involving colleagues in problem-solving initiatives (rather than doing this alone), and engaging colleagues in discussions about work processes or philosophies.

A noticeable, and surprising, consequence of capacity building was the learning volunteers drew from having to compromise self-imposed quality standards in order to empower and develop HCN. Managing these competing stresses, along with subsequent lessons in delegating and prioritising, were the focus of many learning incidents:

Hardest for me has been letting some (work) get through when I know it could be better. It reflects poorly on me and that bothers me. It's all part of the learning process, mine and theirs. – Survey response, manager, Asia.

That's what I learnt over there, it's not all about you. You have to let go of things, you have to listen. I had my gold standard, but if I got 80% of that, well that was great, because it means that (HCN) can continue that on. – Interview transcript, health worker, Asia.

Because capacity building occurs on an equal basis underpinned by ‘the purposeful sharing of mindsets’ (Thomas, 2002: 23), volunteers remain open and observant and thus receptive to ideas and approaches from counterparts (Shim & Paprock, 2002). Almost 15% of learning incidents involved respondents incorporating host-culture approaches into their work:

I'm learning a lot from my colleagues ... most of it has been learning the value of faith-based responses to HIV. Previously all the approaches I had had been secular and very mainstream, and this has been great in looking at an alternative approach to the same problem. – Interview transcript, HIV/AIDS program officer, Asia.

I'm very willing to be open-minded about treatment pathways, and I've become less of a purist since I've been here because ... I'm much more willing to overlap anything I've learnt and bring it into the situation. – Interview transcript, senior physiotherapist, Pacific.

Perhaps the most counter-intuitive learning outcome reported by volunteers is that of domain-specific and technical knowledge, especially as volunteers are frequently the most highly qualified and experienced person in the organisation. Indeed, Thomas suggested that IVPs involve a trade-off between developing generic management skills and specific technical skills (2002). However, a small but significant proportion of learning outcomes (2% of learning incidents, 10% of interviews) related to domain-specific knowledge, experience and understanding. Most of these came through the volunteers' capacity building role, which first required the reinforcement of their own (often tacit) knowledge. Moreover, for many volunteers capacity building extended into unfamiliar functions and contexts, and thus were highly conducive to knowledge construction and learning (Billett, 2001). For instance, a critical care nurse trainer found most of her capacity building focused on infection control; a physiotherapist in the Middle East mentored a HCN counterpart treating patients aged from one month to 70 years old for a range of neurological deficits, both disability and rehabilitation ('Usually physios work in one field or the other' – survey response). A psychologist found himself alongside a (HCN) psychiatric nurse treating street kids, a partnership unheard of in Australian treatment but necessary in the host culture where funding and expertise were limited:

I know an enormous amount now, far more than a psychologist should, about psychotropic medication and all sorts of things of that nature. I think it will be hugely useful to me in the future. I have a respect now for medication which I didn't have before and psychologists as a rule don't have. - Interview transcript.

b. The Organisational Context

Volunteers work in a variety of organisations with different objectives and staffing compositions. However these organisations are generally characterised by being simultaneously demanding and supportive; frustrating yet rewarding. This section discusses these tensions, encapsulated in the following survey response:

Rats in air-conditioning, leaking office when it rained, one stapler, one photocopier, limited pens... (T)oilets that didn't always flush. Very different to (my workplace in Australia) a city skyscraper with the biggest private art collection in the southern hemisphere. BUT - no competition causing infighting, no jostling for partners' favourite status to get the best work, no having a partner sign out every piece of work; colleagues who sought and respected your opinion, helpful staff who assisted my attempts to speak (the local language), answered my questions about culture and practices. – Lawyer, Pacific.

As well as being in countries that are, by definition, poor and lacking infrastructure, most volunteers worked with grassroots organisations in the not-for-profit sector. While some are efficient and well funded³, the overwhelming majority were poorly-resourced even by local standards, with overstretched and under-skilled staff, and structures and processes that disrupted rather than supported work performance. In business contexts, where extrinsic motivations supersede intrinsic ones, such environments would be viewed as impediments to motivation and learning (Katzell & Thompson, 1990). However, the experiences of many volunteers suggest these conditions had the reverse effect. Volunteers appeared to draw on their intrinsic motivation even when task motivation had slumped. Almost a quarter of change incidents related to high levels of motivation resulting from the positive impact volunteers saw their contributions making, or from the challenges presented by their role and the satisfaction of overcoming obstacles:

I can't lie and say I didn't get frustrated at times ... it's just really motivating to work in an organisation where people are given an opportunity in life and a real opportunity to make differences with their lives as well. – Interview transcript, social worker, Asia.

The sense of personal achievement in solving just all these things, these opportunities ... with no resources, absolutely no resources ... that was frustrating at first, but then it gradually became so exciting. – Interview transcript, IT lecturer, Africa.

Dealing with poor or limited resources infused much of the volunteers' work. The absence of adequate facilities, systems and skilled staff was the sole and/or main trigger for several learning outcomes including greater resilience, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and flexibility:

There's just not the systems in place, so anything that you want to happen, even the smallest thing, you have to keep going back, over and over again. I would never have done that in Australia, but you have to be persistent and committed to making it happen. If you don't, it won't happen, it just won't. – Interview transcript, physiotherapist, Pacific.

I don't think I can get more flexible than I am now. (An IVP) makes you like rope, strong rope, you can twist it into any shape you like and it is still strong, and you can untwist it and make another shape. – Interview transcript, education consultant, Asia.

Volunteers regularly relied on creative problem-solving to overcome resource constraints. They reported a total of 54 incidents where they had to innovate solutions to cope with insufficient resources, staffing or funds, and this contributed to over 10% of learning incidents. Most were directed at meeting organisational or client needs. An occupational therapist in Timor Leste, for example, cut 'ergonomic chairs' from plastic buckets for some physically immobile children, while a physiotherapist in the Solomon Islands made remedial rattles for disabled infants using plastic drink bottles and berries. In many instances respondents were forced to develop 'hybrid' solutions by adapting concepts or approaches they had previously used in their home country to suit local conditions. Resourcefulness, adaptability, and the ability to generate innovative solutions, all core building blocks of creativity (Amabile, 1996), made up 15% of learning outcomes. For instance, an engineer working in the Pacific reported in consecutive surveys having to: (1) make major design adjustments to a complex causeway construction in order to incorporate the absence of regular maintenance, (2) use broken coral and grout to support an underwater wall in lieu of other materials ('I never thought my job here would involve standing in the ocean up to my chest monitoring such progress' – survey response), and (3) improvise a surveying marker using a ruler tied to a stick.

Moreover, while much of the volunteers' work is intangible, many saw securing better resources or funding for the organisation as a way to make a concrete contribution. Several volunteers used this as an outlet for entrepreneurial activities which expanded their repertoire of experiences and contacts at work – like sourcing and compiling funding proposals – as well as in their own time. At least 22 (26%) volunteers reported taking on a major project outside their work role and in addition to their job functions. One volunteer, after a field trip to a nearby rural village, initiated and oversaw a multi-national fund-raising and logistics effort to supply the village with fresh water. A health worker in the Pacific established a partnership with an Australian hospital to provide 'pathways' for seriously sick patients that her hospital could not adequately treat. A university lecturer visited a work colleague's home community one weekend and, inspired by the limited reading materials at the primary school, began arranging shipments of second-hand books. He now sits on the school's board and has overseen the delivery of several consignments of books. As the following survey response illustrates, this entrepreneurial 'bootstrapping' often involved nurturing and harvesting external networks:

Access to resources and information: (1) minimal (2) need to use ingenuity (3) mind is continually switched on seeking creative solutions in unexpected places (4) lots of wheeling & dealing goes on outside working hours, running into people while out & about. – Manager, Pacific.

Volunteers regularly used external networks like this to access information. The absence of sufficient information – organisational, cultural, and technical - was widespread for a multitude of reasons, including language and cultural differences, limited feedback mechanisms, and poor administration and record-keeping related to inadequate skills, staffing, systems or infrastructure. These factors combined to make the organisational context highly uncertain. Learning to manage this uncertainty, either by operating effectively with this ambiguity or using strategies to remove it, accounted for almost 10% of all learning incidents, as the following survey extracts exemplify:

It took me a long time to figure out what questions to ask to give me the information I needed and also who to ask – Resource developer, Asia.

I regularly don't understand all of the influencing factors at play at work, so I have had to accept that I have less control over outcomes and processes. – Project manager, Asia.

A related consequence of this uncertainty was that volunteers became proficient in managing information for themselves and their organisations. Several initiated culturally-relevant information systems for the organisation, normally outside the scope of their job description. These ranged from an organisation-wide client database and an integrated financial control system to activity logs, process charts, and whiteboard planning diaries. Almost all employed some strategy to proactively source information related to their job, commonly by fostering relationships with other individuals and organisations. Indeed, they paint the picture of an 'open source' approach to information sharing. As the following interview responses demonstrate, many volunteers developed highly successful learning communities that cut across culture, social status, professions, gender and age groups:

There's not much record-keeping done here so you've got to talk to as many people as possible to get an idea of what resources exist. Most of the people we socialise with are also out here working with the large organisations or the umbrella organisations in the Pacific. So the more people we talk to the better. – IT project manager, Pacific.

At home you mix with (people that) you grew up with, there's a similar career path. But here it's all over the shop. On the phone we talk about work and everyone's doing similar things ... but everyone's taking chances and learning new things, and so if I know someone recently had to make a database that I never had to do before, then it's okay to call them up and ask them.

Everyone has time to do that. – Manager, Pacific.

Not only did this contribute toward important professional networks and networking skills (6% of learning outcomes), it also exposed volunteers to a wide range of perspectives and ideas that fed into their work

and engaged them in effective ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that enriched their understanding of the culture, the development community and their professions. For example, a training officer in Indonesia actively sought out a network of aid and development workers which met weekly at a local café, and was most active and beneficial in the aftermath of an earthquake which struck during the study. Similarly, an IT trainer in Timor Leste accessed expertise to help her upgrade the security of her organisation’s computer network:

There was about 20 people who met regularly. A whole bunch of geeky computer people from all over the place. It’s quite confronting being new to the place, then being introduced to all these computer experts and admitting you don’t know what to do or that you are overwhelmed. But it worked really well and definitely helped me. – Interview notes.

Another feature of the host organisations was that volunteers saw them as ‘safe’ environments in which to experiment with new approaches and ideas, even when faced with inflexible hierarchies or risk averse managers, both of which were common. There appears to be several reasons for this. Volunteers reported that their organisations were, on the whole, relaxed, friendly and trusting, reflecting cultural orientations toward family and relationships common in many developing countries (Aycan, 2004). Their position as volunteers created goodwill among colleagues, clients and the wider community, as did the (community-focused) objectives of the organisation, meaning that many were able to ‘push boundaries’, as exemplified by the following respondent, describing how she accessed information to support her work:

I used and abused my family and friends ... Australian university online libraries, subscribed for every free magazine I could find for the office library. I became friends with (a local university) IT lecturer and convinced him to improve our IT system for very little money. I even emailed an author (lecturer at Oxford University, UK) of one textbook and asked if he could help with the first three chapters ... and he emailed them to me. I would never have tried that in Australia. – Survey response, team leader, Pacific.

Many volunteers also reported that the unreliable nature of the infrastructure and absence of resources made them more comfortable experimenting and failing. As one volunteer told us, ‘It couldn’t have been any worse so there was always the sense, for me anyway, of ‘Let’s try it and see what happens.’’ For a number of others, this freedom came from being the most experienced and/or qualified person available for tasks which, while stretching their expertise, would otherwise have been left to less qualified staff:

You get dropped in the deep end and you’re going to sink or swim. It’s always possible that you won’t swim, but the great thing about it was that the locals understood this and supported you. They knew that you were probably the most capable person to do this, and that you’d do your best. So it was like a safe environment ... it showed that it was okay to fall over. It made me a lot more courageous – a lot more – about what I did. I would never have done as many of things that I did if I hadn’t had that confidence. You have this attitude of, ‘Well I might not succeed but I’ll get in and do my best.’ – Interview transcript, lawyer, Pacific.

Another volunteer was more succinct but no less persuasive: ‘I’m not surrounded by experts and therefore I’m more willing to have a go’ (survey response). In fact, many volunteers reported that they were viewed as ‘experts’ within their organisations, and thus felt their ideas and suggestions were frequently sought and positively received (on average, respondents were putting forward nine new initiatives for consideration every reporting period). The absence of skilled and experienced staff also presented opportunities for volunteers to take on tasks that they would never be given responsibility for in their home country. Of the 221 learning incidents, 50 (23%) resulted from volunteers taking on more senior or demanding (often managerial) roles. This was especially noticeable among early-career workers. In one case, an architect with six years work experience found himself promoted to Head of Technical Design just months after arriving, sat on several government committees, including convening a high-level taskforce to redevelop the country’s airport, and worked on large-scale projects ranging from a hospital to a sports stadium. He acknowledges, ‘In terms of projects and staff management, it was a huge leap in responsibilities ... rather than managing just one or two projects I was managing 30 to 40’ (interview notes). All the learning

incidents he reported were triggered by the challenges of these higher duties. Similarly, an organisational psychologist with just two years work experience ended up taking on what was, in effect, a senior management role in the organisation's strategic planning and policy development, as well as being a mentor/coach for the company's Director during the latter half of her assignment.

c. The Macro Environment

Whereas the work role and organisational context provide rich experiential and social learning opportunities, the macro environment of IVPs contributes to volunteers' learning primarily through its impact on their cognitive frameworks, and the reflection and understanding that this stimulates.

Volunteers face more extreme culture change than most expatriate workers. The countries in which they work differ sharply in their economic, political and demographic composition (Punnett, 2004). Cultural distances between wealthy and poor countries are generally large (Hofstede, 1997) and national wealth has been statistically correlated with cultural dimensions like power distance and individualism/collectivism (Hofstede, 1997; Punnett, 2004). A quantitative measure of the cultural distance between two countries can be calculated from Hofstede's cultural dimension indexes using a method described by Kogut and Singh (1988). While this may offer limited explanatory power (Harzing, 2003), it can help to *illustrate* the relative novelty of most IVPs in comparison to other expatriate postings. For respondents in our study, the average cultural distance between Australia and the host country, where comparative data exist, is 2.5.⁴ This compares with an average of just 0.1 for the countries hosting most Australian expatriates - Great Britain, the United States of America and New Zealand (Hugo, 2006). Volunteers also experience greater cultural immersion because they normally live in basic accommodation within the host community in order to develop more meaningful understanding of local issues, and to build relationships that contribute toward the exchange of skills and knowledge (AusAID, 2004).

This broad and deep cultural chasm manifests in several ways. Because our cognitive schemas, or frame of reference (Rumelhart, 1980), derive from experiences in our own culture, vastly different cultures present

many circumstances where our schemas are ineffective, causing us to misinterpret situations and make inaccurate predictions and assumptions (Osland & Bird, 2000). This was evident in the learning incidents described by volunteers; 13% were triggered by volunteers making mistakes or incorrect assumptions, some of which involved apparently innocuous acts with significant implications; for instance, a consultant in Asia attributed the breakdown of her relationship with a HCN supervisor to a decision to remove a culturally significant picture from the wall of her office for cleaning. An additional 19% of learnings were triggered by volunteers observing events, situations or behaviours that presented stark and salient contrasts with their existing cognitive frameworks. Volunteers tended to use strong language to describe these events, like ‘shocked’, ‘amazement’ or ‘stunned with disbelief’ (survey responses), suggesting extreme disconfirmed expectancy (Festinger, 1957). Such events motivate schema development and learning in order to avoid future misunderstandings (Jarvis, 1987). They also encourage us to look for host-culture ‘models’ from which to learn (Mazur, 1994), and the volunteers’ deep cultural immersion enabled them to construct rich and highly nuanced understandings of the local culture, language and practices. Cultural skills and understanding accounted for 14% of learning incidents. Several volunteers reported quickly becoming more culturally adept than other expatriates with whom they interacted. As their confidence operating ‘inside’ the host culture grew, some began using sophisticated host-culture approaches to achieve outcomes. For example, several volunteers in China articulated strategies they used to develop, or overcome an absence of, interpersonal connections or ‘guanxi’ to help achieve organisational and personal goals (Yeung & Tung, 1996), while a number of volunteers in the Pacific became comfortable using the local practice of ‘bubuti’, a highly complex form of social support and exchange that carries obligations of future reciprocity (e.g. Borovnik, 2006).

What these learning incidents highlight is that this deep cultural knowledge serves as both learning outcome *and* learning trigger; that is, volunteers used this understanding as a platform for deeper learning that led to significant personal development. More than 90% of incidents reporting ‘cultural’ learnings also reported additional outcomes stemming from this awareness. The majority of these related to the

volunteers' own cognitive frameworks, including increased awareness of one's own schemas (and stereotypes), which comprised 5% of all learning outcomes, developing new frames of reference (13%), seeing and incorporating different perspectives into decisions (5%), and recognizing patterns (4%). In effect, their deep immersion in the host culture provided a counter-point that broadened their perspective on their own culture, their work, and themselves:

It certainly gave me a broader outlook, there's no escaping that. It gave me a much better understanding of how societies work and how a lot of developing societies see us ... it gave me another perspective on myself, if you want to look at it that way. – Interview transcript, psychologist, Pacific.

I did not realize that my culture had prepared me to be an innovator – a person who was willing to survey a situation and look at ways of improving things – often through just small changes. (HCN) are much more attached to how things are done now and have always been done – at least during their lifetime ... The issue for me then is how do I adjust to working in a culture where change is such a slow evolving process, when I am here for a relatively short time and when my whole being is geared to implementing change. – Survey response, IT professional, Africa.

Seventeen volunteers (20%) reported significant changes to their values or belief systems during the study. An additional six strengthened existing values. While holding particular values might not, in isolation, facilitate a manager's effectiveness, the responses reflect a more informed and conscious, rather than sub-conscious, pattern of beliefs that can enhance emotional (Goleman, 1998) and cultural (Thomas & Inkson, 2003) intelligence. This also provides strong foundations upon which to address ethical conflicts that frequently arise in global business environments (Robertson & Crittenden, 2003) and, as responses from some volunteers suggest, international development work as well. Volunteers from a variety of professions reported clarifying or heightening their ethical principles. In most cases this came from having to demonstrate and/or explain culturally-different approaches to HCN. In other cases, as evidenced in the

interview response below, it was triggered by the (perceived) absence of appropriate structures or regulations in the host culture:

In Australia there's a code of ethics that can be enforced by law at certain points. If you step beyond those boundaries ... there are a number of different agency guidelines that could constrain your work. In thinking about the lack of constraints in (the host country) ... just knowing that there are no boundaries and that there are different approaches to work, it was almost like I had to be more aware of it for myself and also protecting what other people were doing as well. – Social worker, Asia.

Such self-awareness, combined with deep knowledge of multiple cultures, supports 'frame-switching' (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000), the ability to adjust perspective to suit the context: what Harris et al. term 'handling two swords at the same time' (Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004: 65). A number of volunteers demonstrated an ability and willingness for this in their responses:

Aspects of work are at a point where I've found that if there's something I want to achieve or something I'm thinking about doing it's better just to try and achieve it using the (host culture) approach rather than the (foreigner) way. Not all the time, but sometimes it's just easier. – Interview transcript, social worker, Pacific.

It's been much easier to adjust now, from focusing on the detail which I need to do with the hands-on work, to seeing the bigger picture, the more strategic aspects. I'd never been able to do that previously. – Interview transcript, occupational therapist, Asia.

I now have a completely different way to look at the world if I choose. That I hope to use this when I return to Australia is an understatement. – Survey response, business development consultant, Asia.

Because of the volunteers' embedded position within their community, learning extends well beyond the workplace (28% of learning incidents occurred outside work in varying contexts). Moreover, even

apparently routine day-to-day differences are reinforced, subsequently noticed and thus become salient learning triggers. One interviewee put it like this: ‘When you’re seeing it up close and every day ... it just jumps out at you.’ As the following survey response exemplifies, an accumulation of small incidents that might otherwise go unnoticed can be a powerful learning experience:

This is not one particular incident but a lot of similar incidents that happen fairly frequently.

Complete strangers give me things and do things for me. They offer me food, smooth a seat for me, help me find something I have lost. It’s not just because I am a foreigner. I see them doing things for people they don’t know on the streets. Nothing particularly leads to the incidents, it is just spontaneous giving, and often there is no shared language, but people want to extend themselves for you. I am used to being generous to people I know, but I realise how closed I usually am towards strangers. In Australia I would often think about doing things like that, but didn’t often act on it, giving some excuse like I don’t have time to stop. I am trying to extend my generosity to strangers now and not thinking about it self-consciously. – Resource developer, Asia.

Not all learning incidents were as positive as those reported here. Many of the changes attributable to the macro environment stemmed from unambiguously negative situations. At least 13 respondents were victims of serious crime and nine suffered severe illness, including one volunteer who underwent emergency air-evacuation before returning to complete her IVP. While such incidents cannot be directly related to the host culture or even the IVP – crime, illness and injury are universal occurrences – the volunteers clearly associated these learning experiences with the IVP ‘crucible.’ They were also clear about the reflective powers of such events. Several attributed positive personal change, notably self-awareness, self-sufficiency and adaptability, to these experiences in much the same way that participants benefit from ‘upending experiences’ that are cornerstones of many leadership development programs (Conger, 1992).

CONCLUSIONS

This research supports the view that IVPs are effective training grounds for global managers. It also introduces a framework that may serve as a springboard for future research, and may be of interest to workers, organisations, and educators alike. Firstly, by providing returned volunteers with a framework through which to articulate their experiences, it may make IVPs attractive career advancement options for ambitious workers, most pertinently early-career managers who frequently combine a desire to self-manage their careers and a strong social conscience (Boston Consulting Group, 2006) with a willingness to relocate off-shore (Adler, 2002). This, in turn, may attract better quality volunteers that will benefit host organisations and communities. The findings may be of particular interest to women. Barriers still exist for female managers seeking international careers, particularly in challenging locations (Adler, 1987, 2002). This does not seem to be the case for international volunteers; for example, both AVI and the (United States) Peace Corp recruited more women than men in 2006. Women seeking global careers may look to IVPs as an opportunity to develop key capabilities while simultaneously demonstrating their capacity to perform under ‘high altitude’ conditions.

For volunteer agencies, the framework provides a basis for assessing or enhancing the learning potential of positions, and for improving the ‘match’ between a position and an applicant’s motivations. Organisations outside the volunteer sector may consider the merits of IVPs for developing employees’ skills while simultaneously promoting their own corporate values and ethical credentials. Recent studies suggest growth in the demand for (Cook & Jackson, 2006), and placement of (Hoar, 2004), management and business volunteers, and while the opportunity costs of allowing workers to accept IVPs may seem high, viewed strictly from a human resources perspective they may be as effective *and* as cost-effective as many formal training programs targeting these skills. Organisations may also consider how some aspects of their IAs might be re-designed to further promote expatriate learning, particularly IAs with developmental objectives. For instance, this study suggests that informal ‘capacity building’ contributes significantly to volunteer development; parallel approaches might prove successful in promoting

knowledge flows and expatriate/HCN development within MNEs. Similarly, there is also scope for formal management education, often criticised for not producing skills that employers seek (e.g. Mintzberg, 2004), to leverage IVPs creatively. ‘Service learning’ pedagogies that involve experiential learning through active participation with community organisations (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999) are increasingly common in management education (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2003). Underpinning the approach is the aim to bridge disciplinary ‘silos’ and provide real-world complexity that benefits both learner and organisation (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2003). Combined with online support, for instance, IVPs present a range of possibilities for cross-discipline experiences rich in learning, particularly for post-graduate students who are well positioned to make strong contributions to the host community.

The study has several limitations. While the use of qualitative and longitudinal research methods were necessary to collect the richness of data presented here, this did limit the overall sample size; a problem aggravated by the unexpected evacuations and subsequent withdrawal of some respondents. While qualitative research does not seek the statistical generalisation of quantitative studies, the small sample size does raise the question of how applicable the resultant framework may be beyond the sample. The sample represented 62% of long-term⁵ volunteers placed by AVI during 2006. Comparisons with non-participants and withdrawing participants revealed no significant differences on variables available to researchers, including age, gender, profession, highest education level, work experience, tenure of placement (non-participants), or motivation for volunteering (withdrawing participants). In considering how applicable the study is beyond the volunteer sector, two discernible differences limit the study’s generalisability. Firstly, the proportion of female respondents in the current study (64%), while reflective of international volunteers (e.g. Peace Corps, 2007), is larger than most studies of expatriate workers (e.g. Takeuchi, Shay, & Li, 2008). While no gender patterns emerged in the data, gender can influence the experiences that female expatriates have (Adler, 1987), and may therefore have influenced the nature of their learning incidents. The other factor distinguishing volunteers in this study from studies of paid expatriates is organisational tenure. In one recent study of expatriate managers average organisational

tenure exceeded 13 years (Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2007); moreover, most expatriate studies draw samples from within MNEs, despite calls for greater diversity (Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001). In contrast, international volunteering represents a career transition point. All respondents relocated to new and unfamiliar organisations. At pre-departure, only 27 respondents (31%) could articulate firm career plans following their IVP⁶, while most were uncertain (e.g. ‘Not sure - look at opportunities at end of placement in country and Australia - back up plan (is) go back to banking’ – survey response). Although we found no relationship between future career plans and the learning incidents reported, it is possible that ‘transitioning’ volunteers are more motivated to learn and thus experience more, and potentially different, learning incidents. Irrespective, this protean group may better reflect the reality of contemporary global workers, who tend to be self-directed and highly mobile (e.g. Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002).

An associated threat to the study’s generalisability relates to the transferability of the capabilities that volunteers develop to other workplaces: how valuable are the learning outcomes that volunteers report? As the literature review demonstrated, many match closely with capabilities sought in global managers. Other studies of volunteers have been unambiguous in their belief in the benefits of IVPs to the modern workplace (e.g. Thomas, 2002), including one written for the Chartered Management Institute in London (Cook & Jackson, 2006). While the findings suggest that the immediate cultural and social context drives much learning during IVPs, 80% of the world’s population, and therefore the world’s workforce and consumers, live in developing countries, where IVPs generally occur (Punnett, 2004). Thus, understanding and learning from the people and the context of developing countries can only benefit workers seeking truly global, rather than regional, careers.

Finally, in moving to take advantage of the learning possibilities of IVPs a degree of caution should be exercised. While IVPs might provide both the stimulus and opportunity for volunteers to fast-track personal and professional development, their focus should not shift from building the capacity of the host community to that of the volunteer. Such a shift is unlikely, given the professional approach of most

volunteer agencies toward their IVPs; for instance, the volunteers in our study were subject to a structured performance review cycle that includes the ‘most significant change’ technique (Davies and Dart, 2005). Besides, rather than having competing interests, volunteers who are learning valuable skills are likely to contribute more, not less, effectively to their important role as capacity builders. In this regard, IVPs may represent one of the best possible options for building one’s capabilities while making a valuable – and valued – contribution in an international context.

Table 1
Previous Research on Learning Outcomes of International Volunteers

	Learning outcomes common to business expatriates	Learning outcomes relevant to international volunteers
Task performance (i.e. domain-specific skills & knowledge)	Developing professional networks (e.g. Cook & Jackson, 2006).	Domain-specific technical and practical skills (Brook, et al., 2007; Hudson & Inkson, 2006), understanding development issues (Bell, 1994).
Decision-making & problem-solving	Managing complexity and uncertainty, leadership (e.g. Thomas, 2002).	Problem-solving (Cook & Jackson, 2006; Jones, 2005; Thomas, 2002), innovation and creativity (Cook & Jackson, 2006; Thomas, 2002), being resourceful and adaptable (Brook, et al., 2007; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Thomas, 2002).
Cultural skills & understanding	Cross-cultural communication, host-culture language skills (e.g. Brook et al., 2007, Hudson & Inkson, 2006).	Deep cultural awareness (Hudson & Inkson, 2006).
Role performance & management skills	Managing projects, managing diversity, managing staff (e.g. Cook & Jackson, 2006).	Teaching skills to others formally and informally (Bell, 1994; Brook, et al., 2007; Thomas, 2002), coaching and mentoring (Cook & Jackson, 2006; Thomas, 2002), collaboration and team work (Brook, et al., 2007; Jones, 2005; Thomas, 2002), managing change, managing information and knowledge, managing conflict (Cook & Jackson, 2006).
Communication skills	General communication skills (e.g. Brook et al., 2007).	Influencing and persuading (Cook & Jackson, 2006), negotiating (Cook & Jackson, 2006; Jones, 2005), communicating ideas (Thomas, 2002).
Strategic understanding	Global perspective, global awareness, strategic thinking (e.g. Thomas, 2002).	More sophisticated worldview or 'multicultural' perspective (Brook, et al., 2007; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Jones, 2005; Thomas, 2002).
Personal development	Enhanced self-efficacy, self-sufficiency and self-confidence (e.g. Bell, 1994, Thomas, 2002).	Tolerance and patience (Brook, et al., 2007), resilience, persistence, the ability to overcome adversity (Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Thomas, 2002), stronger ethical values (Brook, et al., 2007; Cook & Jackson, 2006), changed personal values (Bell, 1994, Hudson & Inkson, 2006), managing stress (Thomas, 2002).
Self-awareness		Enhanced self-awareness and understanding (Brook, et al., 2007; Hudson & Inkson, 2006).

Table 2
Characteristics of Respondents

Professional category*	N	%	Highest education level	N	%
Education	21	24	Postgraduate degree (Masters or Doctorate)	13	15
Legal, social & welfare	17	20	Undergraduate degree	48	56
Business, human resource & marketing	11	13	Other formal qualification	20	23
Management	9	11	No formal qualification	5	6
Health Professionals	7	8	Age at pre-departure		
Design, engineering, science & transport	4	5	20-29 years	24	28
ICT	3	3	30-39 years	20	23
Arts & media	3	3	40-49 years	18	21
Other	11	13	> 49 years	24	28
Gender			Status during IVP		
Female	53	62	Accompanied by spouse/family	22	26
Male	33	38	Alone	64	74

* Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO).

Table 3**Destinations of Volunteer Placements**

Region/Country	N	%
1. Pacific	33	38
Fiji	5	6
Kiribati	11	13
Papua New Guinea	7	8
Solomon Islands	7	8
Tonga	1	1
Vanuatu	2	2
2. Asia	39	45
Cambodia	7	8
Indonesia	6	7
People's Republic of China	7	8
Thailand	2	2
Timor Leste	10	12
Viet Nam	7	8
3. Other	14	17
Lebanon	2	2
Malawi	5	6
Maldives	3	4
South Africa	3	4
Swaziland	1	1
Total	86	100

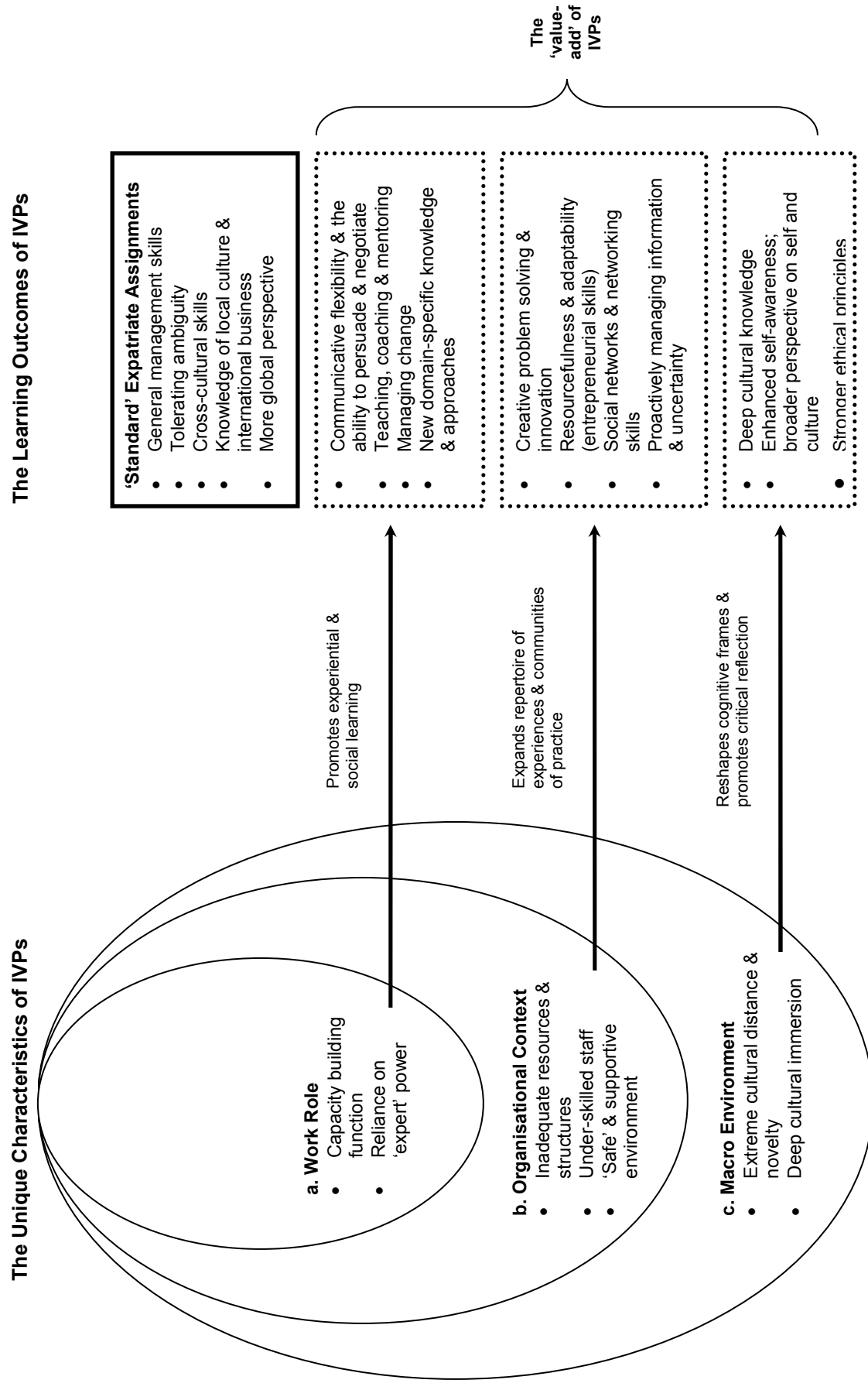
Table 4
Survey Response Rate and Method

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Survey 4	Survey 5	Survey 6	Total
Email	35	32	27	29	27	-	150
Online	15	13	10	8	8	-	54
Post	20	18	13	6	6	56 ⁷	119
Fax	1	-	1	-	-	-	2
Total	71	63	51	43	41	56	325

Table 5
Respondents' Learning Outcomes

	Learning Incidents		Interviews	
	N	%	N	%
Task performance (i.e. domain-specific skills & knowledge)	10	2	40	10
Decision-making & problem-solving	62	14	59	15
Cultural skills & understanding	58	14	18	5
Role performance & management skills	33	8	63	16
Communication skills	56	13	50	13
Strategic understanding	51	12	32	9
Personal development	121	28	95	25
Self-awareness	40	9	27	7
Total	431	100	384	100

Figure 1
The Learning Environment of International Volunteer Placements (IVPs)



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ENDNOTES

¹ Most formal learning stemmed from discussions with other volunteers during in-country meetings convened by the volunteer agency.

² In the present study, this superior was a CEO or Manager based within the organisation or, in cases where volunteers took on a senior management role, Directors and Board members.

³ In our study, these tended to be organisations receiving significant funding from international non-government organisations.

⁴ Countries for which cultural dimension index scores were available are Indonesia, Thailand, PRC, South Africa, Viet Nam and Lebanon. Lebanon's score is drawn from scores for the Arab World, incorporating Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

⁵ AVI classifies long-term placements as IVPs longer than eight months in duration.

⁶ Most of these had taken leave without pay from an on-going position in order to fulfill their international volunteering ambitions.

⁷ The final survey (Survey 6) and the pre-departure survey, not included in this table, were administered in hard copy in order to collect additional data requiring completion by paper and pen.