



Emerging World

Building leaders through international development



International Service Learning Programs: **THE DEVELOPMENT ASSIGNMENTS OF THE 21ST CENTURY.**

Executive Summary

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About Emerging World

Emerging World is a specialist leadership development consultancy established in 2004. The company focuses on enabling managers and executives to learn through the experience of applying their skills to support organizations such as NGO's, small businesses and government agencies operating in the emerging world. Emerging World's mission is to bring the corporate world and the developing world closer together for everyone's benefit.

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INTRODUCTION

International Service Learning Programs

At a recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, numerous CEOs in attendance cited a growing need for talent that could function successfully in new and emerging global markets. Several researchers have observed that traditional in-house approaches to leadership development (LD) are insufficient for developing the global leaders needed today and we were interested to see whether the skills developed through International Service Learning (ISL) experiences help bridge that gap.

International Service Learning programs, in which employees travel across international borders to apply their work-based skills to a project or other assignment that serves a third party constituency are growing in popularity within the corporate sector (Colvin, 2009; Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2012).

The term *ISL* originates from three defining characteristics:

1. Assignments are **international** in that participants travel across national borders to complete their specified work.
2. Assignments involve **service** to a constituency other than the participant's own organization. Usually, this is a nongovernmental organization, small business, or government agency.
3. Assignments focus on participant **learning** as a significant outcome.

Typically ISL programs originate in either the Corporate Social Responsibility (also called CR, CSR or sustainability) department of a company or from within the Leadership Development (LD) function.

THE STUDY

We surveyed and interviewed the people responsible for the delivery of the 17 different ISL programs at 13 different companies regarding their participants' learning outcomes. Just more than half of the programs studied involved sending participants as individuals on assignments while 46% were group experiences. Employee participation in all of the assignments surveyed was voluntary.

In general, ISL programs initially set up to meet CSR objectives (9 programs) were open to more employees than LD-oriented ISL programs while LD-oriented opportunities were often only available to a select group of high-potential employees. The length of the engagements varied across programs and did not seem to be linked to whether programs had a CSR or LD orientation. CSR assignments ranged in duration from 1 to 40 weeks whereas LD assignments ranged from 4 to 26 weeks (median = 6 weeks). However, in both cases some engagements formally included virtual pre- and post-work, thus, shortening the time on the ground.

Leadership Development & ISL

We clustered the responses into ten identified leadership competencies as outlined in Table 1 on the following page. The left hand column describes the competencies that companies say they require of their leaders while the column on the right describes the global competencies that respondents say participants developed by taking part in their ISL programs. The data shows that that seven of the ten identified leadership competencies (70%) were developed through ISL programs.

Table 1: Comparing leadership competencies desired by companies to those global/cross-cultural competencies developed through ISL programs

Required Leadership Competencies	Competencies developed through ISL Programs
Responsible Mind-Set Values-minded leaders, Ethical decision making, Doing the right thing, Responsible mind-set	Responsible Mind-set Citizenship Sustainable leadership
Global/Cultural competence Global mind-set, Exposure to emerging markets, Cross-cultural sensitivity, Cross border collaboration, Demonstrating global perspective, Cross border innovation, Global team development, Cross cultural sensitivity, Building international social capital	Global/Cultural competence Global awareness, Global mindset, Cultural awareness, Cultural sensitivity, Cross-cultural competencies, Cultural agility
Developing self and others Courage to lead, Energy/Passion, Coaching, Building talent, Developing people, Coaching and developing, Interpersonal skills, Self-development such as emotional intelligence, Self-awareness	Developing Self and others Awareness of transferable skills, Transferring skills, Empowering others, Open minded, Self-motivation, Team Spirit
Business acumen Business acumen, Understanding company business objectives, Driving for results, Driving for sustainable results, Business development, Create business value, Continuous improvement	
Organizational agility Getting people on board, Ability to mobilize the organization, Strong communication skills, Prioritizing organizing and communicating, Teamwork, Engaging employees, Relationship management	Organizational agility Organizational/cultural versatility, Organizational sensitivity, Engagement with senior level personnel, Flexibility, Coping with ambiguity, Ability to create cross border business value
Strategic thinking Thinking strategically, Ability to see around corners and project change	Strategic thinking Pragmatic problem solving, Strategic thinking, Taking initiative/Being proactive, Integration
Managing change Being able to continue to pursue goals in the midst of organizational change, Dealing with ambiguity, Enabling change, Resilience to change, Leading change proactively, Flexible thinking, Agility, Ability to manage change	
Innovation and creativity Understanding how to innovate Creativity and innovation	Innovation and creativity Innovation in emerging markets Ability to bring back innovations into the company
Customer focus Ensuring connection to customers, Customer needs focused, Customer driven	
Stakeholder engagement Building stakeholder relationships Building market understanding	Stakeholder engagement How to navigate administratively Cross-boundary collaboration

Companies surveyed: La Caixa, Timberland, Randstad, Microsoft, Medtronic, Deere & Company, KPMG, GlaxoSmithKline, EY LLP, Becton Dickinson, ArcelorMittal, Intel Corporation, and Telefonica. See the full research paper for a detailed mapping of company requirements and participant responses.

Models of Global Leadership

The transition from domestic to global management has been described as a “quantum leap” for leaders (Bird and Osland, 2004). Various authors have developed models around the competencies are needed to navigate the challenges of the global workspace. Our study showed that the competencies developed through ISL programs align with several of the latest competency models including Pless et al (2011), Sharkey et al (2012) and Cabrera and Unruh (2013).

Table 2: Comparison of findings from the present study to those of past studies on the competencies needed for effective global leadership.

Emerging World Study findings	Findings from Previous Studies
Global and Cultural competence	Global mindset Cultural intelligence Cultural intelligence Global intelligence Uncertainty resilience
Responsible Mindset	Responsible mindset Ethical literacy Global citizenship Moral intelligence
Developing Self and Others	Self-development Intellectual capital Societal capital Psychological capital Talent orientation Cognitive intelligence Emotional intelligence
Stakeholder Engagement	Community building Global entrepreneurship Business intelligence
Organizational agility	Team connectivity
Strategic thinking	Pragmatic flexibility
Innovation and creativity	Perspective responsiveness

For more information about these models refer to the appendix.

INCREASED ROI FROM ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

We found that ISL programs generated a range of other benefits in addition to leadership development, which increase their ROI to companies which employ them. With graduates now more educated now about the broader issues in society, **corporate image** is an important recruitment tool. ISL programs often foster a stronger sense of appreciation and connection to the company and deepen **employee engagement and retention** and because participants are exposed to a diversity of people and different perspectives, ISL programs are seen to **facilitate diversity & inclusion**. An ability to step back and look at the big picture **fosters innovation and creativity**, whilst the lack of formal reporting structures on assignment **broadens perspectives & networking skills**, giving people the opportunity to stretch, to see and be more responsible for the whole picture.

MEASURING & IMPROVING IMPACT

We were also keen that our study helps those companies with ISL programs to make them even more effective. A key area of significance for program owners is impact assessment as they are required to justify investments made in their programs. All but two of the companies interviewed were making efforts to measure the impact of their ISL programs on their employees. Our study suggests two frameworks that companies can use to help measure and improve the impact of their programs.

1. Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation

A number of companies measured Level 1 (**feelings**), through a survey after the program to gain initial feedback. Some companies also conducted follow-up surveys to **assess learning** (Level 2). Many respondents acknowledged that translating the experience into a **behavioural change** (Level 3) is more challenging, requiring some sort of pre- and post-assessments delivered before and after the ISL assignment to gauge any shifts. **Assessment of results** (Level 4) would require comparing control and training groups based on a common performance metric.

It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that ISL program managers find assessments at levels 3 and 4 more difficult and we are exploring the concept of an evaluation framework set up amongst interested companies to help assess impact at the level of behavioural change (level 3 on Kirkpatrick's model).

2. Wick, Pollard & Jefferson --- Turning Development into Results

This framework is less about measuring impact and more about making development programs more impactful. The model suggests that turning development experiences into business results requires that six disciplines of breakthrough learning are followed. Our study showed that some programs were taking some of these steps but that all programs could benefit from taking more:

- i) Define outcomes in business terms – are you clear about the business outcomes?
- ii) Design the complete experience – do you have a follow-up plan in place?
- iii) Deliver for application – will the newly acquired skills be applied to real work situations?
- iv) Drive follow-through – are assignees made accountable for optimizing the company resources?
- v) Deploy active support – do you have ongoing support for returning participants?
- vi) Document results – do you formally document outcomes to understand overall impact?

OUR CALL TO ACTION

Our paper has shown that ISL programs, whether setup to address LD or CSR needs, represent a remarkably rich learning opportunity and findings suggested that 7 of the 10 needed leadership competencies, as defined by companies, can be developed through ISL programs. The ISL program learning outcomes identified in this study also align with emerging competency models for global leadership.

Our call to action is for business leaders, Human Resources departments, and executive education providers to embrace the potential of these programs to address the leadership needs of this century. ISL assignments should be recognized as the development assignments of the 21st century and be accorded the resources, focus and status they deserve.

For a full copy of the paper click [here](#)

Appendix 1: Competencies required to be a global leader

	Cabrera and Unruh (2013)	Sharkey, Razi, Cooke, and Barge (2012)	Pless, Maak, and Stahl (2011)
Competencies Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Global Mindset: Ability to connect across cultures. ▪ Global Entrepreneurship: Ability to create a new value through divergence, convergence, and networks. ▪ Global Citizenship: Act of contributing to prosperity and value for all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Team connectivity: Ability to coordinate and integrate people across boundaries. ▪ Pragmatic flexibility: Ability to adapt to other cultures. ▪ Uncertainty resilience: Ability to build upon differences and complexity. ▪ Perspective responsiveness: Ability to act upon both intuition and fact. ▪ Talent orientation: Ability to achieve tasks through people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Global Mindset: cosmopolitan thinking, managing complexity ▪ Community Building: Stakeholder engagement, improved interpersonal skill, personalized relationship management ▪ Responsible Mindset: CSR-related knowledge, socially responsible reflection, servant leadership attitude
Forms of Capital or Intelligences Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intellectual Capital: Knowledge and understanding of global business, global markets, global supply chains and socio-political systems. ▪ Societal Capital: Trusting relationships with people who are different from themselves. ▪ Psychological Capital: Openness, flexibility, respect for and the willingness to work with other cultures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive intelligence ▪ Emotional intelligence ▪ Business intelligence ▪ Cultural intelligence ▪ Global intelligence ▪ Moral intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cultural intelligence: Knowledge of other cultures, culture-specific knowledge, cultural sensitivity and empathy, non-judgmentalism ▪ Ethical literacy: Moral awareness, belief in importance of virtues and values ▪ Self-development: Self-awareness, new perspective on life and business, belief in importance of social relationships and work-life balance