Promoting corporate social responsibility and sustainable development through management development: What can be learned from international service learning programs?

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Abstract

In this article we discuss how the human resource development (HRD) function can support corporate sustainability strategy by designing and implementing leadership development programs incorporating international service learning assignments. We describe “Project Ulysses”, an integrated service learning program that involves sending participants in teams to developing countries to work in cross-sector partnerships with NGOs and social entrepreneurs, supporting them in their fight against pressing global problems. We present the findings of a narrative analysis of learning stories produced by Ulysses participants. Understanding how participants make sense of, and learn from, their experiences abroad provides us with insights into how service learning programs can help managers to develop the knowledge, skills and mindset that will enable them to successfully support a company’s global sustainability and CSR efforts. We conclude by discussing the implications for leadership development, specifically how organizations can incorporate a responsibility and sustainability focus in their management development programs.
Promoting Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development

Through Management Development: What Can be Learned from International Service Learning Programs?

Two major trends have shaped recent developments in management education and the way current and future leaders are developed and prepared for the challenges facing contemporary corporations. The first trend, globalization, is all pervasive. At no time in human history has the contact between individuals from different countries and cultures been greater. Today, managers and professionals at all levels work and interact with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Executives travel around broader regions while their jobs remain headquartered in one place. Global virtual teams are created to address important strategic challenges and to become globally competitive. As a result of this globalization process at both societal and organizational level the demands on global managers have increased significantly (e.g., Beechler & Javidan, 2007; Bird & Osland, 2004; Lane, DiStefano, Maznevski and Dietz, 2009; Levy, Beechler, Taylor and Boyacigiller, 2007; Mendenhall, 2008).

The second trend is more recent, but equally pervasive, and concerns the quest for responsible leadership and its implications for the way management education should be conducted. Management scholars, policymakers and educators (Giacalone and Thompson, 2006; Ghoshal, 2005; Khurana, 2007; Mintzberg, 2004; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Pfeffer, 2005; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002) have increasingly questioned the appropriateness of existing leadership development approaches and the assumptions underlying traditional management education, which, in their view, failed to prepare students and managers for the wider social and ethical issues facing business leaders today. One of these new demands is the expectation of stakeholders that corporations and their leaders address the environmental, social, and economic threats facing our society and take a more active role in the fight against some of the most pressing problems in the world, such as poverty, environmental degradation, human
rights protection and pandemic diseases (Bansal, 2002; Epstein, 2008; Hart & Milstein, 2003; Maak & Pless, 2006; Waldman & Galvin, 2008). As a growing number of public-private partnerships, social innovations and leadership initiatives (e.g. Tomorrow’s Leaders Group of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development; the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS) indicates, more and more business leaders accept their co-responsibility as global citizens for finding solutions to these problems. Yet, surveys of senior executives conducted by the strategy consultancy McKinsey (2006), as well as interviews with managers of large U.S.-based firms (Bansal, 2002) reveal a “knowing-doing” gap with respect to responsible leadership: While executives recognize the broader responsibilities of business in society, they seem to struggle to cope effectively with the wider social and environmental issues facing today’s business leaders.

In response to the trends and challenges outlined above, a growing number of companies are trying to find new ways to incorporate the principles of sustainable development into their management development activities. In this paper, we discuss the potentially crucial role that international service learning assignments can play in helping executives to develop the mindset, skills and knowledge that are critical to create value on the “triple bottom line” (Elkington, 1997) of environmental, social, and economic performance. We will discuss how management development can support a firm’s CSR and sustainability efforts and provide a specific example of an international service learning program, PricewaterhouseCoopers’ (PwC) “Project Ulysses”. We will present the findings of an analysis of learning stories produced by Ulysses participants upon completion of their field assignments in developing countries to explore the nature of their learning experiences. Understanding how Ulysses participants make sense of, and learn from, their experiences abroad will help us gain insight into the dimensions of responsible global leadership and sustainable development, and how these competencies can be built or enhanced.
The Role of Management Development in Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development

Although human resource management (HRM) in general, and the human resource development (HRD) function in particular, potentially play a key role in supporting a firm’s sustainability strategy and CSR efforts, the link between HRM and social performance has received only scant attention from scholars.

There are basically two perspectives on CSR and HRM (Buciuniene & Kazlauskaite, 2012; Deckop, 2006). On the one hand, human resources, as a key stakeholder group and perhaps the most important production factor or “resource” of the corporation, can be looked upon as an object of CSR. This perspective is concerned with issues such as the fair and proper treatment of employees, employee duties, ethical issues in employee relations, creation of ecologically sustainable workplaces, and so on (e.g., Greenwood, 2002; Crane & Matten, 2007). Accordingly, socially responsible organizations are believed to be taking better care of their current and future employees and continuously seeking to improve their working conditions and well-being through implementation of sustainable and responsible HRM practices.

The second line of research explores how the “arrow” pointing from CSR to HRM can or should be reversed. This perspective acknowledges that HRM plays a critical role in the implementation of a company’s CSR and sustainability strategy (Buciuniene & Kazlauskaite, 2012; Cohen, 2010; Orlitzky & Swanson, 2006). For example, Orlitzky and Swanson (2006) argue that since the successful pursuance of social and environmental objectives is heavily dependent on corporate values, organizations must design HR processes that increase employee value awareness and recognition of stakeholder concerns. These include hiring for attitudes and values, performance management systems that assess employees on how much they contribute to the social performance of the organization, and training and development activities that develop skills in receptive stakeholder engagement. The HRM function can thus affect the ethical culture and social performance of an organization, and HR professionals become
important partners in advancing responsible business practices and meeting the demands of different stakeholders (Cohen, 2010; Lepak & Colakoglu, 2006).

Empirical research (e.g., Fenwick & Bierema, 2008; Preuss, Haunschild & Matten, 2009) suggests that the number of companies in which HRM plays a crucial role in CSR and sustainability is still quite small. For example, a qualitative study of HRD managers in eight large North American firms declaring explicit commitment to CSR and sustainability concluded that “HRD appeared to be only marginally involved or interested in the firm’s CSR activities” (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008, p. 24). Yet other studies (Cohen, 2010; Googins, Mirvis & Rochlin, 2007; Stahl et al., 2012) reveal that a growing number of companies are using HRD as a driver of socially responsible business performance and are trying to find new ways to prepare their managers for the social, ecological, and ethical issues facing companies today.

An interesting new trend in management development is the use of international service learning programs and “consciousness-raising” experiences (Mirvis, 2008) in increasing managers’ awareness for social and environmental issues. A global survey of the “top global companies for developing leaders” conducted by Fortune Magazine and the HR consulting firm Hewitt Associates found that leadership development through international service learning assignments “has become the major theme among virtually all the companies in this ranking” (Colvin, 2009, p. 2). The following are some examples of leadership development programs that have an explicit focus on sustainability and corporate social responsibility:

- IBM sends teams around the world to work with local organizations on social, economic and environmental problems, thereby developing their executives’ global leadership skills and building goodwill for the company in the developing world (Colvin, 2009).
- Novo Nordisk, the world leader in diabetes care, sends their vice presidents on service assignments to Latin America to educate them about the dilemmas faced in the
allocation of costly medicines and other health resources in emerging market countries (Googins, Mirvis & Rochlin, 2007).

- At Natura Cosméticos, an environmentally conscious Brazilian manufacturer of skin care, solar filters, and cosmetics, selected managers work in an environmental NGO to help build and manage it (Colvin, 2009).

- Unilever uses “consciousness-raising experiences” to help executives see how their businesses can connect better to the larger world. At their annual meeting in Sarawak, Unilever’s top Asian leaders came together to experience, firsthand, the costs to local communities incurred in the clear-cutting of tropical rainforests. This and similar trips to rural China and India led to calls to incorporate sustainability into regional strategic plans (Mirvis, 2008).

- Pfizer implemented a program called “Pfizer Global Health Fellows” whose goal is to educate key decision makers in the company about global health policy and healthcare infrastructure. Pfizer employees apply for specific positions with NGOs and approximately 50 volunteers are selected by the company and its NGO partners to participate in a 3 to 6 month work assignment in a developing country (https://globalhealthfellows.pfizer.com/login.asp?ReturnUrl=home.asp, accessed Nov. 30, 2010)

These examples illustrate a new trend in management development: the use of international field assignment experiences to develop socially and environmentally responsible leaders. Next, we will describe and evaluate a specific example of such a program, PwC’s “Project Ulysses”, to illustrate how organizations can incorporate a responsibility and sustainability focus in their management development programs.

Promoting Responsible Leadership and Sustainable Development through International Service Learning Programs: Project Ulysses
The Ulysses Program: Objectives, Content and Alignment with HR Strategy

According to PwC the overall goal of Project Ulysses is to develop responsible leaders who are capable of assuming senior leadership roles in a high performing organisation, at both country and international level. Specifically, the goals are

- to build a global network of leaders who understand the importance of values in developing trust-based relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders and who can create a sustainable brand that is differentiated by the quality of these relationships with our clients, our people and the broader community; [and]
- to help our leaders to understand the changing role of business in influencing the economic, political, social and environmental well-being of communities and markets across the world, and our responsibility to work in collaboration with a broader group of stakeholders to achieve sustainable success through responsible worldwide business practices. (PwC, 2008)

To achieve these goals, participants are sent in multinational teams to developing countries to work in cross-sector partnerships with NGOs, social entrepreneurs or international organizations, supporting them in their fight against pressing global problems, such as diseases, poverty, and environmental degradation. Past projects focused for instance on poverty alleviation in East Timor, strengthening coordination in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Uganda, and providing access to clean drinking water in Madagascar.

The overall program goals of Ulysses are closely linked to the learning objectives at the individual level. The intended learning outcomes fall into three broad categories:

1. **Sustainability:** The initial focus on developing greater awareness and understanding of issues related to sustainable development was broadened to include corporate social responsibility and citizenship.
2. **Diversity:** The diversity dimension aims at developing intercultural competencies and global leadership skills, e.g., developing skills for effectively leading diverse teams and interacting appropriately with stakeholders in different cultural settings.

3. **Leadership:** The leadership dimension has been defined more narrowly in terms of leadership development, self-management and personal growth.

Thus, the key program objectives are to develop and enhance the knowledge and skills of program participants in the areas of responsible leadership, global leadership and self-leadership.

Ulysses was initiated and owned by PwC’s global talent management unit. It was designed in 1999 by a small group of visionary HR professionals who foresaw the need for new approaches for developing global leaders in light of complex challenges in business and society. Their approach was to blend new learning methods (e.g. service learning) with content customized to internal and external leadership challenges (diversity and sustainability). They started Ulysses as a grassroots initiative and enlisted internal champions for the program among HR executives (e.g. the Head of Global Talent Development, the Head of Global HR) and over time among business leaders (e.g. Regional Leaders, Global Managing Partner, Head of Advisory Services Unit) to formally anchor the program in the organization.

Due to its sustainability objective the Ulysses program has from the very beginning been closely connected to the sustainability practice of PwC which has been advising policy makers and practitioners on sustainability issues (specifically climate change) since 1997. Today it comprises over 700 Sustainability and Climate Change professionals who offer a broad range of advisory, assurance and tax services in this area. Internal and external sustainability experts worked with Ulysses participants before and after their assignments.

“Project Ulysses” has been running since 2001, with a break in 2002 due to the September 11 events. It targets executives at the partner level throughout PwC’s global network,
which consists of local firms in around 150 countries. The partners are co-owners of the company with leadership responsibility for specific areas and people. As of 2008, 120 partners from 35 countries and 6 continents had participated in the program.

**Program Design**

As shown in Figure 1, the Ulysses program has six phases -- nomination, preparation, induction, assign, debriefing and networking – described below.

--- Please insert Figure 1 about here ---

Nomination Phase. Different PwC countries select potential candidates and recommend one person for the program. The decentralized identification process varies from country to country: some countries shortlist potential participants and then select them via interviews, while others have an open application process and select participants via assessment centers. Common selection criteria are: the person’s tenure status in the partner track (3-5 years), demonstrated leadership effectiveness at the local level, potential for senior leadership roles, and English language proficiency. The final candidate is nominated by senior management, usually the country’s CEO. From this pool, the Ulysses program office (UPO) selects the final group of around 20 participants based on country and gender representation with the goal of creating a diverse learning community.

Preparation Phase: In this phase, participants receive individual briefings on the program by UPO, get instructions to collect their 360-degree feedback data from different feedback sources (e.g. supervisors, peers, employees, customers, etc.) and conduct a first conference call with their executive coach (usually external coaching professionals with a background in psychology and/or HR). In this phase the UPO composes diverse Ulysses teams based on nationality, gender and geographic representation, and seniority. The team building processes are kicked-off by conference calls with the external coaches who also facilitate the
team coaching. Each Ulysses team then selects a project assignment with a partner organization (e.g. social enterprise, international organization, NGO) based on information provided by the UPO who had visited each organization. The project assignments were pre-selected by the UPO based on specific criteria (e.g. country security levels, achievements of the partner organization, quality of the project like impact on local communities and breadth of interaction opportunities for participants with diverse stakeholders).

Induction Phase. In a seven-day Foundation Week, participants meet personally for the first time.

On the individual level, participants continue to work with their coaches on their 360-degree data and craft a development plan for their personal leadership journey. On a daily basis, participants practice yoga and meditation guided by a trainer to help them become more self-aware and mindful and to develop an interior balance of body and mind to better cope with challenging situations.

At the team level, participants work with their team coaches on defining team objectives, building a team culture and developing their coaching skills to practice peer coaching in the field. Furthermore, teams receive orientation on their assignment and meet a representative of the partner organization. With them they define project objectives, launch a project plan and define terms of engagement.

At the group level, participants get input from distinguished external speakers on topics related to the learning dimensions. The Head of Global Talent Development, as owner of the Ulysses program, familiarizes participants with the overall vision of the Ulysses learning experience in the context of PwC’s strategy, facilitates the guest modules as well as discussions with members of the global leadership team who come in as faculty. Members of the Global Leadership Team are the Global CEO and the CEO’s of the PwC networks representing different countries and/or regions.
Assignment Phase. Immediately after Foundation Week, participants began their 6-8 week team assignment in developing countries. Teams worked in partnership with their host organizations on projects dedicated to health, poverty alleviation and environmental issues (see Appendix) to help their partner organization better achieve their social and/or environmental mission and create sustainable solutions at the local level. Projects required cooperation and interaction with partners from different sectors (e.g. local communities, government officials, non-governmental organizations, social enterprises and/or international organizations) with different mindsets and value systems. Throughout this phase participants receive coaching via coaching calls and one personal field visit by their team coach to help them overcome challenges within the team and support them in the peer coaching process.

Debriefing Phase. Shortly after the field assignment, all participants reconvene for a Review Week where individuals and teams share stories about their experiences and learning outcomes. The week’s objective is to help participants make sense of their experiences and translate them into learning by storytelling. On the individual level, learnings are debriefed in one-on-one coaching sessions with regard to objectives set in the Foundation Week. As a result, the development plan is further refined to include the transfer of learnings back home and to craft an individual leadership vision for the future. At the large group level, the Foundation Week external speakers help participants debrief the program learning dimensions in their experiences. At the team level, coaches and facilitators work with the teams to further refine the content and presentation of stories to be shared with the firm’s Global Leadership Team at the end of the Review Week.

The learning stories shared during the first meeting with the Global Leadership Team in 2003 made such a powerful impression that Sam DiPiazza, the Global CEO (2002-2009), made a personal visit in the Foundation Week of the next program and representatives of top leadership served as discussants in the Review Week of subsequent programs. During his tenure Ulysses became the flagship Leadership Development program of PwC global and Re-
sponsible Leadership one of the major strategic pillars of the firm. The program has received intensive coverage in the internal and external media and on the external website both at the global and local level and received the Global HR News Corporate Citizenship Award.

Networking Phase. Following the Review Week, participants join other program alumni in the Ulysses network. After two global alumni meetings in 2005 and 2007, regular regional meetings are organized by alumni. Program alumni work on task forces related to diversity, sustainability and poverty with a specific business focus. Some have initiated regional Ulysses programs, often with shorter assignment phases (e.g. in Asia and UK), while others have set up PwC foundations within their respective countries.

Learning Methodology

The Ulysses Program is based on an integrative approach to leadership development which utilizes a variety of learning methods and assessment tools, including experiential service learning, 360-degree feedback, coaching, lectures by experts, meditation and yoga, reflective exercises, and storytelling sessions to achieve learning at the cognitive, affective and behavioral levels. At the core of the program are international service learning assignments in developing countries.

Service learning is rooted in the experiential learning methodology of David Kolb (Kolb, 1984) and goes back to the work of John Dewey (1916, 1938) who views experience as social and communal, and education as interactive. In the Ulysses Program design, the intent was to extend existing and familiar experiential learning pedagogy through service learning assignments and “consciousness-raising” experiences (Googins et al., 2007; Mirvis, 2008) that aim to broaden, deepen, and ultimately expand the perspectives executives have of themselves and their role in the world around them.

According to the literature, service learning assignments have the potential for moral development (Boss, 1994; Markus et al., 1993), raising awareness on social issues (Kolenko et al., 1996), encouraging civic and social responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Fleckenstein,
1997; Gabelnick, 1997; Godfrey et al., 2005; Lester et al., 2005; Morgan & Streb, 1999), developing a greater tolerance for diversity (Dumas, 2002) and enhancing relational abilities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rhoads, 1997). Although the Ulysses Program utilizes a service learning approach, it differs in important respects from traditional service learning programs that tend to focus on university students (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999; Morton & Troppe, 1996; Salimbene et al., 2005). Ulysses targets executives and partners who already have leadership responsibility in their local firms and are being groomed for senior leadership roles in a global network. Also, Ulysses has a strong international component – the goal is to develop responsible global leaders, and assignments take place in foreign countries. Furthermore, assignments are full-time during a concentrated period and part of an integrated learning concept that combines field experiences with individual assessment, coaching and team building.

What Participants Learn in the Ulysses Program:

Analysis of Learning Narratives

While the challenging conditions experienced on assignment can serve as a catalyst for personal development and growth (Conger & Benjamin, 1999; McCall, 1998; Van Velsor et al., 1998), the transformation of experience into learning requires a sophisticated distilling process that involves reflection, analysis of previous experiences, and discourse with others who faced similar challenges. Weick (1995) reminds us that “[e]xperiences are not what happens to us, but what we do to what happens to us” (p. 176). In other words, experiences do not themselves engage participants, stretch them, or instruct them; the onus of transforming experiences into perspective-expanding and potentially life-changing encounters is on the participants (Mirvis, 2008). In the Ulysses program, the transformation of experience into learning is facilitated by telling stories.

In the next section, we present the analyses of the participants’ stories to explore how they made sense of their experiences in a developmental way, to provide insights into the
learning gains achieved through the Ulysses Program, and, more generally, to better understand how international service learning programs like this can support a company’s CSR efforts and the implementation of a global sustainability strategy.

**Sample and Methodology**

We conducted, transcribed and analyzed qualitative interviews with 70 Ulysses participants, the entire participant population of the programs of 2003-2006 program cohorts. Of this pool of twenty three teams in four regions (Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa), nearly half of the field assignments (43%) took place in Sub-Saharan Africa (Cameroon, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Zamba and Madagascar); six (29%) in Asia (China, Cambodia, East Timor and India), six (29%) in Latin America (Belize, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru) and one in Eastern Europe (Moldova). Teams were composed of three to four participants with the exception of two teams with only two participants.

We interviewed each participant before the field assignment in the Foundation Week (the induction phase) and one to two weeks after the assignment in the Review Week (the debriefing phase), as illustrated by Figure 1. The interviews in the Foundation Week (lasting between 30 and 40 minutes) served two purposes: to collect data on the living and working context of the participants in their home countries and to build a relationship of trust with each participant. Interviews in the Review Week were kicked off using a variation of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) asking the following key prompt question: “What were the two most important incidences that you experienced during the assignment?” In the 60 and 90 minute-interviews, we used appreciative questions to create a supportive climate and motivate participants to share openly the experiences made during their assignments, and an unstructured interview format to obtain detailed descriptions of participants’ experiences within the project team, with the partner organization, and with members of the local communities. This format involved listening to what each individual person had to say, asking further questions beyond what we already knew and probing deeper into participants’ learning experienc-
es. We made sure that certain topic areas were covered with each interviewee: experiences and learning gains related to the learning dimensions described on page 8. This format ensured that certain key topics were covered, but was flexible enough to allow the pursuit of new lines of questioning as relevant issues emerged in the interviews.

The narrative analysis was based on both the transcribed interviews conducted with each individual and on the videotaped team stories shared during the Review Week. The data collection and analysis process was guided by Kohler Riesman’s (1993) framework of the narrative research process, which focuses on five “levels of representation” (attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing and reading) in the production and analysis of learning narratives. Attending stands for a conscious approach towards experience, which may involve anticipating, reflecting, and remembering experiences, to make phenomena meaningful. In the Foundation Week of the Ulysses Program, facilitation methods such as coaching were used to help participants approach the upcoming learning experiences in the field in a conscious and attentive way. Significant experiences that participants had during their field assignments and that were related to the learning areas were shared in the Review Week. Through storytelling, participants made sense of their experiences in a process of interaction with facilitators, researchers and other participants. A third level of representation enters as the investigator transcribes interviews representing primary experience. In order to preserve the character of the original speech we refrained from condensation of speech and tried to preserve the personal dialect of each participant. In the analysis phase, two researchers independently searched the transcripts for stories indicating learning in the three key learning areas of the program, as well as learning outcomes that were not intended by the designers of Ulysses. The researchers then read and discussed the results of their analyses to form a consensus on the final pool of stories, which led to the selection of 177 stories.

Results of the Narrative Analysis
Next, we will discuss eight selected learning stories from six different projects to illustrate how participants made sense of their experiences and what they learned in their service learning assignments. Stories were selected based on their narrative strength (being engaging, well structured, having a plot; Gabriel 2004) and quality to exemplify a specific learning area (see Table 1).

-- Please insert Table 1 about here --

Learning Gains in the Area of Global Leadership

The Toilet Project Story. The following story was told by a North American member of Ulysses team A that engaged in an HIV/AIDS-related project in Namibia. The team had three participants from Central America, North America and Europe.

It was a political body who had donated toilets to the village. These toilets don’t require running water. They work on a filtration system. Essentially, they require wind that decomposes the human feces. And the shantytowns are part of the village that is required to dig some holes in the ground for these toilets to be erected. Holes of probably three feet by three feet, or about two yards by two yards. And the toilets were sitting in the council compound because the community had refused to dig the holes. So that’s what we heard in the meetings. And you say: "Well, how hard is it to dig a hole in the ground when you have probably 60% unemployment in the village? Why can’t you encourage somebody to dig some hole, because that does improve the lifestyle of lots of people who live in that community?"

The thing I learned, and the thing that I’ve learned probably after when we were into the second village visit, was something that you get told when you are very young and when you cross the street: and it was the stop-look-listen routine. And I remember telling my team mates that if there is one thing that has been changing in me from the first to the second to the third week, it’s I am realizing: I am stopping more, I am looking more, and I am listening more. And this was the one place I had to constantly do it, I really constantly stopped, looked, listened as to what was going on in this community. It was probably a day or two after that ini-
tial meeting, when we met some of the people in the community that should have dug the holes to put these toilets in. And I remember asking the question: "Why did you not dig the holes for these toilets? You have to explain this to me, because I am really struggling with why you don’t do this for your community." And the individual we were speaking to said: "You know, there are some good reasons we didn’t dig the holes. One of them is that they were in an area where many of the unemployed children go and play in, and they use it as a sports area. And they wanted us to dig holes right in the middle of that area. And we said no, not there, somewhere else, but the council wanted them there." The second thing he said was that putting the toilets in place is going to bring more people into the village, who believe they are going to improve their habit of living — and it’s going to be actually worse. So, now you start to hear a different side, a different story. And not one that you’d ever turned your mind to, when you were hearing the first story, a day and a half ago. So that was part of the stop-look-listen and don’t prejudge routine because you don’t really know all the facts. [Namibia, 2003-8]

The story reveals the approach ("stop-look-listen") that enabled the narrator to understand the local perspective and gain insights into the causes of project failure. Using inquisitiveness and empathy, he succeeded in unveiling the specific local conditions and understanding the mindset of the affected people. This learning process contributed to learning at the interpersonal level: the willingness and ability to interact with local people, employing a respectful and mindful approach in gathering information, being non-judgmental and the ability to understand different perspectives. These qualities are considered important dimensions of cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Thomas & Inkson, 2009; Thomas, 2008) and global leadership (Hollenbeck, 2001; Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou & Maznevski 2008; Osland, Taylor, & Mendenhall, 2009).

The story provides an example of learning gains in the areas of global leadership and global mindset, such as grasping and managing complexity, displaying cultural empathy and sensitivity, approaching others in a non-judgmental way (Bird & Osland, 2004; Levy et al.,
2007; Mendenhall, 2008). These are three of the specific learning outcomes identified in Table 1. Moreover, understanding issues from the perspective of local stakeholders is considered an important quality of leaders in order to orchestrate different values, interests and needs and to facilitate change that results in sustainable solutions at the local level (Pless & Maak, 2008).

The Candy Wrapper Story. The following health-related story was shared by the same narrator as the previous story:

There is one really important aspect of diversity that I should mention to you. It's the awareness, respect, reconciliation-concept. And I'm really struggling with the reconciliation piece, with much of what I saw in Namibia. It has to do with: "What is it that needs to happen in the communities to change people’s behaviors in terms of sexual practices?" I went in there thinking: They don’t have the education. They are not being made aware of the issues around HIV and AIDS, and that's the root cause. But it’s so wrong, because awareness is like everywhere. (…) People in shantytowns know about condoms, they know about AIDS, they know what it does. And yet the behavior doesn’t change. (…) I do think it’s a million dollar question. And nobody really has the real answer. But some of the underlying reasons could be: We don’t really understand the African communities because they’ve been ruled by white people for hundreds of years. And they seem to accept fate and destiny a lot easier than maybe a lot of other people do around the world. And it’s interesting because you will hear things said to you in some of these communities when you talk about HIV and AIDS and [ask] why don’t you use condoms? Well, you'll hear things like: "Death is a part of life. And if you gonna die you can die young and you can die old. And so why worry about when you’re gonna die?"

In addition, we also often forget the life that they live. When the biggest challenge is to put food on the table every single day of the year, they don’t think about "I wanna live to be a ripe old age of 65 or 75 or 85." That’s not something that’s in their psychology. You hear a lot about people having lots of partners — not knowing who those partners are and what they do. And you go back and say: "Well, you have lots of partners. But why don’t you use a condom? It still cuts down the risk". And then you listen a bit more and you try and understand
what is happening in the communities. Well, unemployment is huge. Poverty is huge. So what happens in the majority of these communities on a daily basis, when people have a little bit of money they go get drunk — and seriously drunk...and people do a lot of things when they are drunk. And they forget about condoms and all those other things.

Lots of young girls have to go out from very early age — ten, eleven, twelve. And they are a source of income for their family. So ‘go and be a prostitute’ is an accepted part of life in many of the communities. Because that’s the way the girls gonna earn some money and she is gonna bring it back into the household. A lot of the men — with respect to those girls who [they] can afford to pay — don’t actually live in the communities. They tend to be people who are actually traveling through those communities. And so they have no intention of using condoms. You’ll hear an interesting saying: "We don’t eat candy or sweets with wrappers on. Why should we have sex with wrappers on?"

I can come up with a number of reasons of why, why, why — I think. But I am still struggling with the reconciliation. It’s like saying: "There’s a gun to your head. You can have sex six times in the next week – one of those bullets is gonna fire. Why do you do it?" Well, they carry on. You can't say people don’t know, you can’t say they are stupid. And that’s the hardest thing to reconcile yourself with when you’re there and when you come back. That’s the one thing I am really struggling with. [Namibia, 2003-8]

The story illustrates a learning process with regard to coping with dilemmas and cultural paradoxes (e.g., Osland & Bird, 2000; Fang, 2006; Gannon, 2007) that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. It provides an example of a respectful approach towards local people and a complex problem (HIV/AIDS) that is connected with local practices that contribute to the spread of the disease. The narrative illustrates a shift from a dominant approach of making assumptions and jumping to conclusions to a respectful approach of co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001) into the social context and into the human condition of a different culture. The narrator talks to different stakeholders, listens actively, looks at the problem from the perspective of locals, makes sense of their sexual practice in the historical, socio-cultural and socio-
economic context and derives an understanding of the problem from the perspective of the affected people. While he does not agree with these practices he neither judges nor devalues the people who practise them. However, in contrast to the previous story it becomes more challenging for the narrator to accept the different "local ontology" as he is unable to reconcile the dilemma he encounters (because it contradicts Western thinking and values). Still, he shows tolerance and respect for other cultures and viewpoints despite disagreement in light of the consequences.

Similar narratives about fatal behaviour in communities were shared in six other teams in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, among our key findings is that participants were frequently faced with dilemmas and cultural paradoxes (Osland & Bird, 2000) that neither fit their expectations nor enabled them to come up with solutions to the problem they uncovered. In many instances, the resulting tensions had a learning effect even if the contradictions remained unresolved, because the paradoxes increased participants’ awareness of the complexity of global sustainability efforts and alerted them to the danger of resorting to overly simplistic solutions and explanations.

**Learning Gains in the Area of Responsible Leadership**

The analysis of the following learning narratives suggests that the Ulysses experience helped participants to enhance their awareness and knowledge related to sustainability, social responsibility, citizenship, and ethics.

**The Witchcraft Story.** The following story was told by a North America member of Team B, which worked on a health-related project in Kenya. The team’s other three members came from South-East Asia, North America and Southern Europe.

To tell you about our observations: [In the country] we still see a lot of stigmatization of HIV/AIDS, which is very strong. In certain areas where we worked, we saw that certain committees in that group, certain members in that committee, have not seen a condom before. But they are supposed to be telling people about how to use condoms. We also heard about the be-
lief in "cleansing" HIV. We were told that there is a belief that if you got HIV-positive, you see the witch doctor and they will tell you to sleep with a virgin and you will be saved. The information we found is that the average young girl who is raped because of this is around 6 years. We saw a 6 year old girl, at that time she was 7, and she got HIV. We were told that she was raped by her neighbour, but her family doesn’t care. [Kenya, 2/ 2005-6]

The narrator shares an observation and presents a cultural practice that violates human rights and internationally shared and accepted moral standards. The intolerable practice of "virgin cleansing" troubled the team profoundly because all team members were parents themselves and imagined how they would feel if their own children were affected. As one of the team members from Southern Europe voiced individually: "The average age of rape victims in that area was between the ages of 4 and 12. My eldest daughter is 10 and my youngest daughter is 7. At that moment I realised how lucky I was to have been born in the Western Civilisation. I am not a sentimental man, but I found myself in a far away land, incredulous and with a large lump in my throat." The experience triggered within the team an intense dialogue and moral reflection as to how much difference is tolerable and when are cultural practices merely different and when are they outright wrong.

According to Donaldson (1996), the challenge is for executives in foreign settings to find a balanced way between the local and the global and thus two possible extremes: cultural relativism ("this is how people behave in this part of the world...") and ethical imperialism ("everyone should follow our norms..."). In other words, responsible global leaders reconcile respect for core human values (e.g. as defined by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights) with respect for local traditions and cultural context when deciding what is right and what is wrong (1996: 6). In this sense the narrative provides an example of increased sensitivity for ethical issues, raising awareness of the tensions between local traditions and core human values and, thus, the moral need for global integration (specific learning outcomes in Table 1).
The Distributive Justice Story. This story was told by a program participant from
Western Europe, a member of team C that worked on a project dedicated to poverty allevia-
tion in Zambia. His three team mates came from South-East Asia, Eastern Europe and the
Pacific region.

Every morning we would arrive at the center where we were working. And you would see
children there with distended stomachs. You would see the brothers, waiting to get whatever
work where they could earn money. Even going around to the villages and hearing the stories
of the villagers involved, was an emotional experience. The way that they help themselves.
They were almost embarrassed. They did not like their situation compared with our situation.
They looked upon us as superiors. And I never felt that. More than that, they were individuals
trying to improve their odds in life. They were trying to improve their personal economic con-
dition, their own well-being. And they were doing things; they were having challenged them-
selves, and challenged their skill sets in ways I’ve never had to do. And they were struggling,
and they were fighting, and they were trying to beat the poverty that is inherent in a lot of the
African systems that we saw. And in fact, I felt in many respects inferior to those people. Eve-
rything I had, as I said, had been given to me. I’ve been given a good education, I had not had
to fight for it. As a result of my education, I’ve been able to find good employment. They’ve
had to fight to make their money. I feel quite humbled by that. [Zambia, 2003-3]

This story demonstrates how a service learning experience can trigger reflections on perceived
disparities in opportunities in life between people in developed and developing countries and
the emergence of humility (see Table 1). The learning in this story is that success in life and
differences in living conditions, education, employment, etc. between people in developed and
developing countries cannot simply be reduced to individual effort and talent. They are first
and foremost determined by other factors such as luck (coincidence of birth ─ being born into
right country) and context-dependent socio-economic chances of access to life opportunities.
Notwithstanding the capabilities to improve one’s quality of life, there are limiting circum-
stances that hinder people in deprived communities from doing so. Thus, there are unequal
chances for many, especially on the African continent. This reflection on distributive justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Rawls, 1971) leads the narrator to a reflective self assessment of privileged circumstances in which he born, educated, and able to live and work. Yet, instead of arrogance, false pride, or criticism for development failures, we find deepened affection and respect for the local people and humility. Heightened awareness of ethical issues is the basis for more critical reflection on project-related issues.

**Hydro Story.** This story was narrated by a North American participant, a member of Team D that went to Madagascar to conduct a project related to poverty reduction. The team’s other three participants came from Eastern Europe, Western Europe and South-East Asia.

I had a similar "evolving perspective" during my experience - our work was to conduct a micro-business study of rural villages to provide data and guidance in determining which villages should receive electricity when a hydro-power dam was constructed. We had initially thought that bringing electricity would of course be good for these villages and allow for them to be happier and more developed. After some time observing the simple life that they led without electricity and without being connected to the outside world, we began to feel that perhaps providing electricity and connectivity would not be that good of an idea since it would likely change and perhaps corrupt this wonderfully simple life that these people enjoyed. [Madagascar, 1/ 2005-10]

In this story the narrator questions the underlying assumption that bringing electricity to rural villages in Madagascar would automatically lead to a better life for those indigenous communities the team had visited. Ultimately, the reflective question raised is: Who determines what a good life is? Is it defined in materialistic, quantitative, economic terms and measured in numbers, such as the gross national product (GNP), or in qualitative terms, such as: clean water and an unspoiled environment; life with, and from, nature; intact social and cultural communities; material independence and self-sufficiency; or even happiness? In this sense the story provides a learning example of responsible reflection (see Table 1) on the project objec-
reative, electrification. The following story illustrates the next level of learning, which is the development of a broader understanding of sustainability guiding decision-making back home.

**Kids Alive Story.** This story was told by a participant from Southern Europe who was a member of Team B.

Well, everywhere you go, they want money. You ask them what they’re going to do with the money; they probably go buy food for a day or a week. If you give them more, they go buy food for a month. But sustainability is not about living for the next day. We had a couple of examples… unfortunately the majority of the examples were of the negative side, people were not having an understanding of sustainability at all. But when we have examples of people thinking about sustainability, embedding some income or generating sustainable solutions, it was a great success. I told you yesterday about this example of this orphanage, Kids Alive. Instead of buying books, they bought cows. Instead of buying rice, they made their own rice and even came to the extent that they built their own clinic with their own bricks that they made from the land they were given. This thing is now sustainable because they have enough cows to have enough milk… Now they even have enough cows to have some meat out of them. So it’s a micro case of how things can be sustainable. Taking things back home, we say, ‘If you’re going to do something, before you decide that’s the right thing to do, make sure you’ve thought about sustainability’. Is it fair to stay? Is it fair to make things better or is fair just for the day and it’s just going to wash away and perhaps do more damage in the end than do good? [Kenya, 2/ 2005-6]

This story illustrates how a service learning assignment can lead to a new perspective and broader understanding of sustainability. The narrator shares his reflections on the meaning of sustainability by stressing a successful example of sustainable development at the local level in Kenya. Having previously witnessed many failed efforts in the field, he contrasts these with the success of the Kids Alive project and comments on his key learning: that in order to determine the right thing to do a leader needs to think about the sustainability impact of his/her decision. Having witnessed – in a very basic sense – what “sustainability” means reminded
participants in this team of their responsibility as leaders to reflect (more than before the pro-
gram experience) on the impact of their decisions on the environmental footprint of their or-
ganization and thus of their co-responsibility as business leaders to contribute to sustainable
futures (Avery, 2005; WBCSD, 2006).

**Learning Gains in the Area of Self Leadership**

The analysis of learning narratives shows that challenging international service projects can
raise self-awareness and contribute to personal growth.

**Working with AIDS Infected People Story.** The following story was told by a partici-
pant from Western Europe who embarked with peers from Northern Europe and the Pacific-
Rim region on an HIV/AIDS related project in rural Uganda (Team H):

I spent two months in Uganda, and it had a major impact on me… So we were fortunate work-
ing with an NGO consisting locally of local people… who really believed in what they were
doing and wanted the project to succeed… their pride, their determination, their conviction in
helping people who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS… was an inspiration to us. And I
think they were very happy with the output of our work… We really spent the first three or
four weeks just listening and then trying to examine possible solutions. And had we tried to
accelerate or impose a solution, then it would not have been sustainable. The key objective of
all of this was to insure that whatever we left was sustainable… And it took a lot of learning
and listening and understanding to really get a firm handle of really what the issue is. In this
case the coordination of activities in the HIV/AIDS area… So we really just listened. And I
found, since I’ve returned, that I am listening much better and having much more focused
conversations, and I seem to have a peace as a result of this… Things that I got concerned
about before don’t seem important now. And that’s giving me a focus in … my life,… in
terms of understanding of where my heart is, what’s important to me, where I want to go in
my life? You know these are big questions. But I got some answers to those. . [Uganda, 2004-
15]
The narrator shares how he and the team learned to listen by engaging with local stakeholders and how this experience led to increased self-awareness and self-management. The story reveals how the team acquired and practised adaptive listening skills in response to local needs with the objective to build a lasting project legacy. In addition to this “stop-look-listen” practice previously introduced in the “Toilet story”, we discover in this particular instance how the experience of local stakeholder engagement led to a profound leadership self-assessment. The narrator shares how these listening skills have entered his day-to-day routine in his home environment to the extent that it has led to a much more balanced self-view and a more focused perspective on what is important in life (see Table 1). Listening is an important prerequisite for relationship building and cooperation. However, what to do when the other party is not willing to engage? The next story demonstrates how to solve this problem and enlist stakeholder cooperation.

Coping Story. The following story was told by a program participant from South Asia who was a member of a two-person team (Team F) that worked on an Eritrean health-related project. His team mate came from Southern Europe.

We learnt a big lesson. In an engagement like this [the partner organization] is not obliged to provide you with data and information the way a client is supposed to do. Therefore, these organizations don’t share your perception. If you tell them, this [getting land mines cleared] is very serious for us, in their minds they believe, “OK fine, you guys have come here for eight weeks; you can spend your time and get lost.” How do you make them share your perception? How do you enlist the cooperation of people who are not obliged to cooperate with you, who are not obliged to serve your cause? What we did was we realized that if we were to go on a purely professional basis, these guys are not going to respond. And we said the only way out is to bond with them. … So we started developing a relationship with them. About a week down the line, my colleague came up with a brilliant idea. He said “We’ll take all these guys out for a dinner… and bond with them right away.” You’d be surprised, there were some 13 or 15 people for that dinner, all key people. They were from the United Nations, from EDA, which
is the Eritrea De-mining Authority Office... We said “We’re the host – we are going to host the dinner.” And the bonding at that meeting was tremendous. You’d be surprised, the people who were indifferent to what we were doing, they got close to us. Only by inviting them for a dinner. And what we did was to follow up, reinforce and tell them: “Man, we had a wonderful time yesterday, now let’s get started.” So it was on a personal level first and then at the professional level. Now, this sparked off a chain reaction. Since we invited them and spent quite a bit of money, each one of them started inviting us in turn. So every week we used to have a barbecue at somebody’s place, go and spend the entire evening with them. And then the bonding became extremely strong. We became one team... That is the key learning. Unless you build a personal relationship with people who are not obliged to support you, you can never enlist the support of those guys. [Getting support from indifferent project partner, Eritrea, Interview 2004-4]

The narrator describes how this experience helped the team understand the importance of building personal relationships with stakeholders whose support is needed to accomplish a leadership objective, but who are be reluctant to provide it. The key learning illustrated by this narrative is twofold (see Table 1): first, the insight, that leaders can learn from overcoming setbacks and obstacles; and, second, a deepened understanding of how sustainable relationships can be built among key stakeholders (Maak & Pless, 2006).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

International service learning programs can play a potentially crucial role in developing responsible business leaders and thereby support a company’s CSR and sustainability efforts. In the following we will first review key learning outcomes and processes and discuss how international service learning programs like Ulysses can help managers to develop the knowledge, skills and mindset that will enable them to contribute to the ‘triple bottom line’ of creating environmental, social, and economic value (Bansal, 2002; Hart & Milstein, 2003).

Key learning outcomes
As described above the Ulysses program objectives are to develop the qualities of program participants in the areas of global leadership, responsible leadership and self management, initially labelled as diversity, sustainability and leadership. The overarching goal of the program is to develop responsible global leaders who understand the changing role of business in influencing communities and markets around the world and who are able to build and sustain trust-based relationships with diverse stakeholders.

Profound learning occurred in the area of global leadership. According to Bird and Osland (2004: 61), the transition from managing in a domestic context to working in a global environment represents a “quantum leap” for managers, requiring new approaches to leadership development and training (Beechler & Javidan, 2007; Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000; Osland, 2008). The findings of our narrative analysis suggest that international service learning programs such as Ulysses, which involve cultural immersion at a relatively deep level through daily interaction and collaboration with local stakeholders, can help managers to make this quantum leap in part by allowing them to develop a global mindset and enhance their cultural intelligence.

Levy et al. (2007: 244f.) define global mindset as “a highly complex cognitive structure characterized by an openness to and articulation of multiple cultural and strategic realities on both global and local levels, and the cognitive ability to mediate and integrate across this multiplicity”. They stress cognitive complexity and a cosmopolitan perspective as core constructs underlying a global mindset. Leaders who have a global mindset are able to acquire and assess information from multiple sources across sectors and cultures, integrate it in more complex schemas, and engage in sense making and reflective processes that are marked by high degrees of differentiation and integrative capacity. The “Toilet Project” and “Candy Wrapper” stories, as well as other learning narratives analyzed in this study, illustrate that the Ulysses Program leads to deeper insights and learning in these areas, including the development of a ‘helicopter view’ to scan problems at a global level and at the same time understand
problems at the local level; an enhanced understanding that pressing problems in the world are complex and multifaceted; and that successful solutions require an understanding of the historical, economic and socio-cultural context, as well as an understanding of the mindset of the affected people. Somewhat paradoxically, the learning narratives suggest that in order to grasp the full complexity of global realities, leaders must get ‘deep down’ to the local level: there, at the local level, a global mindset takes shape – on a local playground in an African village (“Toilet Project” story); in light of sexual practices in these villages and the socio-economic conditions families live in (“Candy Wrapper” story); where rape and witchcraft are a part of the daily struggle to survive (“Witchcraft” story); where origin determines one's fate in life (“Distributive Justice” story); and where, despite the daily struggle of life in a developing country, altruistic motives and commitment to help others prevail (“Working with AIDS Infected People” story).

In addition to the development of a global mindset, we found evidence that international service learning programs like Ulysses can help participants improve their cultural intelligence. Early and Ang (2003: 9) argue that “for successful adaptation to a new cultural setting a person must be able to cognize und understand a culture, and, at the same time, feel motivated to engage others in the new setting”. The stories provide multiple examples of how this capacity is shaped in unfamiliar cultural settings and expressed in participants’ sense making and learning efforts. It is most prominent in the “Toilet Project”, “Candy Wrapper” and “Working with AIDS Infected People” stories, where participants developed a ‘stop-listen’ routine and empathetic listening skills. It also becomes evident in instances where participants’ own ingrained cultural and moral values collided with aspects of local cultural reality and where they struggled to reconcile this reality with their own values and what they considered accepted global norms and standards (e.g., in the “Candy Wrapper” and “Witchcraft” stories). In these cases, cultural intelligence manifested itself in the capacity to cope with di-
lemmas and cultural paradoxes (Osland & Bird, 2000) and to seek ways to reconcile the perceived dilemmas.

Other key competencies developed through Ulysses are in the area of responsible leadership, including responsible mindset and ethical literacy. Responsible mindset denotes the cognitive capabilities of leaders to identify, assess and cope with the ethical challenges faced in the global arena, and thus points to the specific dilemmas and challenges inherent in leading across cultures and competing values settings, as illustrated by some of the seemingly irreconcilable dilemmas and ethical paradoxes encountered by program participants. As global leaders are beginning to answer the call to take on more active duties as global citizens (e.g., as evidenced by recent initiatives such as the Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights, the Global Coalition on HIV/AIDS, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development), they need to have deeper knowledge and awareness of the ethical challenges at hand (Maak & Pless, 2009). Taking on a more active role in these endeavors requires, among other things, the “propensity to engage” (Levy et al., 2007) and reflection on questions such as “what is the role of multinational corporations in the pursuit of a fairer and more inclusive world?” (Devinney, 2009), “who owes what to the very poor?” (Pogge, 2007), and “who must deliver on human rights?” (Kuper, 2005).

The selected stories provide indications that Ulysses participants developed an increased awareness and understanding of social issues and pressing problems in a global stakeholder environment. For example, the “Toilet Project” story demonstrates that coordinated actions among different constituencies, including local groups, are essential; and that recognizing indigenous people and their claims on participation lays a pathway to sustainable solutions that meet the needs of local communities. The “Witchcraft” story highlights the moral complexity resulting from conflicting multiple realities and how commonly accepted global ethical standards might clash with local customs and belief systems. The “Distributive Justice” story demonstrates that service learning experiences such as the ones provided in the
Ulysses Program can trigger deep reflection on matters of distributive global justice. Finally, the “Kids Alive”, “Hydro” and “Working with AIDS Infected People” stories exemplify the development of an enhanced understanding of sustainability.

In addition to having a responsible mindset, dealing effectively with the ethical dilemmas faced in the global arena requires a number of ethical literacies (Maak & Pless, 2009). These include for example the capacity to reflect on different ethical positions (e.g., universalism versus relativism) and to differentiate between when different is different and when different is plain wrong. The “Witchcraft” story illustrates that field experiences can trigger moral reflection skills by exposing participants to dilemmas and situations that contradict universal ethical standards (e.g., human rights) but are far from easy to reconcile. The resulting tensions may have a profound learning effect even if the contradictions remain unresolved, because they increase participants’ awareness of the complexities inherent in responsible global leadership and alert them to the danger of resorting to overly simplistic solutions and explanations. When global managers fail, it is often because they adhere to a naïve form of cultural or political relativism, e.g., engaging in bribery or unlawful behavior because they think it is acceptable or even common in the host country or will not be discovered due to inadequate control systems and law enforcement practices (Donaldson, 1996). Or, managers may make the opposite mistake and uncritically apply global standards, rules, and regulations in a situation that requires culturally sensitive handling. Experiences as captured in the “Witchcraft” or “Distributive Justice” stories can sharpen a leader’s moral compass and help them navigate the complexities and contradictions inherent in managing in the global arena.

Finally, we found that the majority of Ulysses participants exhibited learning gains in the areas of self awareness, self management, and personal growth. The interaction with different stakeholders in and across cultures means that participants are not only confronted with different value systems and cultural habits, but at times also with ethical paradoxes and dilemmas. This confrontation leads to deep level reflection on one’s own identity, values and
behaviours, and may increase awareness of one’s priorities in life. While the “Toilet Project” and “Candy Wrapper” stories indicate that participants can learn to overcome prejudice and develop respect for and tolerance of different lifestyles and standpoints, the “Distributive Justice” story demonstrates that the emotionally challenging experiences made during the assignment helped participants to cultivate a sense of humility and develop a servant-leader attitude, as well as a more balanced and other-focused perspective in life. An overarching theme of the learning narratives is that the Ulysses experience helped participants to become more aware of their inner feelings, values, and what was “really important” to them, as a precondition for developing an authentic leadership style (Bennis, 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Finally, the analysis of learning narratives suggests that to the extent that program participants are directly confronted with human hardship (e.g., poverty, HIV/AIDS), the experience of coping with emotionally demanding and sometimes disturbing experiences can help them learn to regulate intense emotions, develop greater resilience under stress, and gradually expand their comfort zones.

**Learning processes**

Service learning programs such as Ulysses affect knowledge creation and skill development through a variety of factors and processes, which include exposure to challenging and sometimes adverse situations, forcing participants out of their comfort zone, confronting them with cultural and ethical paradoxes, and motivating them to change their perspective on life and to construct a new reality. Additionally, we found that feelings of helplessness and sometimes even guilt, anger, and shame may play an important role in the learning process, as they can trigger deeper reflection, foster empathy and compassion, and mobilize participants to engage with people in the local communities (see “Candy Wrapper”, “Witchcraft” and “Distributive Justice” stories). Moreover, it should be noted that the three learning areas targeted in the Ulysses Program – leadership, diversity, sustainability - are not mutually exclusive, suggesting that learning took place in multiple areas simultaneously. This overlap is not sur-
prising given that Ulysses participants faced a multitude of challenges *simultaneously* (e.g., adapting to a different culture, implementing a sustainable solution in the local community, reassessing one’s own values, beliefs, and deep-rooted prejudices, etc.).

While many of the learning processes observed in this study are well understood by educators and management developers, others remain underutilized in business school education and corporate leadership development programs. As Adler et al. (2005) have noted, programs continue to focus primarily on building intellectual knowledge and tend to neglect the emotional dimensions of learning as well as the action-based application of new knowledge and skills. To foster the development of responsible global leadership, management educators must design and build into their programs learning experiences that support the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of learning.

**Limitations of this Study and Implications for Research**

This study provided some new insights into the effectiveness of international service learning programs in supporting a company’s CSR and sustainability efforts. However, there are several possible limitations that need to be discussed, as well as avenues for future research.

First, this study was conducted with a relatively small sample of executives of one professional services firm characterized by a strong organizational and professional culture. Both the nature of the sample (executives and partners) and characteristics of the program (i.e., the fact that participants were sent in teams to developing countries to work in cross-sector partnerships with NGOs, social entrepreneurs and other organizations) likely affected the study results. To better understand the limits of the generalizability of the findings, the study should be replicated with other service learning programs related to CSR and sustainability efforts.

As discussed elsewhere (Pless et al., 2011) we found some evidence that international service learning programs such as Ulysses lead to long-term learning gains. The results of a post-program survey completed two years after participants’ return from their field assign-
ments showed significant improvements in the areas of intercultural competence development, non-judgmentalness, empathy, moral reflection and self awareness. However, we did not examine whether participants were able to transfer the skills and knowledge gained through the Ulysses Program to their work environments. Future studies should investigate if participants’ experiences while abroad influence their thinking and behaviors once they returned to their home countries, and how behavioral change achieved through an international service learning assignment carries over to the work environment.

A key finding of this study is that service learning programs such as Ulysses affect knowledge creation and skill development through a variety of factors, which include exposure to challenging situations, dealing with situations outside one’s comfort zone, arousal of strong emotions, and the experience of dealing with cultural and ethical paradoxes. Whether all of these experiences are necessary to provide a powerful learning environment is an open question, as is the optimal duration of field assignments. In contrast to other executive development programs that use short-term service learning interventions and mainly involve visits to local communities, Ulysses provides participants with the opportunity to work for two months in a developing country. Future studies should explore whether it is possible to provide similar powerful learning experiences in shorter periods of time and without sending participants abroad. As Mendenhall and Stahl (2000) have noted, international assignments as management development instruments are so expensive that they are often limited to a small proportion of executives and “high potentials”. They advocate the use of short-term field experiences to expose employees to sub-cultures within their own country during short, compressed time periods (e.g., looking after homeless people, working with juvenile delinquents, living with immigrants seeking asylum) to provide significant cultural immersion experiences. More research is needed on the effectiveness of different methodologies and approaches for delivering service learning programs, on their relative cost-effectiveness and their suitability for different groups of employees.
Implications of Project Ulysses for HR practice in Management Development

While the Ulysses program positively affects knowledge creation and skill development, many participants faced struggles when transferring their learning back to their home country. Even though learning transfer was not systematically examined, experience sharing during the first Alumni conference revealed some of the challenges involved. Some participants had to dilute the image that they had been on vacation. Others reported difficulties in translating their knowledge-gains on sustainability and responsibility into the corporate dialogue; specifically when the home country was not already open to these issues. Participants also raised the challenge of applying new skills and freezing behavioral changes instead of falling back into old schemes. One possibility to support new behaviors and successful learning transfer is continued coaching for a couple months after Review Week. Furthermore, the projects themselves could be closer aligned to sustainability areas of strategic relevance of the firm. If one identifies those areas along the supply chain as suggested by Porter & Kramer (2006), this could mean that assignments could take place in specific locations where sustainability issues occur, with sustainability partners of strategic relevance, and/or project assignments address specific sustainability issues in the supply chain. This would allow for stronger support by line management, help to create shared value for the project partners and for the company, and would facilitate a better transition of learning back home because the program’s business legitimacy is higher.

We observed differences in coaches’ ability to help develop the learning dimensions. Successful coaches had a background in working with multicultural teams as well as experience in the relevant topic areas of sustainability and CSR. This is not surprising since the facilitation of learning dialogues around those questions requires the ability to also give input and/or informed feedback on those issue areas.

Furthermore, the service learning assignments provide a rich experiential frame for ethical learning, which has not been systematically tapped into by the program. It requires
facilitators and coaches who have the capacity to enable learning and the practice of moral reflection and moral reasoning necessary for responsible decision making in a global stakeholder society. We recommend working with coaches and facilitators who have a background in sustainability / CSR and are trained in business ethics in order to facilitate learning dialogues in those areas.

To design integrated sustainability programs like Ulysses, it is advisable to have HR professionals running those programs who understand and have a passion for topics such as sustainability, CSR and business ethics. Since more and more universities and business schools provide courses on these topics as electives or mandatory courses – in part as a response to the high-profile scandals of the past decade – there are good chances to hire graduates with a mix of HR expertise and sustainability knowledge for an HR function. Managers working in HR functions can broaden their knowledge and skill base by participating in executive courses on sustainability / CSR or responsible leadership.

A shortcoming of the program was the nomination process. Often participants were not nominated based on a systematic selection process. Some people were sent as a reward for good performance, others because of specific developmental needs, and others because of a specific career development plan made in their local firm. Also, the motives of participants for accepting nominations differed significantly. Some went because they thought they had to, others because they saw it as a career springboard, and another group accepted because they saw the learning potential inherent in the Ulysses experience. Our observation is that those participants with a learning orientation profited most and had the most impact in their respective project teams. A recommendation for the selection of participants is to align it with a systematic talent development process and to provide those candidates with an experiential learning opportunity that shows the ability to learn from experience. The Learning Tactics Inventory (Dalton 1999) is a tool that can help in assessing this ability.
Another important learning is the impact that HR can have as a catalyst for thought leadership on sustainability and responsibility at the strategic level. This was achieved by the Head of Global Talent Development through networking with top business executives and the drive to facilitate learning by bringing together current global leaders with Ulysses participants as future leaders. One important step was to ensure that the Review Weeks of the Ulysses program were aligned to the schedule of the Global Leadership meeting, where the Global CEO meets annually with the regional CEOs of the 160 networks. This provided Ulysses participants with the opportunity to share their experiences with the top leadership team and have a dialogue with them on new approaches to creating value for different stakeholders, on integrating sustainability and responsibility into client services and advise and on pioneering new approaches in the firm’s operations. Since 2005 Responsible Leadership has become an important pillar of PwC’s strategy. This is an example of the pioneering role that HR can have in stirring thought leadership on sustainability and responsibility in business.

Finally, by raising awareness for sustainability issues, helping to experience the relevance for business and developing strategic capabilities needed for supporting corporate sustainability and CSR efforts, HR has not only the potential to inspire future leaders to support sustainability and CSR initiatives, but also to actively engage in them. For instance, some participants set up their own foundations (e.g. to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa), others have become active board members of sustainability related NGOs, and others still have taken over leadership functions in the sustainability practice or drive the sustainability and responsibility agenda in their respective business lines. Such action has been triggered by the Ulysses experience and shared learning as to the role of leaders in promoting sustainability: responsible leaders are steward leaders (Maak & Pless, 2006), protecting and enriching what they are entrusted with and caring for future generations.
REFERENCES


## Table 1: Summary of Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Area</th>
<th>Global Leadership</th>
<th>Responsible Leadership</th>
<th>Self Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Foci</strong></td>
<td>Intercultural, global and diversity issues</td>
<td>Sustainability, citizenship, social responsibility, ethics</td>
<td>Self-awareness, self-management, and personal growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of Learning Gains</strong></td>
<td>Non-judgmentalness</td>
<td>Raising awareness for the tension between local traditions and higher human values and the moral need for global integration (Witchcraft Story)</td>
<td>(Re)assessment of own beliefs and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural empathy and sensitivity</td>
<td>Increasing sensitivity for ethical issues (Distributive Justice Story)</td>
<td>Regulation of emotions (Working with AIDS Infected People Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding issues from a different perspective</td>
<td>Socially responsible reflection (Hydro Story)</td>
<td>New perspective on self and one's own life and career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grasping and managing complexity (Candy Wrapper Story)</td>
<td>Broader understanding of sustainability (Kids Alive Story)</td>
<td>Work-life balance (Working with AIDS Infected People Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercultural communication (Toilet Project Story)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reevaluating own approach to problem-solving (Coping Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of Learning Processes</strong></td>
<td>Dealing with dilemmas and cultural paradoxes (Candy Wrapper Story)</td>
<td>Reflecting on disparities and inequities (Distributive Justice Story)</td>
<td>Coping with adversity and strong emotions (Coping Story)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Ulysses Program Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomination</td>
<td>Approx. 8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>6-8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field assignment</td>
<td>8 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing</td>
<td>Ongoing/unlimited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Senior management in the territories nominate participants
- Participants go through a 360 degree feedback process
- Participants start building teams
- Participants are briefed on the program’s learning dimensions (leadership, diversity, sustainability)
- Teams set project objectives and finalize the terms of engagement with a representative from their partner organization
- Teams work on project assignments where they contribute their professional knowledge (pro bono) to help their partner organization achieve their social and/or environmental mission
- Team coaches make a field visit halfway through the field assignment
- Participants debrief field experiences with facilitators along the learning dimensions
- Teams present their learning stories to the global leadership team
- Global alumni meetings every two years
- Self-organized regional alumni meetings
- Alumni special interest groups (e.g., on topics such as diversity and poverty alleviation)

Length varies depending on country
### Appendix A

#### Table 2

**Overview of Projects, Assignment Locations and Project Partners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of assignment</th>
<th>Project focus</th>
<th>Partner organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Focus: Improving health and quality of life</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Team A** Namibia | Focus: Reducing the social & economic impact of HIV/AIDS on communities in Africa  
The main focus of the team assignment was the development of a flexible, participatory and simple project management system for the non-governmental network organization. | Non-governmental network organization (NGO) Amicaall |
| **Team B** Kenya | Focus: Reducing the social & economic impact of HIV/AIDS on communities in Africa  
The focus of the team assignment was to strengthen the municipal management and information systems related to HIV/AIDS among the different actors in two municipalities, and to develop, review, assess and provide guidance on their evaluation and monitoring systems. | Non-governmental network organization (NGO) Amicaall |
| **Team E** Cameroon | Focus: Reducing the social & economic impact of HIV/AIDS on communities in Africa  
The focus of the assignment was to assist the NGO to develop a project management toolkit to help in the sustainable development of municipal teams and build capacity within the organization. The team worked on the development of a guide for the municipalities and municipal HIV/AIDS teams for the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of municipal HIV/AIDS plans. | Non-governmental network organization (NGO) Amicaall |
| **Team F** Eritrea | Focus: Crisis prevention & recovery: Landmine action  
The team was deployed to support national authorities and mine action institutions in launching a strategic response to the findings of the national landmine impact surveys. Specifically, the team supported the development of an impact-based strategic plan, and helped national authorities to strengthen their capacity for strategic planning in the mine action sector. | Supranational organization UNDP |
| **Team G** Ghana | Focus: Mental health and development  
The team worked with an organization dedicated to alleviating the suffering of people with mental illnesses. The team was asked to act as a facilitator. The internal discussions focused on the strategy of the organization, while the external discussions brought together stakeholders such as donors and the government to discuss the implications of new legislation on the community mental health plan. | NGO in the health care sector BasicNeeds |
| **Team H** Uganda | Focus: Reducing the social & economic impact of HIV/AIDS on communities in Africa  
The mission of this assignment was to develop an evaluation and assessment mechanism for HIV/AIDS projects working together with local municipalities to strengthen their response to HIV/AIDS. | Non-governmental network organization (NGO) Amicaall |
| **Team K** South Africa | Focus: HIV/AIDS healthcare  
The aim of the PwC assignment was to create a toolkit to be distributed to local churches, NGO’s and government. The purpose of the toolkit is to enable those constituencies to implement programs with a consistent level of quality of support for patients on anti-retroviral treatments. | NGO BroadReach Healthcare |
| Team N | **China**<br>Focus: Child Protection<br>The team’s role was to review the efficiency and effectiveness of the current activities in the livelihoods component of the Fuyang Community-based Model for Children affected by HIV/AIDS and to make recommendations about the future development of this component. The team was also asked to conduct an in-depth analysis of two of Save the Children’s NGO partners to determine the sustainability of their business models and the possibility for replication of their work. | NGO<br>Safe the Children |
| Team O | **India**<br>Focus: Eye care<br>Aravind Eye Care is the world’s largest provider of eye care services performing 250,000 surgeries per year. However, the long term aim of the organisation is to perform one million surgeries per annum by 2015. To help them achieve this goal, PwC was asked to design a strategic road map for the organisation to form partnerships with other eye care organisations in the needy regions of India. Implicit in this task was the creation of marketing strategies for identifying partners and the development of monitoring processes to evaluate any new operations. | Social enterprise<br>Aravind |

**Project Focus: Reducing poverty**

| Team C | **Zambia**<br>Focus: Poverty alleviation through education for sustainable agriculture production<br>The team focused on ensuring the long term sustainability of the training center by looking into the center’s income generation activities and its sustainability. The team also worked with the center staff to assess and implement financial management systems to ensure the transparency and accountability of the center, which is expected to contribute to the increase of donor contributions. | Youth training center for agro-processing (NGO) funded by an international organization |
| Team D | **Madagascar**<br>Focus: Growing sustainable business<br>The team worked with an international organization on a rural electrification project as part of a sustainable business development initiative. The mission was to perform a socio-economic study in a district of the country intended to guide the selection of projects best suitable for poverty reduction. | Supranational organization<br>UNDP |
| Team L | **East Timor**<br>Focus: Recovery, stability, employment and poverty reduction<br>The PwC team focused on a mid term review of the activity of the RESPECT program in order to enhance project impact and overall success of the program. They developed a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy for implementation in order to ensure greater transparency and accountability by all stakeholders involved. | Supranational organization<br>UNDP |
| Team M | **Cambodia**<br>Focus: Vulnerable women & children<br>The Ulysses team in Cambodia provided professional and commercial support for Hagar’s board and management, by conducting a comprehensive review of Hagar Design Ltd. This included an assessment of their current operations, a review of strategic options, and the development of a strategic plan. | Social enterprise<br>Hagar International |
| Team Q | **India**<br>Focus: Poverty alleviation through education<br>The team served as the core facilitator of a strategic planning process. Based on discussion with different stakeholders they designed a structure and framework for World Link India’s three-year regional strategic plan. | NGO<br>World Links |
| Team S | **Ecuador**<br>Focus: Local economic development<br>The objective of the PricewaterhouseCoopers assignment was to design a feasible approach with regards to the best microfinance credit-loaning model for the SMEs in the region (analysing the current environment and deciding which model would be best). | Supranational organization<br>UNDP |
| Team T | **Paraguay**<br>Focus: Rural development/Social innovation: Paraguay<br>Fundacion Paraguaya (FP) promotes entrepreneurship in three ways: A microfinance program; an economic education program for children; and an agricultural high school. The focus of the team assignment was the analysis and evaluation of the current | Foundation<br>Fundacion Paraguaya |
program model of FP for future implementation of agricultural high schools in different countries. It involved making suggestions on staffing, organizational structure and on the design of a replication model.

**Team U**
Paraguay
Focus: Rural development
Building on the work undertaken by the Ulysses team T, PwC was asked to develop a medium-term strategy and business plan that allows the organization to grow in a sustainable way.

**Team X**
Focus: Local economic development through SME promotion and waste management
The mission of this second Ulysses project with Ciudad Saludable was to create both, a local and an international business plan for the organisation and to make recommendations for the organisation's strategy, development and marketing and fundraising policy. During their time in Peru the Ulysses team also arranged a community cleanup day.

**Project focus:** Addressing environmental issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Team I**
Madagascar | Focus: Access to clean drinking water
The Ulysses team worked with a social enterprise dedicated to reducing poverty and helping the poor to get access to safe drinking water. The team helped the organization to professionalize their management processes, to improve the business plan and to develop strategies for revenue generation. | Social enterprise Bushproof |
| **Team P**
India | Focus: Water and sanitation
The India team developed a strategic business plan to enable this NGO to reach out and empower hundreds of thousands of impoverished individuals by applying strategic networking concepts. | NGO Gram Vikas |
| **Team R**
Belize | Focus: Eco-tourism
The assignment aimed to produce a professional evaluation of the growth and income-generation potential of the eco-tourism sector. The output of the project was a professional evaluation of the full scope, implications and marketing linkages of eco-tourism in Toledo. | NGO FFI: Fauna and Flora International |
| **Team V**
Peru | Focus: Environmental management and local economic development
The aim of Ciudad Saludable is to spread their micro-enterprise model of community based, self-sustaining organisations which collect waste and recycle all possible materials. The focus of the assignment was twofold. It included the analysis and evaluation of the NGO's program model and its implementation in different locations and the design of a replication model. | NGO Ciudad Saludable |
| **Team W**
Peru | Focus: Local economic development through SME promotion and waste management
The mission of this second Ulysses project with Ciudad Saludable was to create both, a local and an international business plan for the organisation and to make recommendations for the organization's strategy, development and marketing and fundraising policy. During their time in Peru the Ulysses team also arranged a community cleanup day. | NGO Ciudad Saludable |