

Perceptions of CSO volunteer and intern cross-cultural experiences:

Examining pre-departure training and reintegration support

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Abstract

This research explores CSO volunteer and intern perceptions of their experiences working in developing countries within the context of cross-cultural interaction and collaboration. Those experiences are framed by the pre-departure training and reintegration support that each received, or the lack thereof, and how the elements of each affected the overall experience. Research tools included observation of an intern debriefing, an online survey and interviews. Data was coded to identify three global themes: personal growth, cultural exchange and global citizenship. Generally, the more knowledge and support received by volunteers and interns while abroad, the more prepared they felt to interact in the community. However, there were several other contributing factors to successful integration within their host communities. These included knowledge of the local language and previous experience working or living abroad.

Keywords: Civil society organization, volunteer, interns, global citizen, non-governmental organization, training, reintegration

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Introduction

The term non-governmental organization (NGO) was coined in 1945 to allow The United Nations (UN) to properly identify these organizations in its Charter (Willetts, 2002). It became commonly used by the general public in the early 1970s (Willetts, 2002), and the 1980s saw a substantial increase in the emergence and operation of NGOs (Zinnes & Bell, 2003). In the 1990s the evolution of these abundant organizations continued, with many of those that had previously been active predominantly at the local level, increasing their international presence (Willetts, 2002). Inevitably, this then resulted in an increase in the number of staff, volunteers and interns working in developing countries (Sherraden, Lough & McBride, 2008) – the focus of many NGO outreach initiatives. Along with the important consideration of how best to provide aid, education or relief in so many countries around the world, leaders and workers in this space are also faced with the ethical dilemmas of how to do so while respecting (sometimes unfamiliar) cultural traditions, beliefs and norms.

As the number, roles and influence of NGOs continue to evolve, so too do the terms used to describe the various iterations. In addition to NGOs or National NGOs, other terms include: International non-governmental organization (INGO), Grass-roots organization, and Community based organization (CBO) (Willetts, 2002). More recently, the term Civil Society Organization (CSO) has emerged as a more representative term; however, in academic literature, policy discourse, as well as in practice, the term NGO is still used to describe many organizations who self-identify as CSOs (Rainey, Wakunuma, & Stahl, 2017). For that reason, while this thesis will

primarily use the term CSO, the terms NGO and INGO will appear in quotations; all three terms will be used interchangeably.

Geographically, CSOs are located all over the world, regardless of economic or political activity and can be a local, provincial, national, regional or global body. Some CSO structures include a combination of two or more of the aforementioned levels. CSO activity is varied and wide-ranging. While some CSOs may focus on either operational or campaigning activities, they will often engage in both where a perceived need is identified (Willetts, 2002).

More specifically, CSOs may be involved in one or more of the following: disaster relief aid (Pardess, 2005), human rights advocacy (Wallace, Porter & Ralph-Bowman, 2013), environmental advocacy (Burchell & Cook, 2011), education (Nic a Bháird, 2013) and health services (Pfeiffer et al., 2008), community development (Miller, VeneKlasen & Clark, 2005; Rodríguez & Kidd, 2009), sport (Tiessen, 2011) and animal rights (Veissier, Butterworth, Bock, & Roe, 2008). The following is not, by any means, an exhaustive list of CSO activities; however, it does give some indication of the breadth of their endeavours.

Disaster relief – After a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, tsunami or hurricane; or one that is man-made, such as one due to conflict, chemicals or poverty. Affected communities often require medical, logistical, security, infrastructure and emergency services, along with basic supplies, such as food, water and shelter.

Human rights advocacy – These efforts may involve advocating for poor and marginalized groups; refugees, soldiers and war victims; women's and girls' rights; gender, racial and ethnic equality; LGTBQ rights; political and religious freedoms; the end of child labour. These organizations will often be involved in community outreach

and mobilization, raising awareness of rights abuses, promoting legal and policy change; and may provide legal, medical and psychological services, in addition to support groups.

Environmental advocacy – These organizations work to promote change in business, government and at the community level through awareness initiatives and incentive programs. Specific efforts include promoting and funding conservation programs, conducting free energy audits, leading retrofit programs, providing interest-free loans for energy efficient equipment, providing strategic direction, supporting entrepreneurs of sustainable business, advising and promoting sustainable goods and materials, and working to effect policy and regulations.

Education – These organizations may promote literacy, culture, nutrition, reproductive health, immunization, mathematical skills, and practical skills (labour or office). Their initiatives may include knowledge share programs; worker training; developing literacy programs; promoting sharing of culture, art and traditions; promoting family planning, sexual health, proper nutrition and disease management, providing aid for vulnerable children, as well as emotional and financial support.

Development – Development of political or public systems and infrastructure, as well as sustainable income for families in poor communities. Initiatives include the provision of microloans, scholarships and training; the construction of buildings, irrigation systems, community space or roadways; promotion and facilitation of fair trade, political reform or public policy.

Animal rights advocacy – Promoting rights for animals. Initiatives may include lobbying for policy or regulation change; providing food, shelter, vaccinations and sterilization for strays; building and maintaining shelters, caring for rescues or endangered species.

Sport – Promoting health, responsibility and collaboration through physical activity.

These organizations may provide sports training or equipment; construct practice or public sport facilities; or advocate for policy change.

Each of these activities has its own set of logistical, cultural, legal and ethical challenges; processes and needs.

Each of these organizations also require workers. These needs are met through a variety of roles. Permanent staff, both local and international, are recruited and paid to fill leadership roles, oversee programs and maintain organizational operations. CSOs also often heavily rely on volunteers and/or interns. Volunteers work in any number of roles and may either pay the organization for the volunteer opportunity, work entirely without pay or be paid a small stipend. Intern positions are focused on helping develop employment skills and may involve a stipend or consistent pay. While there can be quite a lot of overlap between volunteer/intern roles and those of permanent staff, the former positions are for a fixed amount of time, either short-term (less than 6 months) or long-term (typically 1-2 years) (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). These shorter-term volunteer positions are also known as volunteer tourism (Mostafanezhad, 2013), or voluntourism (Tiessen & Heron, 2012).

In the last decade, as an increasing number of civic-minded youth have been able to travel with more ease than ever before, there has been an appearance of what Mostafanezhad (2013) described as volunteer tourism – “volunteers who pay to participate in conservation or development projects” (p. 485). As CSOs are leaders in international development (Keese, 2011) and volunteers/interns are incredibly valuable to them, several organizations have adapted programs and marketing tactics to appeal to these groups, and improve volunteer acquisition and

retention (Mostafanezhad, 2013). These trends present several challenges, two of which will be examined in detail for the purposes of this research.

CSOs seek to improve conditions for citizens around the globe by offering education, health services, disaster relief aid, and attempting to affect social change. All of these services are offered to communities, who are vulnerable, either because of circumstance (e.g., a disaster requiring outside help) or socio-economic disparity (the very nature of aid organizations is to seek out marginalized groups). While the backbone of CSO outreach initiatives is the notion that all people are entitled to basic human rights (Lai, 2011), the voice of the privileged often further subjugate the marginalized groups they attempt to serve (Wallace et al., 2013). The increase in both the sheer number of CSOs operating in marginalized communities, combined with the increased number of volunteers, interns and permanent staff being sent to serve these groups, often for short periods of time, requires careful consideration of the ethical implications involved.

Some of these ethical implications are considered more completely in the literature review; however, one important consideration is the notion of how to provide aid, education or relief while respecting cultural traditions, beliefs and norms. This is especially important when such cultural differences directly oppose or interfere with those of the aid workers or their mandates. When international volunteers, interns and staff fail to adapt to a new culture they may experience cultural shock, which is “an overwhelming and challenging experience...characterized by anxiety, insecurity and inability to conform...” (Almutairi, McCarthy & Gardner, 2015). Even subtle cultural differences may cause cultural shock and compromise the ability of the organization to provide aid, if workers are unsure of what to expect (van Zijll de Jong et al., 2011). Wei-Wen Chang (2005) argued that with time, culture shock

could facilitate cultural adaptation; however, the increasing number of short-term work opportunities reduces the amount of time international workers are able to spend adapting, and damaging perceptions of unfamiliar cultures may be made instead.

There is evidence to suggest that cultural adaptation can be facilitated by cross-cultural training and increase the ease of interaction between international workers and the host community (Masgoret, Bernaus & Gardner, 2000). Increased familiarity with different cultures has been linked to increased respect for different cultural values and beliefs (Almutairi et al., 2015), as well as leading to more positive interactions (van Zijll de Jong et al., 2011). There is also evidence to suggest that positive experiences are an important contributing factor for higher volunteer return rates and retention (van Zijll de Jong et al., 2011).

This and similar literature provides the basis for an argument that facilitating positive cross-cultural interactions and experiences among different cultures may aid in the achievement of organizational goals around recruitment and retention, as well as reduce some of the potential for further subjugation of marginalized groups by the visiting privileged aid workers. With these and other considerations in mind, many CSOs have invested considerable time and resources into developing pre-deployment training programs and reintegration support (debriefing) to facilitate the re-acclimatization process upon return (Pardess, 2005; Chang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2013). Such literature provides a reasonable foundation for the notion that pre-deployment training and debriefing involving a focus on cross-cultural differences will positively affect one's perception of their experience(s).

Statement of the problem

Several authors have long recognized the importance of developing training programs for volunteers, interns and staff working in unfamiliar cultural environments (Chang, 2005; Pardess, 2005). In addition to facilitating cross-cultural communication and adaptation, such training is also important for ensuring the maintenance of cultural respect and sensitivity – a task that has become a challenge in an age where volunteers are consumers and communities in need are the commodity (Keese, 2011). Increased competition for scarce (human) resources has resulted in CSOs “seeking a comparative advantage in relation to other organisations” (Tiessen, 2011, p. 584).

Cultural norms affect many aspects of interaction, from how we develop personal moral standards (Bell & Carens, 2004) to how we communicate (Vallaster, 2005). “From a practical point of view, this may pose a special challenge in foreign lands where detailed knowledge of different linguistic, social, cultural, and economic circumstances is more likely to ensure success” (Bell & Carens, 2004, p. 303). Echoing this sentiment, several authors have developed models emphasizing the need for cross-cultural understanding, collaboration and working within established cultural frameworks (Bagchi, Musani, Tomeh & Taha, 2004; Chang, 2005; The Sphere Project, 2011).

Chang (2005) identified cultural awareness and sensitivity as key factors in any CSO training program, and identified role play as an effective method for education in local traditions, beliefs and languages. Role play involving negative situations that volunteers and staff may potentially face helps to further increase preparedness of interacting within a different cultural framework. Ishbel McWha (2011) found that activities that increase understanding and closer

relationships, in general, are critical for achieving objectives of outreach initiatives, as they facilitate mutual learning, cooperation and the development of successful strategies.

Eleanor Pardess (2005) advocated that mentorship was also integral for ensuring a smooth transition and ongoing support in the field. She argued that pairing experienced workers, familiar with potential challenges and stresses, with those newly deployed, may alleviate much of the uncertainty involved in working among culturally dissimilar communities. This strategy also has the potential to facilitate integration among the community. Cultural sensitivity is important for international workers to be trusted, accepted and effective in local communities (de Jong, 2009; Frankis & Flowers, 2009; Wilder & Morris, 2008) and once this is accomplished, these workers have the potential to hold a unique position within the community. McWha (2011) found that while international and local permanent staff may be viewed as holding positions of power, volunteers were more often accepted as equals, and more readily accepted into the community, presenting the opportunity for joint learning, understanding and mutual exchange.

Each of the above elements contribute to necessary knowledge and awareness for increased ease of cultural adaptation and reduced negative impact on host communities. It would therefore stand to reason that pre-departure training incorporating more of the above described elements would best facilitate volunteer and intern integration within their host communities. One would expect this to be reflected when examining volunteer and intern perceptions of their experiences.

While larger CSOs have more resources for measuring the success of their training procedures, little of that information is available for the public. Surveys that measure perception and satisfaction are useful for the improvement and development of training programs, as well as for understanding motivations for becoming involved with CSOs and the perceived impact of

such experiences. Such measurement should be consistently updated to reflect current best practices. This thesis seeks to add to the body of knowledge examining pre-departure training programs for volunteers, interns and staff working in cross-cultural environments, their post-deployment debriefing, and specifically, how each affected their perceptions of their experiences.

Research Questions

This research will address three central research questions:

1. Within the context of cross-cultural interaction, which elements of pre-departure training did CSO volunteers and interns perceive to be most useful to them?
2. Within the context of cross-cultural interaction, which elements of reintegration support did CSO volunteers and interns perceive to be most useful to them?
3. Overall, what did CSO volunteers and interns perceive to be the benefits of their placements?

Theoretical Framework

This thesis research is examined through the lens of human rights theory, stakeholder theory and feminist theory, all of which direct ethical deliberations and interactions with marginalized groups in unique and inter-related ways. They each provide important foundational pieces to consider when engaging in cross-cultural communication and collaboration. Human rights theories provide necessary guidelines for the justification of international aid initiatives, stakeholder theory provides a framework useful for considering the impact of aid work on the community at large, and feminist theories provide essential critiques for interacting with marginalized groups.

Human Rights Theory

Human rights theory holds as its foundation that basic human rights be upheld (Arvan, 2014). It emphasizes the need for organizational cooperation to help ensure that every individual may live with the benefit of necessary resources. Many CSOs operate under this basic assumption and several use human rights theory ideals for developing guiding principles (Bell & Carens, 2004). The term Global South is often used interchangeably with the term developing country, and while the principles of human rights can be useful as a starting point for aid organizations often working within the Global South, it has also been criticized for its lack of universality and accessibility for those very citizens (Franke, 2013).

Mark Franke (2013) explained that human rights demand “openness to the human as contested and contestable ground of rights, where the human is something formed in the claims to rights and not something that already exists to whom rights are simply proper” (p. 381). José-Manuel Barreto (2014) argued that the international community should take its responsibility further by introducing intercultural dialogue that would see protection of knowledge production

of marginalized communities and a “quest for equality and justice in a global context” (p. 397). He urged members of the Global North to rethink their ideas of human rights theory, engage in meaningful dialogue with marginalized and underrepresented communities and incorporate those values, beliefs and traditions into the global conversation.

While this line of thinking leaves room for differences and evolution of human rights theories, the non-static interpretation of human rights requires consistent re-evaluation of actions, justifications and outcomes by any person or organization working in this realm. Unfortunately, in leaving room for interpretation and evolution, CSOs are faced with the consequences of such ambiguity, along with the question of where to allocate limited resources for the most ethical and effective outcomes. Marcus Arvan (2014) proposed addressing this ambiguity with a dual theory that distinguishes between domestic human rights and international human rights. He defined international human rights as the “moral entitlements that all human beings have to coercive international protections” (p. 21) and maintained that these international human rights should be the focus and owed the protection of international law.

Stakeholder Theory

Part of the concerns in providing aid to address issues of human rights, social change or disaster relief, are the effects of that aid, not only on recipients, but also on the communities in which they live. Stakeholder theory therefore is a natural progression in the conversation, as it emphasizes considering all parties involved. Considering the interests of all stakeholders is important, even when doing so may not specifically serve the interests of the organization in question. Elisabet Garriga and Domènec Melé (2004) described stakeholders as those who are affected by organizational operations, regardless of whether the organization will be specifically interacting with them or not. Thus, according to stakeholder theory, CSOs must consider the

effect of their aid and involvement both while it is being given, as well as after they have departed.

Garriga and Melé (2004) explained that organizations and staff working with diverse cultures may begin to obtain a more complete understanding of relevant cultural differences and concerns by establishing “dialogue with a wide spectrum of stakeholders” (p. 59). This sentiment was echoed by Jon Burchell and Joanne Cook (2011), who illustrated the need for organizations, and particularly CSOs, to move “beyond the traditional confines of the shareholder” (p. 920). Failing to engage in meaningful dialogue may lead to distrust (Burchell & Cook, 2011) in an environment where trust is critical to success (MacIntyre et al., 2013). While capitalism seems to dictate every aspect of the economy, even reaching CSOs (Barreto, 2014), there has been a trend toward “finding ways to combine social responsibility with established business practice” (Burchell & Cook, 2011, p. 932). Considering interactions with marginalized communities through the lens of stakeholder theory may enable more cultural understanding, more inclusive conclusions about community needs, and give insight into ethical dilemmas and cultural sensitivities.

Feminist Theory

If human rights theory forms the foundation for CSO work with marginalized communities and stakeholder theory directs it, feminist theory provides a broader picture for its interactions. Much CSO work occurs within vulnerable communities (either as a result of a natural disaster, or economic and social disparity), thereby placing those giving aid in a position of power and adding to their ethical burden. With that in mind, as Wallace et al. (2013) explained, feminist theory builds on “principles of equality and social justice” (p. 14), advocating

Careful consideration of marginalized groups and the language, actions, systems and thought patterns that perpetuate their oppression.

Many feminist theorists argue that organizations should “find ways to operate productively and responsibly within unequal power structures” (de Jong, 2009, p. 388). In very few situations is this more applicable than with CSOs, as “the very nature of aid relations puts one in a position of power in relation to those one seeks to support” (de Jong, 2009, p. 392). So many CSOs have focused efforts on women and children, and because women’s movements were “built on links between women in different countries” (MacKie, 2001, p. 180), feminist theory is, arguably, a natural fit. However, Lata Narayanaswamy (2014) cautioned that though “[d]iscussions around shared identities may be useful,” they must also “be undertaken in a context that creates space for a discussion of intersectionality” (p. 585).

In recent years, feminist theory has been criticized for being skewed toward the experiences of privileged white women, while there is evidence to suggest that poverty is a more useful determinant of inclusion (de Jong, 2009; MacKie, 2001; Narayanaswamy, 2014). As a result, Southern feminists, identified as feminists having grown up in the Global South, have emerged as a voice for the marginalized communities of the Global South (Narayanaswamy, 2014). As Sara de Jong (2009) argued, this may place feminist theory in a unique and representative position to provide insight on cross-cultural collaboration and interaction, as it has undergone an evolution, forcing feminists to “rethink their practices” (p. 392).

Literature review

There has been a substantial amount of literature written on CSOs, much of which has focused on the ethical implications of providing aid to countries and communities in need, best practices for aid efforts, and participatory initiatives. There has been a great deal of research on cross-cultural communication; however, considering this continuously evolving field, there is always room to add to the body of knowledge focusing on best-practices and areas for improvement. Furthermore, there has been little examination of volunteer perceptions of pre-departure training, debriefing and their experiences abroad, especially for shorter-term placements of three to six months (Tiessen & Heron, 2012).

This section will begin by examining the trend in shorter-term volunteer and intern placements followed by a specific look at volunteer tourism. It will then explore literature referencing the impact of volunteer and intern placements on the self, the local community and the global community, contextualizing some of the existing literature around ethical dilemmas faced by workers in unfamiliar cultural environments and among marginalized groups. Finally, it will examine literature that provides evidence for how best to support CSO volunteers, interns and staff pre- and post-deployment.

The growth and prevalence of CSOs has resulted in them being woven into the fabric of the global economy (Zinnes & Bell, 2003). As their presence becomes more common and more accepted, certain ethical deliberations become a necessity. However, while aid organizations have access to a plethora of support, material citing specific ethical concerns, the unprecedented recent interest in volunteering and working abroad, particularly in shorter three to six month placements (Tiessen & Heron, 2012), along with the emergence of volunteer tourism (Keese,

2011; Mostafanezhad, 2013), has added yet another complication to this already complicated industry.

Recent years have seen a surge in North Americans seeking placements in developing countries, with an interest in gaining unique experiences and “on-the-job training that would help them secure long-term employment” (Tiessen & Heron, 2012, p. 46). Additionally, volunteer placements lasting as little as two weeks have emerged, leading to volunteer tourism: short-term volunteer opportunities in conservation and development for volunteers who are willing to pay a fee (Keese, 2011; Mostafanezhad, 2013). Mary Mostafanezhad (2013) argued that the visibility of female celebrities in the media who engage in humanitarian efforts has led to a trend of mainly female volunteers seeking these types of volunteer opportunities.

Experiences in developing countries are sought out as replacements for less meaningful and less interactive all-inclusive vacations (Keese, 2011). According to Mostafanezhad (2013), volunteer tourism is one of the “fastest growing niche tourism markets in the world” (p. 485) and is inherently geographical, as at least part of the motivation involves the desire to see a specific location (Keese, 2011). Therefore, while this trend has opened the door for a new category of donor, it presents the additional challenge for CSOs of needing to develop convincing marketing campaigns for this new type of consumer (Keese, 2011).

Additionally, the impact of these placements must be considered. Rebecca Tiessen and Barbara Heron (2012) studied perceived impacts of Canadian youth volunteering in developing countries. They found that these volunteers tended to report impacts based on specific activities, such as tutoring. This corresponds with previously identified motivations of volunteers and interns that are centered upon the idea that the experiences will help them gain a unique skill set leading to increased employment opportunities.

While shorter-term placements may be seen as valuable to volunteers and interns, this short time period also affects the host communities, along with CSO operations. Organization staff in developing countries perceive longer volunteer placements as having a more positive impact (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Shorter-term placements also tend to promote “a charity-centred approach rather than one based on solidarity and mutual learning” (Tiessen, 2011, p. 575), thus creating volunteers and interns that merely spread Western values.

This has the potential for farther reaching implications because these volunteers and interns are the global citizen of the future. Rebecca Tiessen (2011) described global citizenship as “a way of understanding the world in which an individual’s attitudes and behaviours reflect a compassion and concern for the marginalised and/or poor” (p. 573), and argued that we need to disrupt “Western-centrism and create space for Southern partners to articulate a global citizenship vision” (p. 575). These volunteers and interns are the educators for those in the developed world who have not had the same experiences. They have the potential to become unofficial cultural ambassadors, advocates or sponsors of increased development as a result of affinity with another group of people (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). They may also become our future leaders, potentially contributing to diversity of thought in governance. Tiessen (2008) argued that international women’s initiatives and an increase in female leadership provides more opportunities for women around the world to have a voice (p. 200). For these reasons, it is important to carefully reflect on how best to achieve sustainable and desired impacts in developing countries through CSO volunteer and internship programs (Tiessen & Heron, 2012).

While the desire for more meaningful travel experiences and attaining employable skills has created an environment rich with willing volunteers, the ethical question of how to maintain cultural traditions and beliefs in the face of short-term volunteering now presents itself.

Mostafanezhad (2013) argued that it is important to “draw attention to the cultural politics of the intention and its effects, or to acknowledge that sometimes our good intentions can have negative consequences” (p 487). As CSOs “are the principal promoters and implementers of volunteer tourism” (Lyons & Wearing, 2008, p. 6) and at the forefront of providing education, health aid, disaster relief and community development to countries of the global south, cultural boundaries are increasingly blurred and special attention must be put toward ensuring that more powerful institutions are not imposing ideals, norms and knowledge onto marginalized communities. As such, the question of the availability and effectiveness of training volunteers and staff from privileged countries working in developing countries must be examined.

Central to the plethora of literature discussing the ethical implications of aid work is the question of the rights of the privileged to impose their ideals, norms and knowledge onto the communities they desire to serve, and whether this imposition is intentional or not (Bell & Carens, 2004; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Miller, VeneKlasen & Clark, 2005; Nic a Bháird, 2013; Wallace et al., 2013). Many well-meaning organizations have been criticized for their lack of cultural sensitivity and for conducting work in communities where their efforts sometimes further compound complex issues of marginalized groups (Wallace et al., 2013). Unfortunately, efforts to improve the lives of some within a community may act to compromise the living conditions of others, as groups within the same community may claim conflicting rights (Miller et al., 2005). Organizations must therefore carefully consider “dynamics at all levels of decision making and power” (Miller et al., 2005, p.36).

Participatory decision making, where local community members are involved at every stage along the aid initiative process, while not without critique, is therefore a generally accepted standard within the literature (Miller et al., 2005; Rodriguez & Kidd, 2009; Chackungal et al.,

2011). However, even in situations where efforts are made to preserve local traditions and beliefs, aid workers may find their own ideals and beliefs conflict with the work they are attempting to perform. An article by Daniel Bell and Joseph Carens (2004) explored a discussion of ethical dilemmas among several experienced international human rights theorists and practitioners. They identified several conflicts of interests faced by aid workers who were often in a position to “decide between promoting their versions of human rights norms and respecting local cultural norms that may differ from these (Bell & Carens, 2004, p. 304). For example, some Doctors Without Borders physicians reported having to choose between amputating a patient’s limb to save their life and respecting the cultural norms responsible for causing that patient to prefer death.

Difficulty in prioritizing human rights and respecting cultural values is compounded by the fact that CSOs are increasingly supported by private companies – a change that requires spending to be justified and effects the goals, development and evaluation of aid work (Wallace et al., 2013). Pfeiffer et al. (2008) studied health systems in developing countries and found that the presence of aid organizations created an environment that permitted local governments to reduce funding for traditionally government-run programs. They also discovered that CSO positions were comparatively lucrative and lured skilled local government employees, unintentionally contributing to decreased quality of state-run programs upon the eventual departure of the CSO.

Along with the very real ethical concerns of altering established communities, there is also the question of how to ensure that volunteers and interns are prepared to engage within what are often very different cultures. Ethical dilemmas may arise, however, so to may security issues, natural disasters and even logistical challenges. Building confidence through knowledge and

facilitating the transition is important, not only to boost recruitment and retention efforts but also to create a more emotionally positive experience and facilitate cross-cultural collaboration.

Several authors who have studied cross-cultural work experiences have found that a lack of understanding and negative experiences are also related to decreased respect of the host culture (Miller et al., 2005; Chang, 2009; Almutairi et al., 2015).

Cultural norms are often imbedded within a culture and learned over time as a result of societal reactions (Vallaster, 2005); therefore, in order to accomplish a certain level of understanding, in-depth training and coaching is required (Chang, 2009). Workers must first have a good understanding of the specific cultural practices of the community in which they intend to work (Chackungal et al., 2011), taking into consideration specific communication tools and symbols (Felt, Durá & Singhal, 2014) so that they are able to understand any challenges they face in the proper cultural context (Tiessen, 2008). Role play is an effective learning strategy that allows volunteers and staff to react to potential situations, both positive and negative (Chang 2005). Incorporating opportunities to practice responding in various work *and* social interactions is critical for developing increased cultural understanding and successful social strategies (McWha, 2011).

Additionally, volunteers and interns should be presented with tools that will enable them to identify and deal with the ethical dilemmas they may face in their host country (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). An effective method of knowledge transfer to share lessons learned and cultural nuances will ensure that these learnings are captured in written documents (Smith & Lumba, 2008). Mentorship will actualize knowledge transfer, while providing additional, on-the-ground support (Pardess, 2005; van Zijll de Jong et al., 2011), especially when complex ethical issues arise (Tiessen & Heron, 2012).

Training that increases the comfort and confidence of volunteers and staff working in unfamiliar cultural environments is extremely important for recruitment and retention. Furthermore, improving success factors that lead to effective cross-cultural engagement and foster mutual respect has important ethical implications for both international workers and the communities they serve. While there is significant research on the ethics, theories and training practices that lead to facilitation of cross-cultural communication, engagement and adaptation, it is difficult to find literature focusing on perceptions of CSO volunteers, interns and staff who have worked in developing countries. Examining their perceived successes, failures, challenges and suggestions may be a critical step in improving cultural understanding and in facilitating cross-cultural interactions in this new age of increased travel, volunteer tourism and global citizenship.

Methodology

For this thesis, I used a qualitative research design in order to conduct in-depth examination of specific perceptions of CSO volunteers and interns who have worked in developing countries. Focusing on elements involving and affecting cross-cultural adaptation, I examined data using thematic networks as a specific tool for thematic analysis. This tool was advocated by Jennifer Attride-Sterling (2001) as useful and methodical for textual analysis, allowing qualitative research to “yield meaningful and useful results” (p.386) and was developed using elements of various analytic techniques.

Attride-Sterling (2001) outlines the steps for completing a thematic network analysis (p. 390-394).

1. Code material – In this first step, the researcher develops a coding framework, through which to analyze and sort text. Once the codes have been identified, the researcher then pulls from the text relevant segments for further analysis.
2. Identify themes – These coded segments are then analyzed in order to pull reoccurring themes, which should then be further refined upon re-examination.
3. Construct thematic networks – Step three requires that the researcher arrange the themes into groups that will each become thematic networks. From these, the researcher can go on to identify “basic themes” (p. 392) which can then be arranged according to “organizing themes” (p. 392), each pointing toward larger “global themes” (p. 392). The researcher will illustrate each global theme as a “thematic network” (p. 393), which can then be refined through re-examination of the text segments pulled from the data in step one.

4. Describe and explore thematic networks – This analysis allows for a deeper examination of the themes, using the text segments for reference, and identification of patterns.
5. Summarize thematic networks – The researcher is now able to summarize the major themes and patterns.
6. Interpret patterns – Joint analysis of all thematic networks in relation to theory, themes and patterns, and through the lens of the research questions.

Methods

Data for this research was obtained from four sources: informational interviews, an observation of an intern debriefing, an online survey (Appendix A), and intern interviews (Appendix B). The initial five informational interviews were informal and were conducted to identify existing training and debriefing elements. The survey helped to identify cursory perceptions of pre-departure training and post-deployment debriefings and notes from the debriefing observation contributed to the contextual understanding of some of the cross-cultural challenges and benefits faced in the field. These experiences, challenges and benefits were examined more in depth with five interviews with interns recently returned from the field.

The informational interviews were conducted with program leads from four organizations that were funded by the International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) through Global Affairs Canada and one Global Affairs Canada representative. According to Global Affairs Canada,

The International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) is part of the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Strategy, which provides Canadian youth with the tools and experience they need to launch successful careers. The IYIP is designed to offer Canadian post-secondary graduates the opportunity to gain professional experience through international development work. (International Youth Internship Program, 2017)

Interviews with the program leads and the Global Affairs Canada representative served to identify pre-departure training and post-deployment debriefing elements, along with overarching program goals. They also served as a basis for identifying some of the codes used in the initial analysis of notes from the debriefing observation, as well as the interview and survey data.

Participant observation of a debriefing was conducted in March 2017 with 19 returning interns who were deployed by the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC). The ACIC is a “coalition of individuals, organizations, and institutions working in the Atlantic region, which are committed to achieving global sustainability in a peaceful and healthy environment, with social justice, human dignity, and participation for all” (ACIC-CACI website, 2017). ACIC was able to recruit and deploy these 19 interns with funding from the IYIP program and the debriefing was a regularly scheduled component of the overall program. Data was collected from this debriefing by noting questions, comments and discussions referring to challenges or positive experiences specifically relating to cross-cultural interactions. Any references to the cross-cultural training interns received was also noted in order to attempt to relate experiences with existing training or possible improvements. Specific resources to aid in successful reintegration provided during debriefing were noted.

Prior to observation of these debriefings, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) which outlined their right to decline to allow me to observe their debriefing, either before the observation began, or any time throughout the debriefing. No participant declined consent at any time. Although consent was acquired, there were specific portions of the debriefing that I was unable to observe. Participants were assured that any observations or experiences collected and referred to in this thesis would be anonymous.

I was very mindful of observing the debriefings with as little influence as possible in order to allow the process to proceed as it normally would. This enabled data collection of both the typical debriefing process for ACIC, as well as observation and data collection of intern experiences in an environment where they may be less likely to self-censor. This particular debriefing involved a mixture between large group discussions and breakout sessions with smaller groups. During the breakout small group sessions, in order to reduce the focus on my presence, I sat with one group for the entirety of each session and a different group during subsequent sessions. I did not move from one group to another during a single session.

The survey (Appendix A) was distributed May – October 2017 by requesting that organizations and universities who send volunteers and interns abroad share it with their mailing list (see Appendix D for a copy of the outreach letter). Organizations included, but were not limited to those in the IYIP program. Outreach also included using social media (Facebook and LinkedIn posts; Facebook Group posts) and all survey participants were asked to share the survey with peers who met the sample requirements. This snowball sampling procedure also included sending the survey to my personal and professional networks and to those of the thesis committee. In order to encourage participation, a draw for a gift card valued at \$100 was offered.

Before participants could proceed to the survey, they were asked a series of questions (see Appendix E for a list of screening questions) to ensure they met the sampling criteria. If they indicated that they met all requirements, they were then directed to a statement of informed consent (Appendix F) that included assurance of their anonymity as a participant and a reminder that they may end their participation in the study at any time. They were then directed to the survey questions for participation in the research project. Questions were a combination of scaled and open-ended questions. Answers were analyzed using software from the survey tool,

LimeSurvey, as well as through thematic network analysis. In total, 20 respondents met the criteria for participation and completed the survey. As a result of this low number of respondents, all data from the scaled questions were used as descriptive statistics to inform qualitative analysis.

One-on-one interviews were conducted May – October 2017 with five interns. Each one completed their internship with one of the organizations explored during the informational interviews (three organizations were represented in total). These interviews allowed for a more in-depth exploration of perceived challenges and positive experiences related to the cross-cultural aspects of the participants' deployments. It also allowed for more in-depth exploration of their perceptions of their preparedness for the cross-cultural aspects of deployment and support received upon return to Canada. Questions focused on themes observed as a result of the informational interviews and notes from the observation of the debriefing, and encouraged discussion of cross-cultural experiences, training, debriefing and areas for improvement (if any). Responses were coded to allow for comparisons in reoccurring themes and significant differences. Prior to one-on-one interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix G) outlining their right to end the interview at any time. Participants were assured that any data or quotes gathered and referred to in this thesis would be anonymous.

After all notes from the observation of the debriefing, as well as interview and survey data were collected, I went through this data to identify code words and terms. I then coded the data based on these terms and identified data points for further evaluation. Once coded, I identified 15 basic themes (Appendix H):

1. Knowledge transfer facilitates management of expectations, communication of cultural differences and communication of lessons learned.

2. Psychological/emotional support aids personal and professional growth.
3. Attainment of professional goals is facilitated by peer and mentor support.
4. Communication of emergency plans, safety issues and how to navigate these situations are important for the overall well-being of volunteers/interns.
5. Cultural awareness aids in the successful integration of volunteers/interns in their host country.
6. Knowledge of local language (verbal and non-verbal nuances) facilitates integration into host communities.
7. Open-minded volunteers/interns are more easily able to adapt to unfamiliar cultures.
8. Respect for local cultural traditions, values and beliefs allows for more successful cross-cultural collaboration.
9. Community involvement in local events, activities or sports facilitates community integration.
10. Community participation can facilitate the development of projects that will have a sustainable impact.
11. Many actions (subconscious or not) can perpetuate negative stereotypes.
12. Communicating both positive and negative experiences to those not familiar with a particular culture can perpetuate cultural misconceptions.
13. Education initiatives can give a more well-rounded view of host cultures.
14. Networking with like-minded individuals can help develop personal relationships and professional contacts.

15. Organizations can benefit from experiences, skills and worldviews acquired while abroad.

Following that, I grouped the basic themes according to organizing themes, which I then grouped into global themes (Appendix I). In total, there were three thematic networks: 1) Personal growth (Appendix J), 2) Cultural exchange (Appendix K), 3) Global citizenship (Appendix L).

Participants

Participants included volunteers and interns who worked in at least one developing country in the past year with a CSO operating out of a developed country. For the purposes of this thesis, a developing country is defined as “a country with little industrial and economic activity and where people generally have low incomes” (Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2016). A developed country is defined as “a country with a lot of industrial activity and where people generally have high incomes” (Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2016). A full list of developed and developing countries is provided by the United Nations (2012) and were used as a guideline for recruiting participants. This restriction was an attempt to seek out participants who were deployed in countries with differing cultures.

Participation was also restricted to volunteers and interns who completed their volunteer assignment within the past year, as responses will depend on accurate memory of events. Interview respondents were interns who were deployed for at least six months. While six months is still one of the shorter timeframes identified in the literature, it is a long enough timeframe to produce elements of culture shock and adaptation. Survey respondents were not given this restriction.

Survey and interview participants ranged mostly from 19-34 years of age, with only one participant over 45 years of age. Females represented 76% of participants, 16% were male and

8% were non-binary. In terms of ethnicity, 72% were Caucasian, 16% were of mixed decent and 12% were of unknown ethnicity. Most participants had higher education with 68% having completed an undergraduate degree, 26% having completed a graduate degree, and only 4% reporting a high school diploma as the highest level of education completed. Most respondents had also already completed one or more internship or work placement abroad (60%). The vast majority of participants were raised in Canada. USA, France and England were also represented. Participants were deployed in one or more of the following countries: Haiti, South Africa, Jamaica, The Gambia, Senegal, Kenya, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Thailand, Guyana, Nigeria, Mexico.

Due to the small number of interview participants, and in particular, in order to preserve anonymity, demographic information for survey and interview respondents has been combined.

Findings

The following findings are organized according to global themes. While these themes are useful for identification and presentation of the data, it is impossible to segregate themes entirely. Many of the described elements are inter-related. These relationships will be further explored during the discussion section of this thesis.

Personal Growth

I identified two main themes in survey and interview participant responses that they perceived as contributing to their personal growth, either emotionally or professionally. The first was management of expectations, which was accomplished by efficient knowledge transfer. Challenges were identified where there was ineffective knowledge transfer either from the Canadian organizations, the host organization, the previous intern experiences, or in the handover with incoming interns. The second was an effective support system, either peer or organizational, which resulted in psychological or emotional support, emergency or safety support, or professional support.

Expectations. Survey volunteer and intern expectations of what they would get out of the placements included the opportunity to travel and experience new cultures (55%) and/or to develop practical skills that would lead to increased employability (60%); and 84% reported being somewhat to very satisfied with their overall experience. Many of those survey respondents referenced a better understanding for how to work among culturally diverse co-workers, and many referenced the personal relationships they developed. When asked to elaborate on their expectations versus what they perceived to have taken from their experiences, some of the survey participants noted the following examples:

I wanted to experience the world and learn about different cultures, heritages, and lifestyles. I think my internship experienced accomplished that. (Survey Participant 14)

I first wanted to work abroad to experience another culture and see how other people live. I also wanted to see if I could work with people with other backgrounds and perspectives in order to make someone's life better. I feel like I've had a taste of how people work cross-culturally. (Survey Participant 7)

In working abroad, I have been able to experience other cultures and work on my language and communication skills in ways that have been incredibly beneficial to me. I've met a lot of really great people with whom I remain in contact. (Survey Participant 20)

Most of the interview participants echoed these sentiments. One participant, who spent time in South America as their first work experience abroad discussed cultural interaction as a personal benefit.

I really went into it with an open mind. It was really cool to be able to work in an international setting. I've travelled a lot but I've never really worked in a setting like that. The relationships that I've established with my fellow interns as well as with my colleagues abroad were incredibly fulfilling. It was really nice to be able to connect with people like that – to establish deeper friendships. (Interview Participant 5)

As one of the main points of focus for this research involved pre-departure training, it is unsurprising that many of the comments were about the knowledge transfer from the Canadian home-organization, as well as the organization in the host country. About 68% of survey

participants reported having received pre-departure training from their home organization, and of those, 67% were somewhat to very satisfied with that training. Among the most mentioned tactics, were those that the interns perceived as providing them with tools to recognize and respect cultural differences. One of the interview participants found activities that helped identify potential personal biases as useful for maintaining cultural sensitivity while abroad.

The first activities that we did were really centred around, almost finding our place in the universe and how to articulate what our own culture was. So, we looked at who we are and how we're placed and how we think about ourselves. And then we did a day of activities around finding where we stood on a bunch of issues. We did this really neat activity where the facilitator put two different types of views down on the ground. One of them was 'Being late is disrespectful' and 'It's important to be flexible with time' would be the other. And you had to choose which one of those you identify with more strongly. And then there was some discussion around how to deal with situations which might be different from your personal thoughts on the matter. And we did a lot of discussions around anti-oppression training. (Interview Participant 2)

Some participants also mentioned the necessity of learning once they arrived in-country, either from the surrounding community or from available resources. One survey respondent elaborated on their views on effective pre-departure training.

Overall, I feel that there are a lot of things that you have to learn once you are here and from the source. There is only so much practical training you can do. (Survey Participant 11)

One of the interview participants whose placement required in-depth knowledge of local history, laws and news developments also did much of their research in-country.

I did try to do my research on the history and the laws. The first month or two us interns basically sat down to learn about the history of [our host country] and the sexual health laws that were still challenging to get by as youth and as a woman. What was illegal, what wasn't, what were some of the loopholes, what was in the news recently. We really tried to educate ourselves. (Interview Participant 3)

Further elaboration also revealed that there was a perception that some of this research could have been done ahead of time.

Even having a day [during pre-departure training] of chatting with our boss on-the-ground via Skype and having some sort of exercise to do and spending the day brainstorming with the interns about that and looking things up – I think we would have entered the workforce a bit stronger. (Interview Participant 3)

Some of this in-depth research may have been useful for other volunteers and interns who perceived the training that they received as having been too generalized. They advocated for more focused information specific to their individual host countries as a more effective approach.

The training was also very general because it was trying to accommodate volunteers going to all different places in the world, which is simply not possible in a single session. We only had country-specific training once we arrived. We need to receive more of the country-specific information before we go so that we can plan appropriately. (Survey Participant 17)

With regards to the cultural training, I've had similar training in the past and I've noticed with them all that it's still quite broad to prepare students – graduates, post-

graduates, interns. In the sense that the cultural training [needs to be] so specific to the country you're going to. (Interview Participant 3)

Interns who did get country-specific information regarding professional expectations, cultural challenges and logistical support, perceived this as beneficial to their integration within the host community. One of the interview participants described as a benefit their experience of having someone from their host country attend the pre-departure training. They also described other elements that they identified as allowing for better management of expectations.

One of the directors who had worked in [the host country] pulled us aside and sat with us as a group to go into more detail about what to expect and what was expected of us. There were also some videos that the current interns in the country prepared for us, just to give us an on-the-ground glimpse of what they were doing. Someone also came to speak with us about safety and helped us set up the emergency line, and went through the proper protocol in case of emergency. (Interview Participant 5)

Some of the information reported as most useful came from cooperation between the home organization and the organization in the host country.

I think that it's very important for Canadian programs to have well-established partners receiving interns. In most cases when I have gone away the Canadian organization has usually had a pretty good idea of what the partner organization is doing, so I feel like that's always contributed to the success of a lot of the internships that are going on. (Interview Participant 1)

Interview Participant 1 went on to explain that even in situations where there is effective communication between the home organization and the host organization, some challenges can occur. "Sometimes when you are travelling abroad and you go to different organizations, there's

just different expectations in terms of what the job will be, about what you'll be doing." They further explained the challenges of inaccurate or changing expectations and how their pre-departure training prepared them to effectively handle these changes.

Even the project itself can change because it's hard for [the host organization] to know what your skills are and what you're capable of until you get there. I felt that the program in Canada was really helpful because it kind of talked about if you're frustrated and having issues dealing with the work or the work environment, that there was support and they're very open to communication. (Interview Participant 1)

Where the above-described inter-organization communication was lacking, many volunteers and interns identified that gap; 50% of survey participants were completely to somewhat unsatisfied with the amount of information they received from their host organization abroad prior to departure. One of the survey participants elaborated on their frustration with what they perceived as ineffective communication between the home and host organizations.

Obviously, things come up and there should be room for flexibility, but if we had more info before we came, we could've hit the ground running a little more quickly.

It would be nice if there could have been a component where the [local] context was discussed in particular: the projects that others had done, who I would be working with, what the organization does, etc. (Survey Participant 10)

Interview Participant 3 echoed these sentiments and elaborated on possible improvements to communication between the host organization, the home organization and the interns.

I was pretty satisfied with the preparation but ideally it would have been nice to have better contact with our [host country] boss and getting her perspective of what we'd be doing. It's always so much better to involve your [host country] partner organization

equally with the interns you're sending – it just gives them better preparation [of] expectations. (Interview Participant 3)

In addition to discussions of effective communication between home and host organizations during pre-departure training, there was also mention of knowledge transfer among interns in order to manage expectations for their own growth and for the growth of interns following in their footsteps. One interview participant who found their placement particularly challenging noted the importance of communication between incoming and outgoing interns.

I honestly think that the most beneficial thing was hearing from the previous group and the kinds of issues they faced and how they'd overcome them. And that provided some nice context and gave me more information on what was expected of us and the kinds of issues we might face. (Interview Participant 4)

One survey participant felt hearing from any volunteer or intern having previously worked in the same area would be beneficial to incoming volunteers and interns.

I think that speaking with some other volunteers or young folks who have more recently returned from [the same country], whether with the same organization or not, would be helpful. E.g. Peace Corps who are everywhere and have lots of local training orientation materials. (Survey Participant 10)

Overall, effective communication emerged as a perceived benefit, either from volunteers and interns who felt prepared, or for those who felt less prepared for their placements. The common theme among these two groups was the management of expectations of them and by them. Once volunteer and intern placement began, whether there was a perception of preparedness or not, access to support in times of unforeseen challenges, was the next main theme that emerged.

Support. Support was another reoccurring main theme in this data. Where challenges were identified, they were often perceived as being the result of a lack of support, either from supervisors in the host country or upon return. Of those survey respondents who received reintegration support (64%), only about 50% reported being somewhat to completely satisfied with this support. A couple of interns reported a lack of professional support from their direct supervisor, and staff changes as challenging aspects of their placements.

One of the interview participants who identified major challenges in completing their assigned projects, felt a more successful internship would have been possible with more support from the host-organization supervisor.

The direct supervisor that I was working with, he's no longer working with the organization, and it was clear that he was already mentally checked out. He was doing his own projects for his other job – he was trying to build up his own business - and he didn't really have the time that it required to carry out the projects that I was given to carry out in the work place. So that never got done. It was a constant struggle. I had developed a project proposal that I never really had the confidence in what we were doing and how we were gonna do it to be able to work on it on my own. I just didn't have the community know-how that was required. (Interview Participant 4)

Another interview participant identified challenges that occurred as a result of organizational restructuring. This period of restructuring, though not significantly impacting the end result of the assigned project, did require the intern to be flexible and seek additional support where they could find it.

Part way through our program period, there was a huge reorganization of the municipality and so there were a lot of staff changes. My director was actually dismissed,

and my supervisor's contract wasn't renewed. So, it was a bit tumultuous for a little bit because no one knew what was going on and they didn't have any replacements so we were just kind of left without anyone to report to or direction. We just had to figure it out on our own and carry-on with what we were doing – checking in with whoever was willing to speak with us. It was a tricky time for everyone. (Interview Participant 5)

Once volunteers and interns returned to their home countries they perceived professional support as important for their future success. Several of the volunteers and interns noted that the on-the-job experience they received and the contacts they made were less useful than they would have been if that experience and those contacts had been obtained in their home country. Coaching on how to utilize and communicate transferable skills was therefore seen as incredibly beneficial by those who received it. Even those who did not receive this type of support noted its absence and argued its benefits.

I feel that there is discrimination against work experience in other countries. It seems to me that what is most important for Canadian non-profits is that you have experience working in Canada. So, unless you are specifically invested in looking for international jobs, [this type of experience] might not help you all that much. I've definitely noticed that there is a bias toward people with Canadian experience. International work isn't for everyone. So perhaps we could be a little more focused on finding jobs in the Canadian context. And how to market those skills in a way that would be appealing to someone here. (Interview Participant 4)

Many volunteers reported extensive safety training during pre-departure training, some of which even included a self-defence component. One interview participant noted that much of the pre-departure training centred around health and safety.

A lot of [training] had to do with health and safety. It was kind of thinking about what kinds of health things you have to think about in the country that you're going to that you might not think about in Canada. If you go somewhere very hot you'll have to pay special attention to hydration and mosquito born illnesses. We also talked about security because some of the destinations that people were going to might have higher rates of crime. They did a good job of trying to cover different areas because there were internships in a lot of different countries. (Interview Participant 1)

Generally, many of the volunteers and interns felt that this information was useful and reported feeling more comfortable with the information than they believe they would have felt without it. However, one participant reported that they were cautioned far too much on safety concerns during pre-departure training.

I think they warned us of the dangers of the country too much so we felt unsafe at first. This stopped us from feeling comfortable from the start. I think the caution was good to have, but the approach in making us fearful of being in public was wrong. (Survey Participant 19)

While that particular participant reported needing less health and safety training, several others reported not feeling they had enough of the support or information they required in order to navigate security, emergency or safety issues with ease.

My pre-departure training had very little information about dealing with street harassment, which is the number one problem I faced in-country, and I believe the number one complaint from female volunteers in my country. Information on previous security incidents needs to be carefully tracked and given to incoming volunteers during pre-departure training. When I was in-country I reported on a security incident and then

learned Ottawa was never made aware of the incident by the local team. I was also not told before I arrived that within the last year several of the volunteers had left early for security reasons. I think there is the perception that if people know what's going on they may not choose to come, but transparency needs to be emphasized and people have the right to know the exact situation to keep themselves safe. (Survey Participant 17)

A couple of the interview participants also noted personal concerns with emergency protocols.

It would have been challenging to get ahold of our Canadian partner if there'd been an emergency. Not the [main home organization] but the other one – there were two partners. It would have been nice to have met them during the pre-departure training. (Interview Participant 2)

We had to deal with a hurricane scare and some of us evacuated and other stayed, but looking back at some of the protocols that were in place for interns, there was quite a bit of a grey area. Most likely this will happen again in the future in some Caribbean country. I know some interns experienced some civil conflict during an election and so they were also able to express their opinions and what could have been more clear in terms of safety. Hopefully [the host organizations] can use this feedback to improve some of the protocols in the future. (Interview Participant 3)

Where cultural challenges were reported as having been navigated with ease, psychological and logistical support from the host organizations, home organization and from peer groups were perceived to have been instrumental in doing so.

I had a really great experience because the person who ended up being my boss in [my host country] actually offered to come pick me up from the airport and was just extremely accommodating when I arrived so that I wouldn't have to worry about feeling lost or without accommodation. In terms of the Canadian partner that sent me, they were always in contact with us so we never felt as if we were abandoned. (Interview Participant 1)

My ability to integrate into the community was essential to succeeding at work as the culture places a high emphasis on personal connections and informal meetings. Having a network of people also allowed me to brainstorm or problem solve with a range of actors when I ran into issues. Most of my friends were from organizations outside of [my home organization] and its partners and I would not have been able to deal with the pressures of work and daily life without them. (Survey Participant 17)

This type of support was also perceived as incredibly important for volunteers and interns once they returned home from their placements. Several of the survey and interview respondents reported needing emotional support, in particular, in order to readjust to life in their home country and in order to reconcile some of the experiences they had while living abroad.

When I did get back, I did have emotional support. Because I did experience kind of a depression when I came back just from being somewhere and being so on the go and constantly busy and just coming back to a lull. And not being somewhere as exciting and not having a job when I got back. That's always been a big anxiety part for me. But I think eventually when I did reach out to the program coordinator, she was very helpful and supportive. (Interview Participant 1)

Having the debriefing session as a way to wrap everything up and really process that experience was very helpful and a nice way to conclude [the experience]. The chance to talk with people who had had, if not the same experiences, similar experiences, was really valuable. (Interview Participant 2)

Some volunteers and interns found this type of support lacking and perceived this as a barrier to their emotional adjustment upon reintegration.

I would have loved to have chat with a coordinator about my time abroad to help me decompress. Unfortunately, the last time I spoke with one was while I was still in [my host country]. I have so many things I'd love to get off my chest about my experience! (Survey Participant 20)

Effective management of expectations, along with appropriate logistical, safety, emotional and professional support were all perceived as important for professional and emotional growth. Most of the discussion of the factors described above was in reference to pre-departure training and reintegration support. The following section focuses on in-country experiences, both personally and professionally.

Cultural Exchange

Much of the discussion during the interviews, as well as comments within the survey, of volunteer and intern experiences within their host communities centred around the challenges and strategies for navigating daily cultural differences, and the ability or inability to integrate with locals. There was also discussion among some of the volunteers and interns around how their presence, and the presence of their host organizations, would affect the host communities in the long-run.

Integration. Only 45% of survey participants reported feeling integrated in their host communities within the first two months of their placements, while 15% reported never feeling integrated at all. Factors that led to the ability to integrate into the host community were perceived to be: an awareness of the culture and main differences between the culture of host communities and that of the volunteer/intern home communities, previous experience with other cultures, knowledge of the local language, open-mindedness, attending community events and respect for cultural differences.

Some volunteers and interns reported that specific information about differences they might face in their host community allowed them to be more prepared for these differences.

My training was very focused on hypothetical situations that may arise at a placement, but didn't mention the specific culture of my country at all. I didn't really bring the right clothes with me when I packed because I did not realize how much "going out" was a part of the culture – informal gatherings and friendships are really important to make connections. There seemed to be a high emphasis [in training] on watching your behaviour so as not to offend anyone or to ruin the reputation of the organization, but not enough on the importance of informal gatherings. (Survey Participant 17)

Some specific examples of pre-training information that various survey and interview participants perceived as contributing to their integration included:

1. *Two hours of learning greetings and the story behind calling white people 'Muzungus'.*
2. *[Learning] a timeline of [the host country's] history.*
3. *A mandatory international studies course.*
4. *A focus on community economic development.*

5. *A week-long cultural class to learn [the] language, the town, different cultural differences and gestures.*
6. *Flip charts of important statistics.*
7. *Brainstorming and breaking off into groups with people you'd be working with.*
8. *In-person and video presentations from previous interns.*

Where specific cultural information was lacking, volunteers and interns perceived this to be a barrier to successful integration. Survey Participant 5 felt they needed “more training and information regarding women's rights and potential work place implications.” Another survey participant felt they didn't have the tools they needed to successfully integrate into their host community.

I felt that a lack of understanding of the intricacies of life, lack of language and lack of continued involvement with the community meant I never truly integrated. (Survey Participant 2)

This same respondent, though, did not believe that what they required could be accomplished during pre-departure training and felt there was no replacement for additional time spent within a host community.

I found many locals saw me as "just another intern" and didn't seem to make the effort to see who I was or why I was different. I believe that has to do with the large turn-over of international students/interns in an otherwise close-knit community. If I'm being honest I don't think pre-departure training would have led to success. Success may have been increased by longer-term interactions with the community as well as a complete shift in what it means to work abroad in a community development context. (Survey Participant 2)

Other volunteers and interns also commented on the necessity of community involvement, which they perceived to be a main tool for successful integration within their host communities.

[I was successful by] making friends with my coworkers, going to local events, going to people's homes, using public transit, using the public markets and regular grocery stores. The more I got to know locals, the more things I was invited to, and the more I became attached to the city and a true part of the local community. I started to live a lifestyle that the locals live and it was so much more fulfilling than using the stretch of the Canadian dollar to live the high life. (Survey Participant 6)

I developed a network quite quickly, both with people inside and outside my organization, and it helped me to integrate quickly into daily life. Without that network, I would not have felt as comfortable. (Survey Participant 17)

[We were successful by] making friends with local people who could integrate us much better than international staff had cared to. Once we started forming our own community of friends was when we really started learning culture, language, intricacies of our environment, etc. (Survey Participant 11)

Knowing how to speak the local language was perceived to be a huge benefit. Some volunteers and interns perceived their lack of local language skills, and the lack of local language skills of their peers, as an almost insurmountable obstacle, preventing volunteers and interns from integrating into their host communities. Survey Participant 14 noted that they were not “uncomfortable in the culture” and instead described their biggest challenge as “the language

barrier, which is difficult to overcome.” This idea was echoed by survey and interview respondents alike.

Without a knowledge of the local language I never truly met people that weren't related to my job. (Survey Participant 2)

The two people that did come that weren't as comfortable with Spanish definitely had a much harder time integrating themselves. Just because, sometimes without language you feel like you don't have your personality. (Interview Participant 1)

Interview Participant 1 was also able to compare their most recent placement with past experiences working in developing countries and identified language as an important tool.

This time I had that language advantage so I definitely did not struggle as much as I know some of the other interns did who arrived and didn't have as much of a grasp on the language. I know that kind of gave them an outsider feeling a lot of the time. It created more anxiety, especially in work and everything. I was able to acclimatize a lot easier because of language. (Interview Participant 1)

Other communication challenges were noted in relation to literacy and a tradition of oral communication over written communication. Using more locally appropriate tools was perceived as both a challenge and necessary adjustment required on behalf of the volunteers and interns. One of the interview participants who focused on research within the community found that they needed to adjust their collection methods to fit the comfort of their research participants.

I wanted the people who I was giving the surveys to, to be able to fill them out on their own, because I felt like I might get a different answer if I'm asking the question. What I quickly discovered was that no one wanted to fill out the form. They all wanted me to

read it to them and then they would give me the answer. I wasn't super happy about that but it seemed like, especially with the older generations that they just didn't feel comfortable reading. (Interview Participant 4)

One interview participant perceived collaborative sessions with other interns in various developing countries as useful in identifying specific culturally appropriate and/or project-appropriate tools and ideas.

We had weekly WebEx sessions where we would talk about a different theme every week. That was across all participants [in the various countries]. It was a time to talk about what we were doing and check in with each other. Every week we would alternate talking about the project we were working on. Some weeks were themed and we teamed up to present on a topic. There was a presentation on how to reduce the use of plastic bottles, and actually, our tree nursery was built using plastic bottles, so we thought we should use that to show that it's not waste and it can actually be used as a resource. When we presented on that, one of the other participants reached out to us to discuss how it could be something they could do with their project. There was another group doing community gardens at a school and some of my fellow interns, their project was focused on urban development. They were redeveloping this urban park and they were like 'hey, maybe we can do some urban gardens in our park'. So, there was definitely some sharing of ideas. We really did develop this comradery and it was nice knowing we had that support. (Interview Participant 5)

Being open-minded was also perceived to be important for community integration. Many volunteers and interns felt they needed to be flexible to differences they did not understand or did not anticipate.

[I was successful by] speaking the language, being flexible, not having expectations and keeping a positive outlook. (Survey Participant 7)

I had expected the local country office to be a bit more ready for us, but can appreciate the stress they are under and of course did not take this personally. I was able to insert myself in other ways and still provide some help on some other tasks. (Survey Participant 10)

One of the interview participants discussed a perceived lack of open-mindedness as a barrier to a positive experience.

The person who was with me while I was there, when our internships matched, we ended up not being as in-sync near the end. I kept trying to support him and he wasn't doing anything to change or to try new strategies to help himself, he just continued complaining about the issues he was facing. So, at the end, I just stepped back from the situation because I couldn't keep trying to help him when he wasn't going to do anything himself. (Interview Participant 1)

This ability to be open-minded and integrate into the community was perceived as contributing to the ability of volunteers and interns to maintain cultural sensitivity and respect for the host community's culture.

I think that making friends is probably the best way to maintain cultural sensitivity. I had a few ideas about Latin America before I went in terms of gender roles and other practices like religion and things like that, but I think that's the best way to get an idea of everything - is to make friends with people who live there and go off of how they act themselves. So, it's a lot of listening and observing when you first arrive. And always

being respectful and realizing that you have pre-set biases from where you've grown up and your family and everything you've learned and that everybody else has a different history so you have to respect their different backgrounds and how they might see things because you don't have the same stories. (Interview Participant 1)

Another of the interview participants also perceived the ability to listen and observe as being crucial to integration within the host community and important for attempting to maintain cultural sensitivity.

The most important thing is to listen more than you speak, especially when you're talking about issues that may be more sensitive, and not imposing my views on a situation. My work was focused on LGTB rights and how vulnerable persons can access justice, so I had to listen more than I spoke and to be really careful about imposing the North American ideal about what rights should be and which rights should be more important. (Interview Participant 2)

Open-mindedness and respect for culture were perceived as facilitating interactions, despite challenging and conflicting cultural values and beliefs.

I was able to understand cultures and norms but was not able to interact with locals well due to the way Asians are seen in Jamaica. As an Asian person, this was particularly difficult for me. (Survey Participant 8)

Being a man in a place like [my host country], the differences aren't all that apparent. I was working [there] with my spouse, and it was more problematic with her for cultural sensitivity. She had to change the way she dressed and I didn't really have to change all

that much. And even less so in [my previous work abroad]. So I guess, I don't know. It's an odd double standard but it's certainly there. (Interview Participant 4)

Having an open-minded personality, along with relevant language skills and the ability to integrate within the community were all perceived to be important components of cultural exchange and a positive experience. Respect for the host culture was certainly viewed as an important aspect of community integration, and this led to the consideration by many volunteers and interns of the ethical implications of their presence within their host communities.

Host community impact. During their placements, some volunteers and interns deliberated the ethical implications of their presence and the initiatives they were working on. One reoccurring concern was the possibility that they might perpetuate negative stereotypes within their host community. One of the interview respondents illustrated how difficult this can be to avoid by describing a regular scenario.

One thing in [my host country] that was really hard to deal with was, because I'm white, there's this perception that I'm somehow smarter or know things that they don't know. And that becomes really problematic when your boss is [a local] but they still ask you questions and you have no idea what the answer is. They're the ones that have that information. And I don't know quite how to overcome it. It just seems like there's not a lot of confidence when dealing with a white person and that's problematic in a work place. (Interview Participant 4)

Concerns of how to reduce negative impact on host communities resulted in an effort by some volunteers and interns to involve the community in decisions about the type and extent of the initiatives respondents were tasked to execute.

[A participatory approach] was integral as it allowed me to better understand the community's wants, needs and strengths in order to implement programs/activities, which are culturally appropriate and sustainable. (Survey Participant 5)

One of the interview participants was particularly conscious of the effect that their projects would have on the host community. Having participated in other international development initiatives, this was at the top of their mind as they began their most recent work placement.

I think that having worked previously in development and having lived in a country where there was a lot of development work, I've seen the overwhelming majority of projects fail. I wanted to do a lot of research before I did any projects. Just to make sure that this was something that the community actually wanted, and would actually have a long-term impact, rather than just be something that I could stamp my name on. (Interview Participant 4)

This particular intern reported feeling conflicted enough about how best to carry out their initiatives that, in the end, they could not do so.

I was able to do a lot of research to see what kinds of projects I might implement. So, we did things like surveys, we went door-to-door, we did workshops with community members – all those sorts of things, to try to see what it is that they really wanted in their community, what was going on, what their thoughts were, what their plans for the future were. There were definitely some areas of need, for example, I was looking at a park that had become not so nice and I wanted to know how we could revitalize that park and make it something the community members could be proud of. There were a lot of ideas focused

around security and these kinds of things and, while I had ideas on how we might address it, there just wasn't the time for me to begin implementing it. (Interview Participant 4)

When asked about their expectations for their placement, one survey participant illustrated their frustration with their work term abroad, and felt this experience was representative of a common issue.

Although I am glad to have seen it, I was very disappointed with NGOs in their broader sense. Being on the frontline I came to see first-hand how often NGOs fail or really are not what we think they are, regardless of their size, or notoriety. Big international organizations are often the worse [sic] as they come with their own projects based, not on local culture, but on what they think people need, and dump huge amount of resources on failing projects. At the local level, it allows for a lot of corruption and the money rarely reach it's [sic] intended destination. (Survey Participant 9)

Interview Participant 2 noted that their “project was also really shaped by the priorities of the Northern funder,” a scenario that they perceived to be less than ideal.

While many of the interview and survey respondents commented on their desire to improve their host communities and were confident the organizations with which they worked were attempting to do the same, there was some concern about the short-term nature of many of the projects in which respondents were involved. One interview participant reported a desire to be involved in a piece of a larger project; however, because there was a perceived focus on developing skills and experiences of volunteers and interns, this did not appear to be desirable for the organizations or other interns involved.

I did my best to try to hand over parts of [my project] but it just didn't seem like – there were interns that came in after us and I spoke to both of them about the research I had

done and what was going on but they weren't super interested in taking that up. They wanted to develop their own projects. (Interview Participant 4)

They went on to describe what they perceived to be a flaw in the program with which they were involved.

When you read through these mandates it says nothing about the country and the people you're working with. And that is such an obvious absence. It's all about you. And that's problematic. And that creates these pressures...at the risk of setting up projects that aren't sustainable, which I would argue is very counter-active. (Interview Participant 4)

Another interview participant also challenged the ethical implications of programs that send volunteers and interns abroad to work in international development.

There's such a fine line in terms of what's better – funding the local organization on-the-ground and funding local workers to do the work, or sending people abroad. In my opinion, we're coming to that era where institutions and hiring agencies really need to be aware of – just because it looks good on paper – was it really ethical? It's always a broader issue, in my opinion. Is there a different way to do it that is more culturally appropriate? (Interview Participant 3)

Discussions of cultural exchange were sorted into two main themes: community integration and community impact. Volunteers and interns attempted to integrate into the community so that they were in a position to learn as much as possible from their experiences. The majority of respondents considered a perceived successful integration as a vital piece of their placements. In learning and integrating, there was also a focus by many on the impact they would have on their host communities, and the impact of the organizations with which they were

working. Once they returned to their home countries, the concern for how they would impact their host communities, even after having left, was still a concern for many respondents.

Global Citizenship

The third global theme identified in this data was the notion of volunteers and interns applying their learned knowledge, adjusted worldview, acquired skills and unique perspectives of host communities to the global body of knowledge, and becoming ambassadors for cross-cultural awareness, if even in a very small way. Additionally, a very notable concern and focus for these types of placements, is on preparing participants for better employment opportunities and positions of leadership.

Home community education. There are various ways in which volunteers and interns who work abroad can communicate their experiences and lessons learned to family, friends and their home communities. Some of these are perceived to have positive impacts and some of these are perceived to have negative impacts. One large concern for volunteers and interns was the possibility that they would perpetuate negative stereotypes in, or about, their host communities. One interview participant described their struggle with communicating about their experience once they returned to their home country.

In my case there was a significant amount more of violence to be concerned about. The debriefing gave me a chance to re-centre my responses to a Canadian context. But also, how to answer questions about 'well, wasn't it so dangerous there'? And how to talk about these types of things without feeding stereotypes. (Interview Participant 2)

Seemingly of equal concern was the possibility of inaccurately representing one's host community, either consciously or subconsciously. This could be accomplished through depictions on social media (and ethical photography), or through interactions with friends, family

and the community. One of the interview participants described this challenge and their concerns of speaking about their experience once they returned home.

That's always been something very important to me: giving the truthful version of what you've experienced in a different country. It's pretty hard for people to understand when they haven't been there. Myself included. I haven't visited a lot of regions of the world so I really can't understand some of the things people would want to explain about the reality of those places. But I wonder if there are different strategies of sharing those stories that are helpful for giving people a more accurate picture of cultures, and things like that. (Interview Participant 1)

They elaborated on the feeling of needing to be more cautious about speaking around friends or family who had never had similar experiences, as they were perceived to more easily misunderstand.

When I talked with people who had similar studies and had done similar internships there was a lot of connect because they'd faced similar situations and challenges. Whereas, if you're talking to friends...I studied international development so if I spoke to friends who weren't in that bubble or hadn't done long stints abroad doing work, they were more interested in the travel aspect, they kind of viewed it as you on vacation for six months. And maybe it's also because of what we put on Facebook and social media because, of course, I wanted them to hear of the interesting things I was doing – I did put up some things about work, but a lot more of it was how I was using my time to also see the country. (Interview Participant 1)

One tool some volunteers and interns were asked to utilize, was community education initiatives. Through events, presentations or other educational activities, volunteers and interns

attempted to present a more well-rounded representation of their host communities. Still others perceived a benefit of their experience in their development of empathy, what that meant for foreigners in their home countries and how they could facilitate integration for those in their home countries.

I'm just a lot better at presenting myself to second language speakers because I'm more aware of the struggles they face. It's given me more sympathy for people who move to Canada and the struggles they face. (Interview Participant 4)

You're working with people from different cultures so you have to learn the best way that you can both benefit from the experience. (Interview Participant 3)

Communicating their experiences with friends, family and the general public was one concern mentioned by several respondents. Another common concern was how to communicate those experiences to potential employers, how to illustrate transferable skills, and what that would mean for their future careers and aspirations.

Employment and leadership. The focus for many of these placements, especially the internships, was on providing participants with the skills and experiences they need to obtain employment and become more effective leaders. This was reflected in both the survey and interview data. Many volunteers and interns perceived their experiences as having helped them obtain the skills and perspectives necessary for the types of employment positions in which they were interested. Several survey respondents commented specifically on the professional impact of their placements.

[The placement] helped me gain an understanding of what field I wanted to work in, helped me develop independent working skills, which I utilize in my new job every day, and made me value having work to do and funds to do it. (Survey Participant 2)

My experiences abroad pushed me towards a job that I love. I learned a lot through my volunteer experiences but they also showed me which areas I do not want to pursue. (Survey Participant 7)

I work for the government and I got my job from having worked abroad. (Survey Participant 19)

I was explicitly told by my manager that my experience [abroad] and passion for culture is what gave me the edge over other candidates. (Survey Participant 5)

I think [my placement] helped be become even more adaptable and flexible when things change. I also have learned to be better at checking in with others and better manage expectations. (Survey Participant 10)

All the interview respondents also discussed the professional benefits of their placements.

Two excerpts are included below.

Absolutely my confidence has improved. I'm much better at articulating my needs as a worker. I used to be a little bit shy about explaining how I'm feeling and having personal kinds of conversations in the workplace and now it's something that I feel is absolutely

necessary to my functioning in the workplace. If something's not going right, I need to talk about it to address it and get it over with. (Interview Participant 4)

We were working for a family planning organization and I've also been interested in sexual/reproductive health, so for me I learned skills that could be applied to many developing countries, so I could learn from that and apply it to future positions.

(Interview Participant 3)

While 70% of survey participants reported being employed, and some perceived this employment as having directly resulted from their internships, there was much feedback in the survey on possible improvements to internship programs, in particular. Survey Participant 19 noted that they wished “it was easier to use supervisors and connections abroad as references for new job applications.”

While most of the interview participants were very happy with their placements and the support they received, during the interviews, many did identify areas for improvement as well. One of the interview respondents described their main challenges and expectations of professional support.

To be honest, when I was originally interviewed for the program, one of the big selling points was that reintegration training. That they would have that process to connect you to employment when you got back home. That was something that I was very interested in... maybe they said it in a way that made it seem like it was a little more hands on than it was. Because I'd worked abroad quite a few times, even though I made very good connections while I was there, they weren't so helpful when I was looking for a job in Canada. So, I feel especially now, for new grads, a really helpful thing is having those

contacts. So that's one of the drawbacks of the internship is that you don't establish some of the homebased contacts that you would like. (Interview Participant 1)

Less related to employment, and more related to peer support and developing relationships with like-minded individuals, many volunteers and interns also perceived a need for networking opportunities with other interns.

I wish I had more time to discuss with my fellow interns, their experiences and how they have developed because of it. (Survey Participant 8)

[The internship] is advertised as something that is funded by the Government of Canada, but basically, they are mostly giving financial support. There's no other support in terms of training or creating a network for all of their interns. I know that they fund a lot of internship programs, so even creating a network or conferences or things like that. The purpose of their funding is to give new graduates employable skills by sending them to these different jobs. They put it on the programs in terms of responsibility to make sure [CSO organizations] have that reintegration process but [the government] doesn't take any responsibility themselves for maybe aiding that process, as well. (Interview Participant 1)

Finally, some volunteers and interns perceived these experiences as having greater implications globally, for the improved overall understanding of other cultures, for the development of future programs and for continued international development work.

The experience was good for me, but I'm not sure it really made a big difference for the country I was working in. I'm not sure funding volunteer programs is the best use of the Canadian government's money if it is seriously interested in making a difference in the

country. I believe simply giving the money directly to the local organizations would have a larger impact. (Survey Participant 17)

I guess, the world has become more nuanced for me. Before I started working and taking jobs in international development, I definitely looked at it with rosy glasses. And I think that I just didn't understand the complexities of at all. (Interview Participant 4)

One reemerging theme of this research has been the perceived importance of experiences that help volunteers and interns learn and grow, both personally and professionally, and on the perceived importance of doing so while respecting the values and beliefs of host communities. This concern is also reflected in how both survey and interview respondents comment and discuss appropriate ways to communicate about their host cultures and their experiences. In speaking with family, friends and potential employers, many respondents have noted a concern in how to accurately portray their personal experiences, professional experience and how to accurately portray their host communities.

Discussion

This research explores CSO volunteer and intern perceptions of their experiences working in developing countries within the context of cross-cultural interaction and collaboration. Those experiences are framed by the pre-departure training and reintegration support that each received, or the lack thereof, and how the elements of each affected the overall experience. Factors outside of training and debriefing that may have affected the overall experience were also explored. These factors included personal experiences, such as previous and frequent international travel, previous work abroad, previous internships, previous cross-cultural training, and previously having lived abroad. Also considered were personal skills, such as host language skills, as well as open-mindedness and the ability to be flexible.

Three research questions guided the data collection for this research project: 1) Within the context of cross-cultural interaction, which elements of pre-departure training did CSO volunteers and interns perceive to be most useful to them? 2) Within the context of cross-cultural interaction, which elements of reintegration support did CSO volunteers and interns perceive to be most useful to them? 3) Overall, what did CSO volunteers and interns perceive to be the benefits of their placements?

Data on each of these questions was collected via participant observation with interns having recently returned from placements abroad, a survey containing a mix of scaled and open-ended questions, and one-on-one interviews. The focus on qualitative data allowed interns to direct their answers and share experiences that they perceived to be the most relevant. It also allowed for self-reflection, as the focus was on their perceptions, rather than on the measurable impacts they may or may not have had on their host communities. Though impact on host

communities was not explicitly explored as a focus, it was a commonly addressed issue by participants.

Pre-Departure Training

Several elements of pre-departure training that were identified in the literature as useful (Bell & Carens, 2004; Chang, 2005; McWha, 2011; Pardess, 2005) were also found to have a perceived benefit to participants in facilitating adaptation within their host communities, success in their professional roles and ease of navigation in unfamiliar countries and cultures. Because there were different elements of pre-departure training provided by the various organizations represented in this research, some of those elements were identified through participants' experience, and some are based on the perceptions of volunteers and interns that these elements were lacking.

Volunteers and interns in this research identified communication of relevant information as useful for their management of expectations and as a tool for navigating challenging situations. Information on general cultural awareness and tools for helping volunteers and interns recognize their own biases were common and considered useful. Many commented that while this general information was useful, it was only a part of what they felt they needed to know before arriving in their host countries. More specific information about the individual countries each volunteer and intern was visiting, was identified by those who received it as useful, and by those who did not, as lacking.

Each culture represents a unique set of values, traditions, beliefs, artifacts, and verbal, as well as non-verbal nuances. Each also has a unique combination of differences, safety issues, and needs. For this reason, specific information about host countries can be very beneficial to volunteers and interns and several ways to accomplish this discovery of information are

illustrated in this research. While some organizations hosted presentations or meetings with previous interns working in each of the countries receiving new interns, others encouraged research projects specific to the host country or brought in country experts to share relevant information. Once having arrived in their host countries, some of the host organizations conducted a tour of the community, presented an oral description of its history or pointed out some of the most common, but unique words, sayings and gestures. Still others presented each intern with a package of tips, blogs and videos compiled by past interns working in the host country. As the focus of much of these placements was on practical skill development in the workplace, volunteers and interns who knew what would be expected of them and what their work tasks consisted of (i.e. detailed job descriptions), perceived their terms to be less challenging. Similarly, another perceived benefit was comprehensive information on work culture and organization hierarchy of the host organizations, given prior to departure.

Many cultures have values and beliefs that differ from much of the developed world, yet many international development organizations are run by citizens raised in developed countries. Many CSOs are working in developing countries precisely to try to improve quality of life by working for equality for all. In these countries, where volunteers and interns are often working to promote controversial initiatives, the skills and strategies for balancing respect for the local culture with professional requirements are incredibly important. Even for volunteers and interns who are not working in controversial roles, the predominately female participants in this research identified the necessity of examining ethical implications of sensitive issues and related potential scenarios. The literature further advocates for this idea of giving volunteers and interns the tools to handle complex ethical issues (Bell & Carens, 2004; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Miller, VeneKlasen & Clark, 2005; Nic a Bháird, 2013; Wallace et al., 2013; Mostafanezhad, 2013).

Without these tools, volunteers and interns perceived themselves to be at a disadvantage and in some cases, have indicated emotional distress as a result.

This facilitation of cultural sensitivity also has wider-reaching implications. Without the tools to be respectful and adaptable in their host communities, the literature suggests that integration into the host community will be difficult to achieve (de Jong, 2009; Frankis & Flowers, 2009; Wilder & Morris, 2008). This community integration is perceived as vital for effective professional experiences and positive personal experiences. Without this integration, volunteers and interns reported feeling like outsiders and having missed out on an important aspect of their experience.

In a situation with so many unknowns, the more information that can be provided ahead of time, the more volunteers and interns feel they can successfully navigate unforeseen situations. Some volunteers and interns reported needing general health and safety information to properly prepare for their placements. Examples included, clothing best suited for the temperature and how to best avoid potential bug and disease concerns. Other interns felt they needed much more support to navigate unsafe situations. Ranging from advice on specific areas to avoid, at specific times, to unsafe or uncomfortable social situations and potential defense techniques, volunteers and interns perceived this information to be useful in mitigating physical and emotional trauma. Those volunteers and interns who found themselves in emergency situations perceived this lack of support and advanced knowledge particularly stressful. There were several comments about the need for proper emergency protocols and contacts that were perceived as necessary for future placements.

Mentorship or another form of support was also identified in the literature to be a useful tool in cultural integration and adaption (Pardess, 2005). Strong support systems were identified

by volunteers and interns as beneficial in a variety of ways. Having contact with a representative from the volunteer or intern's home organization served as a lifeline and professional resource. Having the opportunity to engage with someone who has lived a similar experience with similar challenges provided a resource for managing difficult situations. Having a peer group, either in the host country, around the world with a similar community, or both, served as a valuable brainstorming tool, useful for both professional and personal successes. While support from other foreigners was useful, having a social network within the host community was viewed as essential for successful integration, and served as a valuable resource for community inclusion, as well as a compass for navigating and understanding situations within specific cultural contexts.

Each of the above elements were identified by the volunteers and interns in this research and are fairly easy to achieve with research, pre-planning, and a good relationship with the local office or partner organization in the host country. Organization, information and support were all perceived as providing the necessary tools to facilitate integration and cultural adaptation, professional successes, and an overall positive experience. While each of these elements was particularly useful to the participants in this research, some personal skills, experiences and traits were also identified as useful for cross-cultural adaptation.

With the information and support needed from the home organization and the host organization, volunteers and interns felt that they were better able to navigate the challenging and sometimes uncomfortable situations that they were faced with each day. Participants reported facing everything from daily logistical issues to severe sexual harassment. These daily challenges were more easily navigated by volunteers and interns who were described as open and

flexible, who had previous experience within unfamiliar cultures and who spoke the local language.

Speaking the local language was perceived as being very important for successful integration within the host community. It allowed volunteers and interns to form relationships with locals, to better learn and understand cultural traditions and to pick up cultural nuances. It also allowed them to participate in community events and activities. Inclusion in each of the above-mentioned elements was reported as significantly improving the quality of the overall experience.

Volunteers and interns who described themselves, or their peers, as open and flexible, also perceived these traits to be useful in adapting to unfamiliar cultures. The differences of daily life, work life and peer network could be overwhelming, and sometimes incomprehensible. Those who could easily work within a changing and confusing environment were reported to have had more successful and inclusive placements. Previous experiences working or living abroad provided a frame of reference for some of the more challenging aspects of being entrenched in unfamiliar situations and was perceived as having facilitated a more open and flexible attitude.

Reintegration Support

Living in an unfamiliar country, within a different culture and without a regular network of friends and family can be emotionally exhausting. Challenges in communicating efficiently, in understanding complex cultural nuances and attempting to achieve professional objectives, despite potential ethical dilemmas, can add to the exhaustion. Additionally, many volunteers and interns working in developing countries may be faced daily with uncomfortable situations. Once returned to their home countries, some volunteers and interns even reported reverse culture shock

– the challenge of readapting to life prior to their placements – either as a result of this placement or a previous one. For volunteers and interns experiencing the emotional challenges of readjusting to their home countries, having a space to discuss past negative experiences, frustrations and connections to awe-inspiring cultures, was perceived as a very important step in the process.

Furthermore, many volunteers and interns reported looking forward to reconnecting with peers and having the chance to decompress among those who could understand the types of experiences they had had. While volunteers and interns who had been deployed to different countries could not understand the specific experiences of one another, having a similar frame of references, from which to draw parallels, was perceived as enabling them to understand each other in ways many others could not.

In addition to providing volunteers and interns with an opportunity to share and vent, reintegration support also provided them with the opportunity to negotiate specific challenges and lingering emotional issues in the presence of those who could offer advice and strategies for how to manage them. One of these challenges included being able to communicate experiences with those around them who had no frame of reference, and therefore could not fully understand. Another challenge included how to mitigate the perpetuation of negative stereotypes or preconceived notions of a culture that many volunteers and interns reported feeling a deep connection with.

As outlined in the literature, the type of interactions and experiences achieved by these placements can serve to facilitate the development of a bond between the volunteer or intern and their host community (de Jong, 2009; Frankis & Flowers, 2009; Wilder & Morris, 2008). As a result, despite negative experiences, many volunteers and interns reported feeling protective of

their host community and sought to avoid any negative or unrealistic perceptions of the host culture. Many of them felt they faced the challenge of communicating both the good and the bad that they experienced, but felt that by doing so, one way or another, they would be perpetuating incorrect assumptions. Through meetings with their host organization, with peers in their cohort, or both, volunteers and interns felt they were provided with a safe space in which to share experiences before needing to navigate communication of these experiences with those lacking the same level of understanding.

Many of the organizations represented in this research required volunteers and interns to participate in community education opportunities. This allowed them to present a more well-rounded depiction of their host cultures in the form of presentations, community events and educational materials. These types of initiatives also gave volunteers and interns the opportunity to become a type of ambassador for their host cultures. They provided a space to share the beautiful aspects of their host communities, within realistic and educational settings. The education initiatives also allowed them to put their knowledge to use by informing their home communities of the opportunities and responsibilities of working in developing countries.

As I mentioned above, one large benefit to experiences abroad is the development of practical professional skills, along with cultural intelligence – the ability to work across cultures. Volunteers and interns identified one challenge of working abroad as the inability to create professional networks within the context of the Canadian or Northern workforce. It is therefore perceived as being very important that they are able to effectively communicate relevant work experience and transfer of skills to potential employers. Learning the strategies for applying experience from working abroad to businesses within the Canadian/Northern context required support from the home organization. Where provided, this support was identified as being useful

in acquiring employment post-deployment. Where absent, this support was identified as a desired element of post-deployment reintegration.

A common element that was commented on by volunteers and interns was the ability to develop a professional network. While many appreciated the support in building or expanding on their resumes, many also felt that additional support in the form of professional interaction would have provided more exposure to potential employers leading to expedited employment in their desired fields. The focus of most of the organizations represented in this research was on providing young Canadians with employable skills; however, interns perceived the lack of professional networking opportunities as a prominent gap in the overall design of the program.

Another desire expressed by volunteers and interns was the opportunity to engage with peers with similar experiences and career paths beyond post-deployment. The immediate debrief was identified as very useful and volunteers and interns identified their appreciation of this opportunity. However, there were many who commented that they would like to be able to engage further than just that once and believed that a networking group or networking activities that brought past volunteers and interns together would be beneficial for discussing shared experiences, lessons learned and for professional advancement.

Opportunities to provide feedback were plentiful throughout the entire process. Volunteers and interns identified the ability to provide suggestions on improvements and communicate about the status of their work and personal experiences as very satisfying. They were happy that their experiences could benefit future programs, along with future volunteers and interns. They also identified some of the required feedback processes as being beneficial for personal reflection of professional and social developments. There were some, however, who expressed the desire to provide more in-depth feedback or better utilize feedback from their

experiences. Some respondents noted being open to mentorship opportunities, some were interested in taking this knowledge to future employers or working to further international development, and others expressed a desire for the community at large to benefit.

Overall benefit

The idea of working to further international development or to benefit the community at large was reoccurring in this research. Almost all the volunteers and interns in this research were very satisfied with their experiences. Even though many identified areas for improvement, most felt it was a positive experience. Many of the volunteers and interns who were deployed were also passionate about cross-cultural collaboration and sustainable international development. A small, but significant, group of volunteers and interns also reported being concerned with the ethical implications of sending volunteers and interns abroad to engage in short-term initiatives that may potentially have a harmful impact on the recipient communities. Many identified the notion of shorter-term volunteer and intern placements as creating unsustainable development projects that because of their unsustainable nature, would harm the host communities.

As noted in the literature, longer placements are perceived as having more positive impacts on the host community (Chang, 2005; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Some volunteers and interns also urged consideration of creating placements that would be part of larger, more sustainable projects. While these may not necessarily provide the breadth of experience that the shorter-term initiatives would, they were preferred by some for the reduced perceived negative impact on the host community. By changing the focus from mainly benefiting volunteers and interns, to a focus on benefiting the host communities, some interns felt the projects would be more ethical. This view of international development being more harmful than beneficial to host communities caused a few interns to question their desire to be involved in the field at all.

In addition to the impact that volunteers and interns may have abroad, the literature suggests that as future leaders and citizens with diverse perspectives and experiences, they also have a great potential to impact Canadian/Northern communities (Tiessen, 2011; Tiessen & Herron, 2012). Their diversity of thought and the benefit of their experiences will inform the decisions they make in future employment positions, but should also be applied more immediately to benefit advocacy groups or advisory boards. The Canadian government and Canadian CSOs can only benefit from recruiting volunteers and interns for youth advisory boards and should explore opportunities to more actively take advantage of the energy and perspectives of this unique group. Tiessen (2011) also noted that volunteers and interns who develop an affinity for diverse cultures, often demonstrate an increased commitment to fund international initiatives and a desire to support global citizenship.

The literature identifies the experiences of working in developing countries as one of the steps for creating global citizens (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Many of the volunteers and interns identified with the basic description of a global citizen and many of them felt very protective of their host cultures, while wanting to share those cultures with their home communities. As these numerous global citizens are discovering their voices, education is key for promoting cultural sensitivity, respect and cross-cultural collaboration. In addition to attempting to teach people of differing cultures, citizens of developed countries also have an opportunity to listen and learn about underutilized tools, by expanding our belief systems and by embracing different collaborative approaches.

A continual evolution and reconsideration of past decisions and future opportunities is required in order to strive for effective cross-cultural collaboration. Diversity of thought and a

continuous process of debate and justification are also required. It is in this process and in fulfilling this requirement for diversity of thought, that these new global citizens may play a role.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Various reoccurring themes are present in this research, indicating several common elements of pre-departure training and reintegration support that were perceived by volunteers and interns as having facilitated cultural adaptation. One of these elements was effective knowledge transfer. Any element that facilitates knowledge sharing between organizations, interns and peers should be incorporated into training programs. The ongoing interaction between involved parties will also facilitate idea exchange and serve as a support system for volunteers and interns working abroad.

Training programs should also incorporate an element of research about the specific country and culture in which the volunteer or intern will be working. This is important to put the placement in context with historical, cultural, legal and religious aspects of the host community. Similarly, tools and strategies for interacting in culturally sensitive, emotionally charged scenarios are imperative. Tools and strategies for handling complex ethical issues should also be presented. Basic language skills, a willingness to engage in community activities and a flexible outlook should be considered when assigning placements.

Upon reintegration, an immediate opportunity to discuss emotionally charged scenarios, along with positive experiences should be provided. Strategies for communicating experiences to friends, family, community and prospective employers are also important. Furthermore, networking opportunities for past, present and future volunteers and interns should be provided for continued engagement, as well as personal and professional development.

In the case of government funded programs, currently there is a lost opportunity to access the perspectives and ideas of past interns. Youth advisory councils would greatly benefit from engaged global citizens with experiences, sometimes numerous, working in developing countries

and adept at cross-cultural collaboration. Countless authors (Tiessen, 2008; Tiessen & Heron, 2012) document the benefits diversity of thought in effective governance structures around the world. As Canada puts more focus on international cooperation and cross-cultural collaboration, this diversity of thought would be valuable. The development of youth advisory councils would also add an element of ownership and responsibility to work abroad and a greater examination of the responsibilities of the new global citizen. This new global citizen must also be capable of advocating for a diversity of thought that incorporates various cultures with various approaches to collaboration.

The goal of this research was to better equip academics and organizations with additional discussion of elements of pre-departure training and reintegration support that volunteers and interns perceive to be most beneficial in facilitating cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Providing potential evidence for themes in cross-cultural training that better equip volunteers and staff to both respect local cultural practices in developing countries, and to interact with local community members of differing cultural beliefs, will ideally improve the efficacy of work-related objectives.

Despite the potential benefits of this research, there are also limitations. Because of the inability to use randomized sampling, generalization is not possible. The reliance on participant self-selection may also have created a biased sample of participants who have had either very negative or very positive volunteer experiences. As this research is dependent on accurate memory of specific events, it is also subject to memory error. Participants' memories may be altered by the very experiences they have reported on.

During the debriefing, I was not able to be present for all break-out group sessions. There was therefore feedback that was certainly missed and because only one debriefing was observed

for this research, direct comparison with other organizational debriefings was not possible. It is also impossible to isolate pre-training and debriefing elements from the overall experience.

While the interviews did allow for a more in-depth examination of experiences and themes, they were conducted with a small number of interns and therefore reflect only the experiences and perceptions of those individuals. Direct generalization of the data will not be possible and, while every effort has been made to remain as impartial as possible, any reports of information or questions asked during the interview will be subject to interviewer bias.

As mentioned, the narrow scope of this research makes it impossible to generalize these findings within a broad, global context. It, nevertheless, may reinforce other findings within recent literature and highlight support for possible areas of improvement for pre-departure training and reintegration support. It may also highlight potentially useful scenarios for future knowledge sharing that may lead to greater utilization of attained skills, experiences and perspectives, and a more even distribution of cultural learning. Rather than a dynamic where Western values and practices are imposed, perhaps research such as this will foster a dynamic where local traditions and lessons learned are equally sought out.

There are currently no standard pre-departure training or reintegration support programs. One of the aims of this research, therefore, was to compare the perceived benefits of various elements of each in order to identify those common elements most valued by volunteers and interns who have worked in developing countries. Generally, the more knowledge and support received by volunteers and interns while abroad, the more prepared they felt to interact in the community. However, there were several other contributing factors to successful integration within their host communities. The first was knowledge of the local language. This was noted several times as helping to facilitate many other factors that led to integration and cultural

adaptation. The second was having previous experience working or living in other cultures. Volunteers and interns reported that these previous experiences helped to manage their expectations and helped them to adapt more easily.

There are several possible areas for future research in pre-departure training and reintegration support. Comparing elements of pre-departure training and debriefing across related internship programs would produce a comprehensive list of the innovative ways in which organizations are supporting their interns. Following a cohort of interns from pre-departure training, through their placements, reintegration and subsequent employment would serve to provide more evidence for correlation of training and reintegration support with cultural adaptation and employable skills. Finally, examining the perceived impact of internships from the perspective of members of the host community would provide interesting context for the notion of successful cultural adaptation.

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Appendix A

Survey questions

Volunteering/Interning/Working abroad

How many assignments have you completed where you were stationed in a developing country?

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|-----------|
| 1. | 1 | 4. | 4 |
| 2. | 2 | 5. | 5 or more |
| 3. | 3 | | |

With which organizations did you complete those assignments?

Open ended

In which countries did you complete your assignment?

Open ended

Please describe your travel experience (select all that apply):

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 1. | None | 4. | Frequent international travel |
| 2. | Travel within country of nationality | 5. | Long trips abroad |
| 3. | Occasional international travel | 6. | Lived/worked abroad |

When did you complete your most recent volunteer/intern/work abroad assignment?

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------|----|---------------------|
| 1. | In the last 3 months | 4. | 9-12 months |
| 2. | 3-6 months | 5. | More than 12 months |
| 3. | 6-9 months | | |

Before departing for your most recent assignment, please rate familiarity with your host culture, acquired through:

(1=no familiarity, 2=some familiarity, 3=average familiarity, 4=above average familiarity, 5=very familiar)

Self-directed research

1. 1-5

University Study

2. 1-5

Your volunteer organization

3. 1-5

Cultural exposure

4. 1-5

Before departing for your most recent assignment, please rate your mastery the host culture's local language:

(1-5; non-existent (no language skills), poor (few language skills), functional (basic conversation), highly functional (comfortable communicating with locals), fluent/nearly fluent (advanced written and conversation language skills))

Before departing for your most recent assignment, did you receive any cross-cultural training from your organization?

1. Yes, I received extensive training
2. Yes, I received basic training
3. No, I did not receive any training

Before departing for your most recent assignment, please rate the level of your satisfaction with cross-cultural training received from your organization in each of the following areas:

(1=completely unsatisfied, 2=somewhat unsatisfied, 3=neither/nor, 4=somewhat satisfied, 5=very satisfied)

1. Examination of local traditions, beliefs, communication tools and symbols.

2. Role play in relation to potential work place scenarios (neutral or positive).
3. Role play in relation to potential work place scenarios (negative).
5. Role play in relations to potential social scenarios (neutral or positive).
6. Role play in relations to potential social scenarios (negative).
7. Opportunities to interact with a mentor/past volunteer prior to, or during, the volunteer experience; someone who provided lessons learned or an opportunity to ask questions
8. Please list any other forms of cross-cultural training provided to you by your volunteer organization.

Open ended

Please rate your satisfaction with your level of cultural preparedness (acquired either through training or personal experience):

(1= completely unsatisfied, 2= somewhat unsatisfied, 3=neither/nor, 4=somewhat satisfied, 5=very satisfied)

1. Before leaving
2. In hindsight, after returning

Which factors contributed the most profoundly to your decision to volunteer/work/intern abroad?
(Please rank the following in order of importance; with 1 being the most important and 9 being the least important)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Travel and see different parts of the world | 6. To join friends/family who are also volunteering |
| 2. Make a difference and help other people | 7. Gain practical career experience or skills; stepping stone to a paying job |
| 3. Reciprocity – To “give back” | 8. Take a break from reality or avoid unemployment |
| 4. Experience a challenge and achieve something extraordinary | 9. Religious/spiritual/moral obligation |
| 5. To better myself and grow as a person | 10. Other: |

Open-ended

After returning from your most recent assignment, did you receive any debriefing from your organization?

1. Yes, I received extensive debriefing
2. Yes, I received basic debriefing
3. No, I did not receive any training

Please rate the challenges you experienced during your most recent assignment:

(1 =not challenging, 2= slightly challenging, 3=somewhat challenging, 4= challenging, 5= very challenging)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Amount of authority over operations | 6. Importance of customs, manners, and greetings |
| 2. Amount of respect given in society | 7. Knowledge of local language |
| 3. Amount of freedom/autonomy | 8. Social interactions with peers |
| 4. Management/organization of operations | 9. Social interaction with locals |
| 5. Involvement in moral/religious education | 10. Comments: |

Open-ended

Please rate your level satisfaction with your experience abroad:

(1=completely unsatisfied, 2=somewhat unsatisfied, 3=neither/nor, 4=somewhat satisfied, 5=very satisfied)

1. The quality of my work
2. The quality of my training

3. Personal interactions
Do you intend to complete more assignments abroad?

1. Yes
2. No

4. Overall experience
3. Unsure

List three things that would make you willing and able to complete more assignments abroad in the future.

Open ended

Thinking about why you first wanted to volunteer/intern/work abroad, how have your expectations been met?

Open ended

How have your expectations not been met?

Open ended

Demographics

What is your age?

- | | |
|----------|----------------|
| 1. 19-24 | 4. 35-39 |
| 2. 25-29 | 5. 40-44 |
| 3. 30-34 | 6. 45 or older |

Which of the following best describes you?

1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-binary

To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you **most** identify?

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. White | 7. Southwest Asian |
| 2. Black | 8. Pacific Islander |
| 3. Hispanic/Latino | 9. Arab/Middle Eastern |
| 4. First Nations | 10. Mixed race/descent |
| 5. East Asian | 11. Other |
| 6. South Asian/Indian | |

Please identify your country of nationality.

Open ended

How do you describe your religion, spiritual practice, or existential worldview?

1. Open ended
2. Prefer not to answer

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. Less than high school | 4. Associate's degree |
| 2. High school graduate (includes equivalency) | 5. Bachelor's degree |
| 3. Some college, no degree | 6. Graduate or professional degree |
| | 7. PhD |

Appendix B

Interview questions

1. Did you receive any pre-deployment training?
 - a. If so, over what time span?
 - b. Can you describe some of the areas of focus and/or training activities?
2. Can you think of any positive experiences you encountered while deployed abroad?
 - a. If so, please describe a few of them.
3. Can you think of any negative experiences you encountered while deployed abroad?
 - a. If so, please describe a few of them.
4. How did you ensure that cultural sensitivity was maintained while you were deployed?
5. Did you receive any post-deployment debriefing?
 - a. If so, over what time span?
 - b. Can you describe some of the areas of focus and/or resources with which you were provided?
6. Were there any ways in which interns were encouraged to give suggestions and opinions about improvements to the program/experience?
 - a. If so, please describe them.
7. Do you intend to complete more assignments abroad?
 - a. If so, please describe some of the benefits of the program contributing to that intention.
 - b. If no, what are some things that would make you more willing to do so in the future?
8. What were some the expectations you had about the program and working abroad?
 - a. How have your expectations been met?
 - b. How have your expectations not been met?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form – Debriefing

Title of thesis: Perceptions of volunteer, intern and staff experiences as a result of cross-cultural communication training.

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in the student thesis named above. It is important that you understand the purpose of the study, how it may affect you, the risks and benefits of taking part and what you will be asked to do, before you decide if it is in your best interest to take part in this study. You do not have to take part in this study. Taking part is entirely voluntary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore your perception of experiences within an unfamiliar culture or cultures, and how the presence or absence of cross-cultural training may have played a role in your feelings about those experiences. Data will be used by the researcher for her thesis and in the future, may be published in scholarly journals.

Study Design

If you agree to enter into this study, during the course of your debriefing with the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation, the researcher will observe and collect data about your recent deployment. Your participation is anonymous, your name will not be linked with the researcher's debriefing notes and you may withdraw participation at any time. In the event that you withdraw, all notes relating to your feedback will be deleted and will not be used in the thesis.

Potential Harms

There is a chance that talking about your work abroad may be upsetting and that you do not wish to be included in the research. You may withdraw your participation at any time and your data will not be used.

Potential Benefits

You may not experience any benefits from participating in this research, although it is possible that you may benefit from talking about your work abroad.

Alternatives to the Study / Withdrawal from Participation

You are being asked to consent to being observed by the researcher as part of a research study. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to decline participation, confidentiality is assured and the decision to participate (or not) will in no way be shared with others. You may withdraw your data from the research at any time without penalty.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Any information that is learned about you or about the experiences that you discuss will be kept private. Any observations or notes will not be linked with your identity. The data collected in this study will be kept on the researcher's secured laptop for five years, and will then be destroyed.

If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in it, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

If you wish to contact the researcher, Lindsay Falt, about your participation in the research or for research results, you may do so via e-mail lindsay.falt@msvu.ca, or at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

By signing this document, you are NOT waiving any of your rights.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date : _____

A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Appendix D

Outreach letter

Dear [volunteer, intern, staff member],

You are being invited to take part in the student research project “Perceptions of volunteer, intern and staff experiences as a result of cross-cultural communication training”. The purpose of this research is to explore your perception of your experience(s) within an unfamiliar culture or cultures, and how the presence or absence of cross-cultural training may have played a role in your feelings about that experience.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and should you choose to participate, your insights may help inform future cross-cultural training.

Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be directed to an online survey containing questions about your past assignments. Your participation is anonymous and your name will not be stored with your responses. There is a chance that talking about your experiences may be upsetting. You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time. You may also discontinue participation in the survey at any time by exiting the browser.

In order to participate, respondents must meet the following criteria:

1. Respondent was raised in a developed country (a country with a lot of industrial activity and where people generally have high incomes).
2. Respondent completed an assignment with a civil service organization/non-governmental organization within the last year.
3. That assignment was completed in a developing country (a country with little industrial and economic activity and where people generally have low incomes).

If you meet these criteria and would like to participate in this voluntary survey, please follow the below link. You will be first asked to provide your electronic signature on a consent form outlining the risks and benefits of participating in this survey. You will then be directed to the survey questions.

Questions should take between 15-25 minutes to complete.

[\[Link\]](#)

Thank you,
Lindsay Falt
MSVU

Appendix E

Screening questions

To move on to the survey, respondents must answer 'yes' to each of these questions:

1. Were you raised in a developed country (a country with a lot of industrial activity and where people generally have high incomes)?
2. Have you completed a volunteer/intern/work assignment with a civil society organization/non-governmental organization within the last year?
3. Was that assignment completed in a developing country (a country with little industrial and economic activity and where people generally have low incomes)?

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form – Survey

Title of thesis: Perceptions of volunteer, intern and staff experiences as a result of cross-cultural communication training.

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in the student thesis named above. It is important that you understand the purpose of the study, how it may affect you, the risks and benefits of taking part and what you will be asked to do, before you decide if it is in your best interest to take part in this study. You do not have to take part in this study. Taking part is entirely voluntary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore your perception of your experiences within an unfamiliar culture or cultures and how the presence or absence of cross-cultural training may have played a role in your feelings about that experience.

Study Design

If you agree to enter into this study you will be directed to an online survey containing questions about your past experience(s) in developing countries. Your participation is anonymous, your name will not be stored with your responses and you may cease participation in the survey at any time by exiting the browser. All responses previous to full completion of the survey will be deleted at that time.

Potential Harms

There is a chance that talking about your experiences may be upsetting. You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time. You may also discontinue participation in the survey at any time by existing the browser.

Potential Benefits

You may not experience any benefits from participating in this study, although it is possible that you may benefit from talking about your work abroad.

Alternatives to the Study / Withdrawal from Participation

You are being asked to participate in an online survey as part of a research study. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to decline participation, confidentiality is assured and the

decision to participate (or not) will in no way be shared with others. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality

Any information that is learned about you or about the experiences that you discuss will be kept private. Your participation in this survey will remain anonymous.

The data collected in this study will be kept on the researcher's secured laptop for five years, and will then be destroyed.

If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in it, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

If you wish to contact the researcher, Lindsay Falt, about your participation in the research or for research results, you may do so via e-mail lindsay.falt@msvu.ca, or at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

By signing this document, you are NOT waiving any of your rights.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ (electronic signature)

Date : _____

A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Appendix G

Informed Consent Form – Interview

Title of thesis: Perceptions of volunteer, intern and staff experiences as a result of cross-cultural communication training.

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in the student thesis named above. It is important that you understand the purpose of the study, how it may affect you, the risks and benefits of taking part and what you will be asked to do, before you decide if it is in your best interest to take part in this study. You do not have to take part in this study. Taking part is entirely voluntary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore your perception of experiences within an unfamiliar culture or cultures, and how the presence or absence of cross-cultural training may have played a role in your feelings about those experiences. Data will be used by the researcher for her thesis and in the future, may be published in scholarly journals.

Study Design

If you agree to enter into this study, the researcher will ask you a series of questions about your experiences working abroad, about your cross-cultural training and about your debriefing. Your participation is anonymous, your name will not be linked with your responses and you may withdraw participation at any time. In the event that you withdraw, all notes relating to your responses will be deleted and will not be used in the thesis.

Potential Harms

There is a chance that talking about your work abroad may be upsetting and that you do not wish to be included in the research. You may withdraw your participation at any time and your responses will not be used.

Potential Benefits

You may not experience any benefits from participating in this research, although it is possible that you may benefit from talking about your work abroad.

Alternatives to the Study / Withdrawal from Participation

You are being asked to consent to being interviewed by the researcher as part of a research study. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to decline participation, confidentiality is assured and the decision to participate (or not) will in no way be shared with others. You may withdraw your data from the research at any time without penalty.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Any information that is learned about you or about the experiences that you discuss will be kept private. Any observations or notes will not be linked with your identity.

The data collected in this study will be kept on the researcher's secured laptop for five years, and will then be destroyed.

If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in it, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

If you wish to contact the researcher, Lindsay Falt, about your participation in the research or for research results, you may do so via e-mail lindsay.falt@msvu.ca, or at XXX-XXX-XXX.

By signing this document, you are NOT waiving any of your rights.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date : _____

A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Appendix H
From Codes to Themes

Codes	Issues discussed	Basic themes
Presentations	General cultural information	1 Knowledge transfer facilitates management of expectations, communication of cultural differences and communication of lessons learned.
Role play	Pseudo-projects/potential scenarios Navigating challenging sensitive topics	
Expectations	Communication of role descriptions Introduction pre-departure with host organization Intern-intern lessons learned (via blogs and videos) Intern-intern in-country handover Individualized cultural differences/considerations for the specific countries	
Feedback	Intern-host organization surveys throughout Intern-home organization surveys throughout	
Support	Peer support with our interns or foreigners in hosts country Team building with other interns pre-departure Opportunity to process experiences (positive & negative)	2 Psychological/emotional support aids personal and professional growth.
	Support from host organization supervisor to accomplish work objectives	3 Attainment of professional goals is facilitated by peer and mentor support.

	<p>Training to communicate transfer of skills (employability)</p> <p>Group conference calls (w other interns)</p> <p>Pressure to complete task (Funder or host organization)</p> <p>Development of practical skills (on-the-job training)</p>		
Job experience			
Safety	<p>Contact with Canadian government in case of unsafe host-country conditions</p> <p>Specific security concerns for different countries (walking at night and in specific neighbourhoods)</p>	4	<p>Communication of emergency plans, safety issues and how to navigate these situations are important for the overall well-being of volunteers/interns.</p>
Research	<p>Research of specific culture (self-directed) - local traditions, beliefs, values</p>	5	<p>Cultural awareness aids in the successful integration of volunteers/interns in their host country.</p>
Work abroad	<p>Previous experience in other countries/cultures</p>		
Self-reflection	<p>Contemplation of experiences (personal & professional)</p>		
Host language skills	<p>Ability to communicate with co-workers and other citizens of host country</p>	6	<p>Knowledge of local language (verbal and non-verbal nuances) facilitates integration into host communities.</p>
Open-mindedness	<p>Language nuances/gestures</p> <p>Using culturally acceptable tools (considering literacy, traditional forms of story-telling, etc.)</p> <p>Ability to work within and among cultural differences - despite some negative experiences</p>	7	<p>Open-minded volunteers/interns are more easily able to adapt to unfamiliar cultures.</p>

<p>Cultural differences</p>	<p>Cultural sensitivity (observe and ask, reduce efforts to change community values)</p> <p>“White-saviour” - discomfort with the perception of white is right by citizens of host country</p> <p>Deliberation of ethical dilemmas with the use of established techniques</p> <p>Experiences of gender discrimination</p> <p>Experiences of LGTBQ discrimination</p> <p>Engaged in community events/sports activities</p> <p>Developed relationships with locals</p>	<p>8</p> <p>9</p>	<p>Respect for local cultural traditions, values and beliefs allows for more successful cross-cultural collaboration.</p> <p>Community involvement in local events, activities or sports facilitates community integration.</p>
<p>Community needs</p>	<p>Awareness of project/initiative impact on community</p> <p>Attention to local needs</p> <p>‘White saviour’/white is right</p>	<p>10</p> <p>11</p>	<p>Community participation can facilitate the development of projects that will have a sustainable impact.</p> <p>Many actions (subconscious or not) can perpetuate negative stereotypes.</p>
<p>Communication</p>	<p>Image projection on social media</p> <p>Speaking about negative experiences</p> <p>Speaking about positive experiences</p> <p>Completing a community education project post-deployment</p>	<p>12</p> <p>13</p>	<p>Communicating both positive and negative experiences to those not familiar with a particular culture can perpetuate cultural misconceptions.</p> <p>Education initiatives can give a more well-rounded view of host cultures.</p>

Networking	Engaging in intern/volunteer networks post-deployment	14 Networking with like-minded individuals can help develop personal relationships and professional contacts.
Leadership	Acquiring employment via existing networks Taking benefit of experience, skills and worldview to help organization succeed	15 Organizations can benefit from experiences, skills and worldviews acquired while abroad.

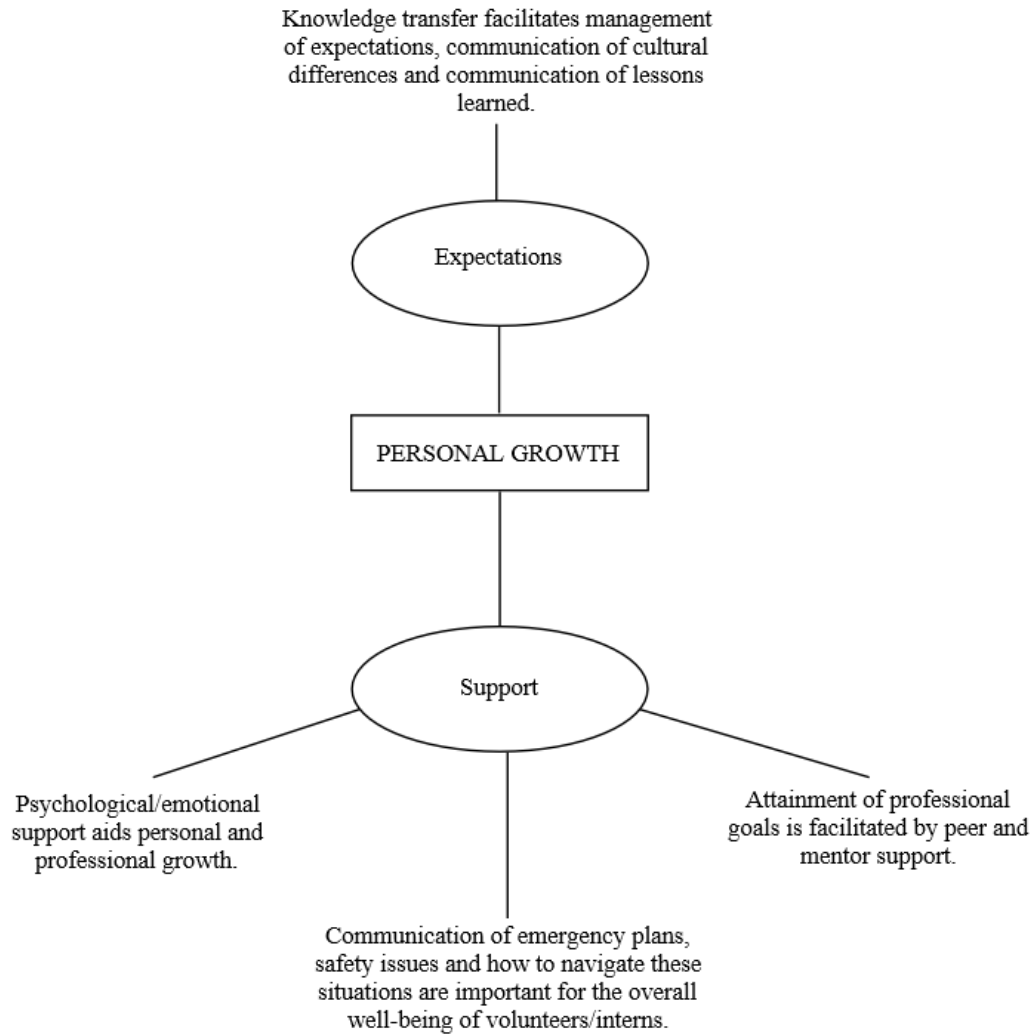
Appendix I

From Basic to Organizing to Global Themes

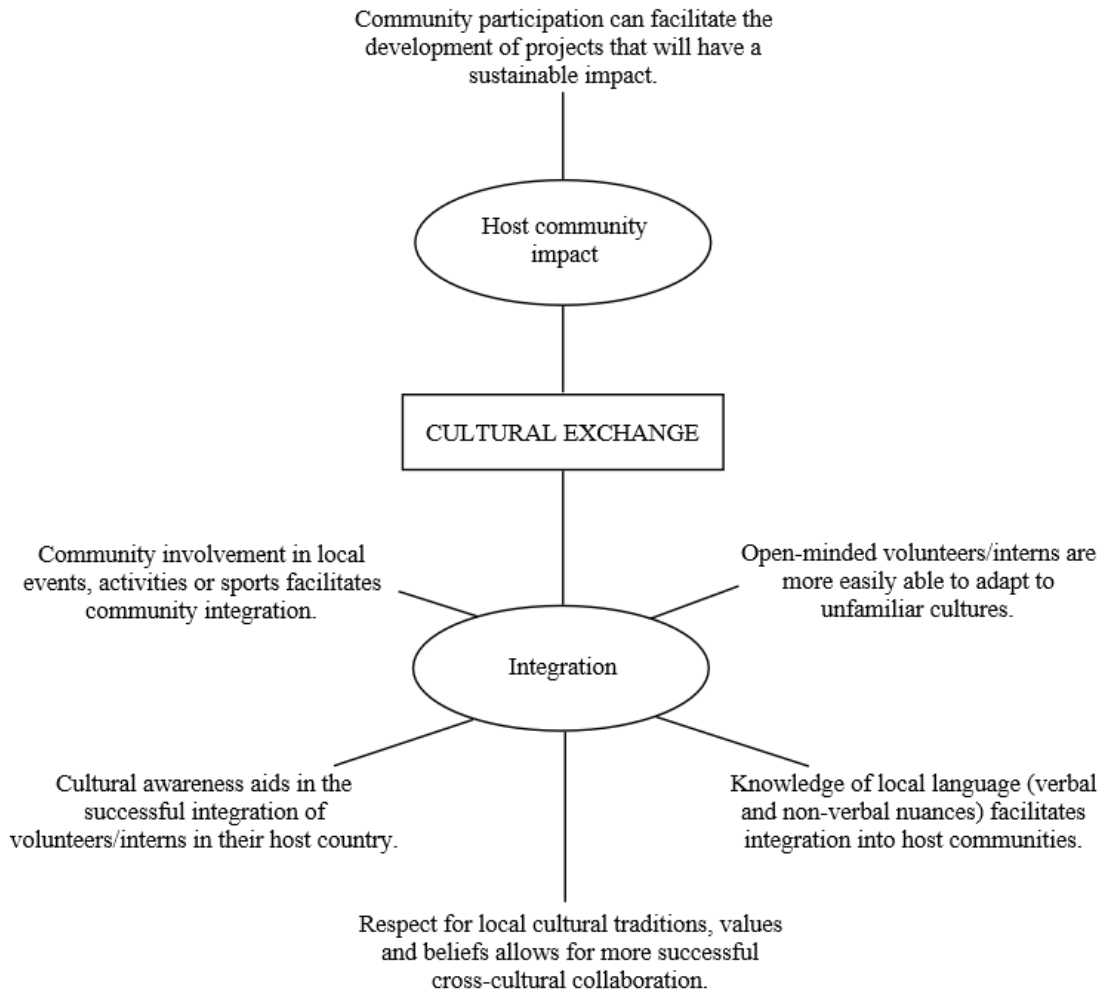
Basic themes		Organizing themes	Global themes
1	Knowledge transfer facilitates management of expectations, communication of cultural differences and communication of lessons learned.	Expectations	Personal growth
2	Psychological/emotional support aids personal and professional growth.	Support	
3	Attainment of professional goals is facilitated by peer and mentor support.		
4	Communication of emergency plans, safety issues and how to navigate these situations are important for the overall well-being of volunteers/interns.		
5	Cultural awareness aids in the successful integration of volunteers/interns in their host country.	Integration	Cultural exchange
6	Knowledge of local language (verbal and non-verbal nuances) facilitates integration into host communities.		
7	Open-minded volunteers/interns are more easily able to adapt to unfamiliar cultures.		
8	Respect for local cultural traditions, values and beliefs allows for more successful cross-cultural collaboration.		
9	Community involvement in local events, activities or sports facilitates community integration.		

10	Community participation can facilitate the development of projects that will have a sustainable impact.	Host community impact	
11	Many actions (subconscious or not) can perpetuate negative stereotypes.	Home community education	Global citizenship
12	Communicating both positive and negative experiences to those not familiar with a particular culture can perpetuate cultural misconceptions.		
13	Education initiatives can give a more well-rounded view of host cultures.		
14	Networking with like-minded individuals can help develop personal relationships and professional contacts.	Employment and leadership	
15	Organizations can benefit from experiences, skills and worldviews acquired while abroad.		

Appendix J
Personal Growth



Appendix K Cultural Exchange



Appendix L
Global Citizenship

