



International volunteering: employability, leadership and more

International
volunteering

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the experiences of individuals in transition between education and work during international volunteering expeditions. While it was expected that outcomes might include employability enhancement and skill development, the authors aimed to clarify what the main factors were, examine employability related factors in relation to other groups of variables, investigate development needs perceived by individuals, and evaluate the extent to which factors explored were influenced by participant attributes. Finally, the authors aim to integrate these findings into a series of recommendations for future research.

Design/methodology/approach – The study involved 406 respondents in three countries, where data were collected in the field. Survey design was based on previous related studies in volunteering and employability. Principal components analyses revealed a four-component structure relating to leadership and teamwork, the environment and empathy, values and volunteering, and personal skills.

Findings – Employability enhancement was not a primary motive for engaging in the expeditions. Data suggest that respondents had much more altruistic motivations, with perceived benefits more associated with emotional capital development and authentic leadership, although respondents also acknowledged an enhanced ability to deal with selection processes due to their enriched experiences.

Research limitations/implications – In undertaking this work using quantitative methods, the authors acknowledge that they have limited access to the richness of data that might emerge from more in depth narrative analysis. Further research could engage respondents in focus group studies.

Practical implications – The implications of this research are for individuals, that engagement with international volunteering for disingenuous reasons such as CV enhancement is likely to lead to failure, and for employers that individuals who have engaged are likely to have benefited from significant development in leadership skills. For international volunteering organisations, promotion of the employability-enhancing attributes of the expedition may be less relevant to potential participants than the richness of the experience itself.

Social implications – Engagement with international volunteering is personally transformative as well as delivering benefits in the context of the communities where the volunteering took place. While some respondents were drawn from a “widening participation” background there were no significant differences in their responses.

Originality/value – The authors believe this is the first study to attempt a detailed analysis of the range of attributes potentially held by individuals engaging in international volunteering expeditions.

Keywords Employability, International volunteering, Authentic leadership, Voluntary organizations, Leadership

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

This paper investigates the experiences of participants in international volunteering assignments. The research was based in a UK-based youth and education charity, operating in the international volunteering sector. Anonymised in this paper, it will be referred to as “the charity” throughout. This is a strongly values-driven organisation, promoting the ability of young people to: “work together, regardless of social background, culture and nationality; becoming part of a global community active in making their world a better place”. Volunteers are formed into teams which bring together people of different ages, social background, cultures, and nationalities. They are supported by staff who act as mentors and role models through structured, facilitated challenging experiences. In return, they offer the teams of “venturers” as the non-staff volunteers are known cultural immersion and a powerful experiential learning opportunity. Expeditions are normally made up of groups of young people typically aged between 17 and 24, of whom approximately half are normally self-funded venturers from the UK, around up to a quarter are international, and around 12-15 per cent each are normally from the host country and a youth agency partnership programme that aims to give opportunities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This paper presents results from a study of individuals undertaking expeditions in 2010 in India, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Borneo.

What do the volunteers actually do? Overall, the charity aims to promote three areas of benefit. For individuals, the aim is development as a global citizen and leader, working with and valuing the team. Life in the field, often in a jungle setting, involves significant physical challenge, with a typical expedition involving a trek of up to 150km. In addition, individuals should develop the confidence in dealing with people from different cultures and countries, mental resilience to succeed in the face of adversity, self-awareness, the preparedness to influence group situations, the ability to plan and lead group projects, and the ability to work in teams alongside others from different backgrounds. From a community perspective, the desired outcomes include community infrastructure development, and might include building a school or improved health and hygiene facilities. Environmental outcomes associated might include improving facilities for science or tourism, monitoring plant and wildlife species, working with conservation specialists, and delivering “on the ground” conservation work. Finally, the values emphasise global citizenship, with the aim that individuals will make an impact on their local communities following their return.

This organisation perceives itself as rather more than a “gap year travel company”, in that they have the distinctive aim to benefit the communities in which their projects take place and personally develop the volunteers. Relatively little was known about venturers’ personal motivation for undertaking these challenging assignments. Based on previous research and internal monitoring data it was believed that enhancement to one’s CV might have been a factor, particularly the opportunity to enhance one’s “employability”, defined below. What was not known was how this factor was positioned in relation to other factors such as leadership skills (defined below), the individual’s values, motivation to volunteer, and their perception of their role as a global citizen. Further variables which were expected to potentially impact on the experience included the international element, the aspect of cultural immersion, service to others, and coping with the intensity of the whole process.

The initial research aims (RA) of this study were:

- RA1:* through factor analysis (EFA), to identify the main groups of variables arising from individual perceptions of the expedition experience using data gathered during the expedition experience.
- RA2:* to examine the position of employability-related factors in relation to other groups of variables.
- RA3:* to investigate the development needs perceived by individuals which emerged during the expedition experience.
- RA4:* to evaluate the extent to which factors explored in RA1-RA3 were influenced by participant attributes.
- RA5:* to integrate these findings into a series of recommendations for future research.

Literature review

Literature used to inform this study drew on three main areas: research on the individual impact of young people's volunteering, which may not necessarily be in an international context; a review of selected literature in relation to leadership where this informed the research design or analysis; and finally we briefly incorporated some aspects of individual perceptions of employability.

There is a relatively well-established body of research on international experiences, including the impact on careers of "self-directed travel" – essentially a gap year (Inkson and Myers, 2003), referred to as "the big OE" or "overseas experience" in Australia and New Zealand and associated with the predisposition of their young people to go travelling. They concluded (p. 179) that: "considering OE as a work-career phenomenon is a limited view", although they acknowledged the opportunity for transferable learning arising from the experience, and the appropriateness of the OE option for individuals undecided on immediate career choices. The critical elements that go to make up a successful expedition experience were researched by Beames (2004), including the notion of the expedition as a "rite of passage". Hudson and Inkson (2006) offered an exploratory examination of the overseas volunteer development work and the impact on future career of the "hero's adventure". They investigated motivation to volunteer, experiences as volunteers, and learning and transformation. Their findings emphasised the altruistic nature of individual motivations, the emphasis on self-discovery. They noted that (p. 317):

"[...] volunteering overseas creates major disjunctions in career and in life, and these disjunctions appeared to be transformational for many volunteers". The phenomenon of the gap-year volunteer (or volunteer-tourism as it is sometimes known) is not without its critics. Simpson (2004) suggested that the long term benefits were based on flawed assumptions of simply learning through encountering "difference"

A number of studies have specifically examined the volunteering expedition experience, although not generally aspects relating to employability. Beames (2004) found that the critical elements of the expedition included the notion that it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, cultural immersion, helping people in great need

(described, p. 294 as “a huge draw for young people”), the intensity of the experience, and the challenge of physical hard work. Outcomes included independence, self-esteem, self-confidence, achievement, and post-expedition employability. This prompted Beames to comment (p. 294) that:

[...] the young people were most interested in intra-personal gains – rather than learning inter-personal skills.

It was seen as the opportunity to adapt to disequilibrium that yielded the real growth opportunities.

Charleston (2008) based on ethnographic field research (participant observation), concluded that cross-cultural competence was manifested in the attributes such as curiosity, communication, adaptability, passion, and empathy; while the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2009) identified possible tensions within the groups based on the different social backgrounds venturers were drawn from. Research by Handy *et al.* (2010) reported a very comprehensive cross-cultural study that suggested that students were not necessarily motivated to undertake volunteering for CV-building reasons, but that this did vary by cultural context. They suggested (p. 500):

[...] substantial theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence suggest that many people engage in volunteering activities to improve their employment prospects by increasing their human capital – expanding their social contacts – or sending a positive (volunteering) signal to employers.

The research suggested that in countries where volunteering had the effect of positive signalling to potential employers, volunteering rates would be higher. Balanced against this, students who were motivated by CV building would exhibit a lower intensity of volunteering. The study suggested (p. 518) that in societies like the USA where CV building was the norm and large numbers of students volunteer, regular volunteering was seen as a more credible “signal” than episodic volunteering. The study concluded (p. 519) with a call for further research on “what triggers individuals to take the initial steps to participate”. We suggest that our research will begin to fulfil this agenda, although we acknowledge the qualitatively different nature of the volunteering involved. Handy’s research focused on volunteering through a regular weekly commitment. “Venturers” in this study have made a commitment of several months of their lives to a more focused (albeit normally one-off) experience.

In respect of leadership the context of the expedition experience, Bennis (2012) conception of “crucibles of authentic leadership” was felt to be particularly relevant, in respect of the development of individual leadership skills as a consequence of some defining event”, as Bennis (2012, p. 545) stated:

[...] one of the sweeter uses of adversity continues to be its ability to bring leadership to the fore.

Bennis suggested that successful leaders who had grown from their own “crucible” could evidence four essential components of the experience: adaptive capacity, ability to engage with others through shared meaning, a distinctive voice, and integrity. He suggested that adaptive capacity was the most important:

All of our leaders had an extraordinary gift for coping with whatever life threw at them (p. 545).

Bennis also articulated some further perspectives on the actual performance of leadership that appeared relevant in the expedition context (p. 555):

[...] the most successful leaders were those who saw themselves not as top dogs but as facilitators. [...] They concerned themselves with such issues as keeping the project moving forward, making sure everyone had the tools and information they needed [...].

A more contemporary perspective on authentic leadership, uncovered after the research had been undertaken was offered by Beddoes-Jones (2012) whose work with Royal Air Force officers suggested there might be three main “pillars” of authentic leadership: self-awareness (which included empathy and influence), ethics (which included transparency and fairness but also courage), and self-regulation (which included discipline, energy, and flexibility). Although uncovered too late to inform the research design this conceptualisation was to prove useful at the later analytical stage.

A similarly dynamic conception of leadership was articulated by Newman (2008) in respect of “emotional capital”, with three components (p. 8 et seq.). “External emotional capital” relates to the perceived brand strength of the organisation. In the case of the charity, “venturers” would perceive an alignment of their values with the organisations, and hence perceive a desire to engage with the expeditions. “Internal emotional capital” refers to the feelings and beliefs held by individuals in the organisation. Finally “intra-personal emotional capital” relates to how individuals mobilise their own personal energy and deploy “emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995) in their relationships with others. According to Newman this means understanding one’s own emotions and how these drive behaviours, and developing the skill to leverage these to influence the behaviour of others. Newman describes (p.11 et seq.) the emotional capital model of emotional intelligence which has five broad components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, social skills, and adaptability. Newman further expands this into seven “assets”, which include self-reliance, assertiveness, optimism, self-actualisation, relationship skills, and empathy. These attributes were incorporated in the design of the survey instruments described below.

We also wanted to incorporate individuals’ perceptions of their own employability (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Rothwell *et al.*, 2008). Any study incorporating employability should recognise the sometimes contested nature of the term. Thijssen *et al.* (2008, p. 167) for example described it as an: “attractive but confusing professional buzzword”. Gazier (2006, p. 10) described “three generations and seven main concepts of employability”, the more contemporary of which included a consideration of the relative performance of individuals (and groups) in the labour market, and the marketability of individuals’ skills. Thijssen *et al.* suggested a simpler three-level conception of employability: individual, social, and “company” (or within the organisation). As our respondents were not yet in employment and our work focused on their potential future performance, we were drawn to the individual and self-perceived perspective, and a definition by Hillage and Pollard (1998, p. 12):

Employability is about the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work.

Employability was thus defined, for the purposes of this study, as the perceived ability to attain one’s desired level and type of employment in the future. In terms

of skills and attributes that might appear relevant and also connected with the employability literature, Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) integrated a perspective on employability with the importance of emotional intelligence, which appeared to fit well with the perspective on emotional capital (Newman, 2008). Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough's (2009) emphasis on the importance of real-world experience is a common theme in the employability literature. Poropat (2011) emphasised the role of citizenship behaviour in developing employability outcomes, echoing the findings of Handy *et al.* (2010).

As a consequence of the literature review undertaken, we defined the variables that needed to be included in the research and the items that were to make up the survey instrument. The previous studies were qualitatively focused and indicated broad areas for further investigation such as the teamwork and leadership aspects. The "crucible" nature of immersion in the challenging expedition experience was recognised, as well as the demands on individuals in respect of their emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. The review also revealed some areas about which very little was known, such as individual venturers' development needs. Finally the employability-related aspects of the investigation were informed by previous studies with similar demographic groups.

Research design

Survey items were informed by recent work by Charleston (2008) and Beames and Stott (2008), research by IPPR (2009), and by key informant interviews including the charity's CEO. A paper-based questionnaire was used which could be completed in the field where respondents might not have access to computer facilities. In respect of attitudes to the expedition, organisational commitment questionnaire survey items from the studies in organisational behaviour (e.g. Meyer *et al.*, 2002) were initially considered, and were distilled into a smaller number of survey items which attempted to capture the main essence of organisational commitment. Example items included: "I am proud to tell others that I am part of (this charity)" and "I find that my values and (this charity's) values are very similar". To reflect the "crucible" aspect of the expedition, questions such as "I am resourceful and can motivate myself when the 'chips are down'" were included. Further questions were developed to investigate respondent perceptions related to "emotional capital" of their level of communication, curiosity, adaptability, passion, and empathy (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Newman, 2008; Charleston, 2008). Example items here included "I am good at listening to others' points of view", and "being exposed to new cultures helps me to understand things from other peoples' perspectives". Finally it was believed that a motivational factor for individuals might relate to "global citizenship aspects", and survey items developed here included "I appreciate the interconnected nature of people and the environment". To reflect the diversity of individuals taking part in the expeditions, a further main part of the survey instrument captured demographic and other data relating to the individuals themselves described below.

For the scale items, scoring was on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). On all items non-responses were scored "9" in line with SPSS convention. Open question responses (e.g. motivation) were grouped thematically. The development needs ranked items were also grouped thematically and given a weighted score according to the rank respondents had assigned. In respect of survey administration, because data collection occurred simultaneously in three countries, the pilot process trialled a set of briefing notes designed to improve consistency of application. This was

found to be successful. Data entry were undertaken in each countries administrative base, with initial entry into Excel™ and later conversion to SPSS version 16™. Finally input data were checked back to the original questionnaires when these had been mailed back to the UK.

Strengths of the research design were believed to be: it was theoretically grounded, being informed by existing research on international volunteering, personal development, leadership, and employability; and it was triangulated, involving key informant interviews at the design stage, a comprehensive survey, and insights from key informants at the analysis stage. There were some limitations recognised in the research design employed. Some survey items were discarded at the factor analysis stage as this produced a more coherent set of sub-scales. Importantly, in a study of volunteering in an international context, we acknowledge the limitation placed on our frame of reference by (inevitably) examining the topic through the lens of western culture. Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of a self-report study.

Procedure, participants, and ethical considerations

The survey was distributed in the field to the 2010 cohorts of venturers just before the end of their overseas visit, in three different geographical locations (percentage of total respondents shown in brackets): India (19.2 per cent), Costa Rica and Nicaragua (38.7 per cent), and Borneo (41 per cent). There were 406 responses, 51 per cent of whom were female. Just under 49 per cent of respondents were in the youngest age group (17-19), with 31.7 per cent being 20-22, and 17.5 per cent 23-25. “Fundraising” venturers comprised 47.3 per cent of the respondents, with other categories being “UK partnership” or individuals typically from significantly more disadvantaged backgrounds (4.7 per cent), UKBIS graduates (24.6 per cent), host country nationals (6.7 per cent), and international participants (13.6 per cent). Just over 31 per cent of respondents claimed to have bachelor or masters degrees. Data were also gathered on parental occupation, as it had been considered that this might be a proxy for social class. More than half of respondents claimed to be from senior management/professional or management/professional backgrounds (38.9 and 22.2 per cent, respectively). Further demographic data are available from the corresponding author. In each country respondents were read a standard statement assuring them of the confidentiality of the results and that their answers to survey items would be aggregated and not individually attributed. Respondents were invited to ask for a summary of the results should they require it. Survey items have been designed with appropriate sensitivity to race, religion, gender, orientation, and disability.

Results

To fulfil our first RA, principal components analyses (PCA) were conducted to explore the dimensions of the measures employed in this study. In particular, we wanted to establish the main groups of items arising from individual perceptions of the expedition experience. Taking the dataset as a whole an adequate number of correlation coefficients between the items of 0.3 or above were identified (Pallant, 2007). The ratio of items to respondents was adequate for an exploratory study at 10.7:1, this following the removal of weak items as indicated above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.894, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at $p < 0.001$. Kaiser’s criterion (eigenvalues of 1 or more) initially extracted ten components of which the first two explained 24.47 and 6.11 per cent of the variance, respectively. However as Lance *et al.* (2006) suggested, the “K1” criterion as it is known can severely over-estimate the number of factors. We were keen not to specify too few

factors (thus potentially ignoring a factor or combining it with another) or too many, risking a focus on minor factors at the expense of more important ones (Hayton *et al.*, 2004). Inspection of the screeplot revealed a clear break after the fourth component. We had also conducted parallel analysis using Monte Carlo PCA version 2.3 (Pallant, 2007, p. 191), which suggested that just three factors should be retained (results available from corresponding author). Faced with a judgement call, we followed Liu and Rijmen (2008) who suggested (p. 556) that: “the number of factors should represent qualitatively different constructs that conform to the underlying guiding theory”. Allison’s (2000) study had suggested four components (self, others, the natural world, and education and career), thus a four component solution was specified.

PCA were conducted using promax rotation specifying a four factor solution: Promax had been chosen as previous experience had suggested it offered the potential for the simplest solution. Results are shown in Table I. Although the rotation converged in six iterations, a relatively “clean” structure was revealed. The four factors eventually explained 43.4 per cent of the variance once certain weak items had been removed (described below). Factor 1 (25.78 per cent of the variance) was labelled leadership and teamwork, and included items relating to taking personal responsibility, dealing with the unexpected, and goal setting. Inspection of the component items reveals a high level of congruence with the conception of leadership in a challenging environment (Bennis, 2012), and also related to the “self-regulation” aspect of authentic leadership described by Beddoes-Jones (2012, p. 46), including discipline, emotional control, patience, and resilience. One respondent commented (in the context of enhancement of her employability):

When did I work in a team? Everyday in Borneo; When did I lead a team? – In one of the harshest environments ever – the jungle! When did I push myself? – Trekking! When did I have to adapt to a new environment? – Need I say more?!

Factor 2 (6.53 per cent of the variance) presented a group of components concerned with the “green” agenda including awareness of a range of global citizenship issues, and also included elements relating to cultural sensitivity and being open to ideas. We have labelled this factor “environment and empathy”. This showed a strong relationship to literature items relating to studies specifically about international volunteering (Beames, 2004; Charleston, 2008). Factor 3 (5.74 per cent of the variance) which we have labelled “values and volunteering”, contained items in respect of personal values, and also the desire to “make a difference” (Handy *et al.*, 2010). This appeared to fit well with the “ethics” pillar of authentic leadership (Beddoes-Jones, 2012, p. 46) which include integrity, honesty and fairness. The fourth factor (5.36 per cent of the variance) again related to personal skills but quite a distinct group to the first factor. Factor 1 related more to pro-activity and leadership while factor 4 emphasised listening and tolerance (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Newman, 2008). This also related strongly to Beddoes-Jones’ self-awareness pillar of authentic leadership which emphasised relationships, empathy and influence. One respondent commented:

The confidence I gained volunteering under pressure and tough circumstances (has) also helped to settle my nerves (and) with developing these soft skills which I possess due to living and working with so many people from all walks of life for 3months!

Finally, we were concerned that our four-factor judgement call might have forced a solution that had discarded a potentially viable factor, so we re-ran the analyses requesting a three and five-factor solution, however, the results did not materially

Pattern matrix ^a	Component			
	1	2	3	4
I am able to plan and lead group projects	0.759			
I am resourceful and can motivate myself to succeed when the “chips are down”	0.681			
I have the skills to peacefully resolve group conflicts	0.674			
I am proactive and have a “can do” approach to problems	0.669			
I feel able to get the best out of my team	0.630			
I take responsibility for my actions	0.593			
I am able to adapt the way I approach problems depending on the task & people involved	0.561			
I am able to reflect on, and learn from, my experiences	0.542			
I am aware of my mental strengths and weaknesses	0.522			
I am able to set personal goals, make plans to reach them, and achieve them	0.513			
I am able to deal with the unexpected	0.501			
People can always rely on me	0.344			
I am a supportive, cooperative, and helpful team player	0.311			
Living in an environmentally sustainable way is very important to me		0.917		
I am very conscious of my own actions in relation to concepts of carbon footprint, and reducing/reusing/recycling		0.878		
I am aware of how consumer choices at home may affect peoples' lives in other countries		0.648		
I appreciate the interconnected nature of people and the environment		0.639		
I am aware of global injustice and inequality and how I can contribute to tackling these		0.578		
I have important responsibilities to my home and global community		0.526		
I am sensitive to the needs of others		0.397		
I am sensitive to the customs and beliefs of those from other cultures		0.384		
I am willing to share my time skills and knowledge to help others		0.317		
I am open to others' ideas		0.304		
I feel I have a much more positive attitude at the end of the expedition, to work and life in general			0.795	
			0.780	

(continued)

Table I.
Four factor solution
using promax rotation

Pattern matrix ^a	1	2	3	4
I really think that this experience developed my personal values in a positive way				
One of the things I've got from this experience is lifelong friendships and memories			0.702	
The sense of achievement I have got from this expedition has been as good as it gets			0.672	
I am proud to tell others that I am part of (this charity)			0.655	0.322
I really believe I can make a difference			0.581	
This expedition has helped to develop my maturity			0.560	
I don't think there could be any better work experience at my time of life than what I've been doing			0.512	
I find that my values and (this charity's) values are very similar		0.312	0.353	
I am a confident, self-reliant independent person				0.783
I am tolerant of people whose beliefs/opinions contrast with my own				0.755
I am good at listening to other people's points of view				0.740
Raleigh expeditions are really unique and special, way more than just a "gap year holiday"				0.723
This expedition has been important for clarifying my study/career path			0.301	-0.398
I can efficiently manage and organise my life (e.g. time, relationships, work/study, other commitments)	0.311			0.337

Notes: ^aRotation converged in six iterations. Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: promax with Kaiser normalization

enhance our understanding so were discarded (full results on these solutions available from the corresponding author).

Scale α , means, and inter-correlations are shown in Table I. Scale reliabilities were all good ($\alpha = 0.84, 0.84, 0.82$, and 0.77 , respectively), and had been improved by the removal of some weak items. For example, one item which had failed to make the 0.3 cut-off criterion was also removed from personal skills: “Being exposed to new cultures helps me understand things from another’s perspective”. This appeared anomalous: intuitively, one might have expected this to load more strongly, but on checking we could not see any data-driven reason for this being so, and the actual loading was extremely low (0.216). As similar items existed (e.g. “I am tolerant of people whose beliefs/opinions contrast with my own”) we felt the item could be regarded as redundant and safely rejected. Two employability-related items were also removed, described below. Most scales showed reasonably strong, positive inter-correlations.

Our second RA concerned the position of employability-related factors in relation to other groups of variables. In respect of concerns regarding employability signalling vs altruistic motivations, our results suggest a strong orientation towards the latter. Initial responses to the “motivation” question (reported below) had placed CV-enhancement as a low-scoring item. The two survey items that most obviously indicated an employability orientation were not supported by the data: “participation on this expedition is important for building my CV” failed to make the 0.3 cut-off criterion. Similarly the factor relating to “personal skills” had been improved (to $\alpha = 0.76$ from $\alpha = 0.71$) by the removal of the item: “This expedition has been important for clarifying my study or career path”. However, as will be seen later, “career decision making” did feature among the top ten development needs. These findings show support for the work of Handy *et al.* (2010) and appear to indicate a predominantly altruistic motivation among the venturers surveyed. Later, at a practical level, the respondents indicated that their expedition experience.

Our third RA was to investigate the development needs perceived by individuals during the expedition experience. This had been explored using an open question: “What do you think are your three most important development needs (in order, greatest first, right now?)”. Selected results, the top ten items, are shown in Table II. Full results are available from the corresponding author: there was a long tail of highly individual items. Interestingly, the broad pattern of high-scoring “personal impact” factors (as revealed by factor analysis) appears not dissimilar to the broad pattern of development needs: items relating to leadership, motivation, then empathy and teamwork, feature towards the top of both lists. The highest scored development need, “confidence”, indicates perhaps the extent to which venturers were significantly challenged by the experience. Comparing these results to responses to one of the

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Leadership and teamwork (14)	53.73	5.46	0.84			
2. Environment and empathy (10)	40.64	5.24	0.566**	0.84		
3. Values and volunteering (9)	37.86	4.59	0.494**	0.556**	0.82	
4. Personal skills (5)	23.56	3.74	0.364**	0.381**	0.356**	0.77

Notes: Reliability coefficients are on the diagonal. **Statistically significant at $p = 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table II.
Scale descriptive statistics and inter-correlations (number of items in brackets) for the following subscales: leadership and teamwork, environment and empathy, values and volunteering, and personal skills

introductory questionnaire items: “what was your motivation for joining a (charity) expedition” (see Table IV) suggests that while the venturers had initially accepted the potential of the challenge, it had perhaps taken them further out of their comfort zones than they had expected (Tables III and IV).

Our fourth RA was to investigate the extent to which other variables were affected by participant attributes. Earlier studies (e.g. IPPR, 2009) had suggested, for example, that there might be tensions within the cohorts attributable to how they were funded and ultimately to social class divisions. This was not supported. One way between groups analyses of variance were systematically conducted to explore the impact of demographic variables on the experience, using the entire list of questionnaire items (excluding the ones identified as “weak” by factor analysis) and the four subscales identified earlier. For the whole list of items, no statistically significant differences were found other than in respect of expedition country. A statistically significant difference was found between the scores for Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and the scores for Borneo ($F(2, 432) = 8.8, p = 0.000$). The effect size (η^2) was small-medium (Pallant, 2007, p. 247) at 0.049. For the subscales, only “personal skills” showed a statistically significant difference by country, this between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and Borneo ($F(2, 372) = 33.4, p = 0.000$). On checking the data, this had been entered accurately but the minimum score for Costa Rica and Nicaragua was overall much higher. Full results are available from the corresponding author, meanwhile the tendency towards higher scores from this particular geographic location could be investigated further.

Rank	Development need	Score
1.	Confidence	228
2.	Leadership	201
3.	Motivation, persistence, being positive, and proactive	152
4.	Tolerance and empathy	106
5.	Interpersonal and communication skills	86
6.	Personal skills, maturity, self-improvement	72
7.	Teamwork	66
8.	Career decision making	57
9.	Resilience, coping, stress management	47
10.	International development and cultural understanding	45

Table III.
Top ten perceived
development needs

Note: Thematically grouped items: headings only shown ranked, with weighted scores

Volunteering/making a difference/impact/travel	99
Personal development and challenge	36
“For the experience”	18
Life changing, getting out of rut	13
Adventure/something different	13
Gap year experience	8
New people and situations	7
Improve my English	6
CV and employability	5
Recommended to me	3

Table IV.
What was your
motivation for joining
(this) expedition?

Note: Scoring: each recorded entry scores “1”

Scale results can be summarised as showing positive outcomes for the experience of such expeditions for each of the factors identified. There was a strong emphasis on behavioural attributes related to leadership, motivation, and a positive approach to the challenging situation; and importantly these factors also featured highly on the list of perceived development needs. The grouping of the highest-scoring factor items also corresponded with the individual focus identified by Beames(2003, 2004), with the second strongest factor reflecting the charity's environmental and globally connected values (Charleston, 2008). Finally there were fewer differences than expected attributable to demographic factors, and relatively little emphasis on the instrumental focus of employability and CV building.

Conclusions and future recommendations

Our fifth and over-arching RA related to the integration of research findings and how these could inform future study. The results reveal that the intensity of the expedition experience dominated the thoughts of the respondents at the point they were surveyed. Perceptions (or expectations) about employability may arise later but at the point of data collection factors relating to leadership and teamwork were the main outcomes but also the main development needs. As one respondent said:

(The charity) will humble you, defy your every expectation and provide you with an experience that will inspire you and make you stand apart from the next guy – It was actually the frame of mind, my sense of purpose and achievement and my attitude that anything is possible is what has really helped. Working together with people of all nationalities and knowing that your limit is always that little further in front was a great experience.

We believe the refined sub-scales based on the components leadership and teamwork, the environment and empathy, values and volunteering, and personal skills; offer substantial potential for further research and development in the international volunteering field, potentially with other organisations and in other national and cultural contexts. In terms of limitations, because our research has not thrown out aspects of difference in the data generated, we have perhaps neglected the important cross-cultural aspects identified in other, related research (Charleston, 2008). Finally, because our methodological focus has been primarily quantitative on this occasion, we have not captured the richness of personal narrative that has been evident in previous studies.

We suggest there are a number of implications of this research. For individuals, the project has revealed the importance of a strongly values based approach to participation, and the importance of voluntary organisations recognising this in their selection and induction processes. The individual impacts appear to arise principally in respect of leadership and teamwork skills, including resilience, courage, and recognising one's impact on others – all attributes essential for survival in the expedition context – and it is the transferability of these from the "crucible" into a potential workplace situation that should be regarded as the beneficial outcome rather than employability *per se*. Does international volunteering enhance employability? Indirectly, yes, as one respondent commented, describing:

[...] a life changing and simply fantastic time on my expedition (and) I picked up lots of interpersonal and life skills.

However a more immediate connection in the minds of the "venturers" were the leadership and team working skills involved. If one considers the "three pillars of authentic leadership" (Beddoes-Jones, 2012, p. 46), it would appear to be attributes to do with self-awareness, behaving with integrity, and exercising self-regulation that are

evident to a greater extent than employability alone. We suggest that a longitudinal study of the links between leadership skill development and employability might be the subject of further enquiry.

Undertaking an overseas volunteering expedition with the sole aim of contrived CV building is likely to lead to failure, due to the extremely tough conditions under which individuals can find themselves, and the duration and intensity of the experience. For employers, the research suggests that individuals who signal a volunteering expedition on their CV are unlikely to have done so for any disingenuous reason such as “padding”, rather will have genuinely gained from the experience in the sense of development and growth, and will bring a much stronger skill-set to the world of work than their peers who may have undertaken a more low-engagement or less intense volunteering activity. This is not intended to demean the value of less immersive volunteering: when altruistically motivated this may still lead to personal growth as well as the beneficial (social) outcomes, and some volunteering is surely better than none at all. In this context therefore this paper also contributes to our understanding of what adds to individual employability, demonstrated by a preparedness to go beyond one’s everyday role and even environment, and make an exceptional and selfless contribution often in changing circumstances. For voluntary sector organisations the research has highlighted the importance of recognising the development needs that international assignments can present, and the extent to which careful preparation is required for challenging experiences in the field. This project was initially developed to fill a gap in our understanding of the benefits individuals perceive from an international volunteering experience. The research reported here has challenged some of our assumptions and indicated that authentic leadership related to emotional capital as well as employability are appropriate as a focus of the individual outcomes gained, based on an altruistic set of motives and values.

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