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Developing responsible global leaders through corporate-sponsored international volunteerism programs



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In today's modern business environment rife with intense competition, some of the most financially successful global firms exhibit high levels of corporate social responsibility (CSR). High CSR companies take into account the concurrent expectations of their multiple stakeholders (e.g., customers, shareholders, employees, community) and attempt to maximize performance in pursuit not only of the firm's financial objectives, but also of broader goals related to improving the environment and society more generally. Consider this impressive list: Microsoft, Disney, Google, BMW, Daimler, Intel, Sony, Volkswagen, Apple, and Nestlé are Reputation Institute's top ten best known companies for their CSR reputations. These firms have earned their positive CSR reputation and their investments in CSR have paid off. Research suggests that investing in CSR is associated with higher levels of innovation, strategic differentiation, risk management, employer attractiveness, customer preferences, shareholder value, and financial performance. Broadly speaking, it appears that "doing good" in the world is also inherently good for business.

To facilitate a corporate-wide focus on CSR, global firms need responsible global leaders who understand and maximize value for multiple stakeholders, rather than focusing primarily on short-term economic gains. Indeed, it is well known that senior leaders not only play a critical role in determining the strategic objectives of their firms, but also act as role models who shape the ways in which their organizations go about their business activities. Responsible global leaders make decisions, develop strategies, manage staff, and execute policies and practices that benefit multiple stakeholders in the countries where they operate. They have the ability to understand the various cultural contexts in which the firm operates and the motivation to understand how those directly and indirectly connected

to the organization can be affected by its actions. Finally, responsible global leaders are world citizens who care about others, the environment, and society and surround themselves with highly competent and socially responsible people who aid them in their efforts promote the interests of their firms' various internal and external constituencies.

One approach to develop responsible global leaders is for firms to initiate an international corporate-sponsored volunteer (ICV) program. ICV programs provide opportunities for leaders and prospective leaders to go "on loan" as pro bono advisors to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in developing countries. The participating leaders provide short-term, project-based technical expertise for projects identified by the NGO, the goals and deliverables of which are aimed at NGO capacity-building. For the individual leaders, they are provided with a rich experiential opportunity for developing cultural agility and social responsibility. One example of an ICV program is the Dow Sustainability Corps, a skills-based bro bono advisor program which engages employees to help solve pressing problems around the areas of clean water, agriculture, housing, education, health, sanitation, and energy. As the website for the Dow Sustainability Corps highlights:

Dow Sustainability Corps (DSC) is part of Dow's approach to meet the world's most basic needs by matching interested and capable employee(s) with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social entrepreneurs and local government agencies that need support for sustainable development projects, especially in emerging geographies and areas of growth for Dow. Dow employees who take assignments as part of DSC use their time, professional skills and knowledge to help improve the lives of people around the world. These skills-based employee engagement assignments draw on employee's skills, or area of

expertise, rather than manual labor. http://www.dow.com/company/citizenship/corps.htm

In the past ten years, we have seen a four-fold increase in ICV programs like the Dow Sustainability Corps, including Pepsico's PepsiCorps, GlaxoSmithKline's PULSE Volunteerism Programme, and IBM's Corporate Service Corps.

This article examines the unique characteristics and competencies of socially responsible global leaders and describes how ICV programs are a particularly powerful way to develop such leaders. We discuss specific practices for maximizing the effectiveness of these programs in order to encourage greater corporate social responsibility.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE GLOBAL LEADERS

Socially responsible global leaders are necessary for companies to build reputations for CSR. These leaders are unique in that they possess both *cultural agility* and *CSR values*. Let us consider more closely these characteristics and how they serve to promote greater levels of CSR.

Cultural Agility

CSR is not an insular concept. It requires senior leaders who possess an understanding of how to analyze the needs of multiple stakeholders across national and cultural boundaries and who know how to maximize these needs concurrently. Socially responsible global leaders must be able to decipher complex situations and optimize diverse, and often conflicting, stakeholder needs. The most effective of these leaders are culturally agile. Culturally agile, socially responsible global leaders have a repertoire of cultural responses that they leverage appropriately to "do good" and "do no harm" across stakeholders across countries and cultures. Using their cultural agility, cultural adaptation, cultural minimization, and cultural integration are three possible responses of socially responsible global leaders. Let's consider each in the context of socially responsible global leaders.

At times, socially responsible global leaders need to *adapt* to various cultural norms to maximize the benefit to key stakeholders. Using an adaptation response, socially responsible global leaders address the needs of the local employees, consumers, and communities by adjusting their practices to fit the local norms, customs, traditions, and environment. For example, *Buck's Global Survey of Health Promotion and Workplace Wellness Strategies 2012*, by Buck Consultants, surveyed 1,356 organizations from a total of 45 countries and found that the employee wellness programs that were managed "by local staff with personal connections" outperformed employee wellness programs that were managed centrally through headquarters. When socially responsible global leaders want to promote workplace wellness, they are best advised to allow for local adaptation in implementation.

While adaptation is important in some situations, socially responsible global leaders recognize that adaptation is not the correct response in every cross-cultural situation. At times, socially responsible global leaders need to *minimize* or persuasively override local norms, customs, and

behavioral expectations in order to do the right thing for employees, the environment and society. We can see socially responsible global leaders using cultural minimization in cultures that disregard employee safety practices or environment protection laws, or engage in corruption and bribery. In these situations, socially responsible global leaders would need to maintain a CSR value with an industry, corporate, or personal value, irrespective of cultural norms, customs, and behavioral expectations. For example, Coca-Cola Enterprises (CCE) has a global code of conduct for all CCE employees that would need to be fostered and reinforced by CCE's leaders globally. Capturing the universality of this code of conduct, the policy from their website states:

By working as an employee at CCE, you are representing the Company to our customers and everyone else you come into contact with. As laid out in our Code of Business Conduct (COBC) you are expected to adopt the highest standards of professional and personal behavior and demonstrate Respect, Integrity, Good judgment, Honesty and Trust, the RIGHT Way, in all your actions, no matter what the circumstances.

One of the guiding principles of the COBC is 'complying with anti-corruption laws.' The Anti-Corruption Policy extends on this principle, and is applicable to all employees and everyone we do business with, including agents, representatives, consultants, independent contractors and anyone acting on behalf of CCE. https://www.cokecce.com/about-cce/anti-corruption-policy

There are other times when neither adaptation nor minimization is the answer and socially responsible global leaders need to *integrate* multiple approaches into decisions, policies, and practices. An example of this is found among the Nestlé leaders who are involved in the firm's stakeholder engagement program. Through this program, Nestlé's leaders regularly convene their key stakeholders (including customers, employees, community leaders, NGOs, suppliers, and reporting agencies) in an effort to create collective responses and to collaborate on generating recommendations for issues affecting the firm. From the Nestlé website:

The outcomes of stakeholder convenings are fed back to senior management and taken into account in the development of our policies, commitments and actions for the following year. For instance, feedback from earlier convenings has been incorporated into our new Rural Development Framework and also led to our partnership with the Fair Labor Association (FLA), in which we are currently working to identify and eliminate child labor in our cocoa supply chain. Feedback from the convenings also forms the basis for our materiality analysis. http://www.nestle.com/csv/what-is-csv/stakeholder-engagement

Socially responsible global leaders operate with cultural agility when they have the ability to leverage each of these three strategies — adaptation, minimization, and integration — when needed and when appropriate to do good, to do no harm and to maximize benefits to their stakeholders. However, cultural agility is necessary but not sufficient for fostering socially responsible global leaders. CSR values are also needed. Cultural agility without corresponding CSR values could foster leaders' use of their cross-cultural competencies

in a manipulative manner to serve their own interests. Companies need to build global leaders' cultural agility while fostering their CSR values, including toward social responsibility orientation, ethical values, and altruism.

CSR Values

While responsible global leaders are first and foremost devoted to their firms' strategic objectives, they are unique from the traditional business leader in that they have reframed their understanding of high-performance to include the multiple stakeholder perspective. They have, ideally, integrated CSR into their fundamental beliefs and values and view CSR as an important part of their leader identity. More specifically, these individuals view CSR initiatives not simply as a means of promoting their organization's long-term interests (although this concern no doubt factors prominently into their mental calculus), but rather as a personally meaningful enterprise that reinforces and affirms who they fundamentally are as people and as leaders of their firms.

CSR values include an orientation toward social responsibility, ethics, and altruism. Each of these values can be fostered, promoted, and rewarded by organizations to develop a broader cadre of socially responsible global leaders. Let's now consider the features of organization-initiated developmental opportunities designed to build socially responsible global leaders.

DEVELOPING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE GLOBAL LEADERS

Recognizing the need for responsible global leaders, firms are offering developmental opportunities to build both cultural agility and the values of CSR. However, merely labeling a developmental opportunity for this purpose does not make it so. For these interventions to be effective in building responsible global business leaders, they need to possess five key features. The first three features serve to build cultural agility and the final two help to foster CSR values.

Feature 1: Leaders must be placed in situations where they can collaborate with peers from a different culture.

Given that responsible global leaders require cultural agility, to build this competency leaders must be provided opportunities to engage in meaningful peer-level collaborations with members of different cultural groups. When designed effectively and when those selected are open to this experience, working with culturally diverse others to achieve a common goal has been found to create more positive crosscultural attitudes toward individuals from diverse backgrounds. These collaborations, moreover, foster leaders' empathy and interest in the needs of the target culture.

Feature 2: Leaders must be placed in situations where they can "stretch" their functional skills in a novel cultural environment.

To build cross-cultural competencies, leaders also need to practice culturally appropriate behaviors in different cultures. Traditional corporate settings and expatriate communities do not necessarily offer rich developmental experiences. They are often so similar to one's own culture that they do not force individuals to "stretch" themselves enough from a cultural standpoint to derive the deep cross-cultural competencies that is needed to recognize and appreciate cultural differences. Further, developmental experiences should give leaders the opportunity to question and test the limits of their cultural knowledge and assumptions and to learn the extent to which they are culture-bound. In situations similar to one's own culture, this limit is not tested because the cultures of the expatriate community or regional corporate headquarters are too familiar.

Feature 3: Leaders must be placed in situations where they can practice cultural humility.

Cultural humility reflects the extent to which expatriates are appreciative of host national contributions, teachable with respect to learning from the host environment, respectful of the fact that they have something to learn in the host country, and accurately self-aware. People with cultural humility know their knowledge, skills, and abilities are culture-bound, which manifests as an overt appreciation for ideas from other cultures and a respectful desire to learn from them. To encourage cultural humility, leaders should receive feedback on their performance in cross-cultural situations. For example, cultures differ in how directive, approachable, and paternalistic leaders are expected to be to earn the respect of subordinates. Global leaders must recognize how their behaviors are interpreted through the cultural lens of their subordinates, especially when cultural adaptation is necessary. Global leaders credit the feedback received during international experiences as instrumental in helping to build their repertoire of responses in different cultures.

Feature 4: Leaders must be placed in situations where they can work on projects that foster their altruism.

To the extent that companies can provide meaningful opportunities for leaders to observe the effects of their altruism on others, such initiatives may tap into innate pleasure-seeking drives that increase the future occurrence of these behaviors. Within the past decade, neuroscientists have discovered that when acting with generosity and altruism, the human brain responds in the same way it does to the fulfillment of other basic needs for species' survival, including eating and sex. As adaptive mechanisms in our primitive brain, they all trigger the sensation of pleasure. Working with the human brain's innate positive reinforcement could be the very reason why certain organization-sponsored programs are able to develop responsible global leaders. By fostering empathy, these programs may reinforce the idea that "doing good" also feels good.

Feature 5: Leaders must work with others who reinforce and possess strong CSR values.

In addition to providing volunteers with opportunities to engage in meaningful projects, it is important that they be immersed in a rich CSR-oriented environment where colleagues with whom they interact possess these values.

If colleagues are apathetic or "lukewarm" to the core values of CSR, these conditions will likely hinder a leader's development of strong CSR values. We recommend that firms carefully select developmental experiences where participants are able to interact with and build relationships with others who possess and "live" the values of CSR.

CORPORATE-SPONSORED INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERISM PROGRAMS

Corporate-sponsored international volunteer programs blend these five important features for developing socially responsible global leaders. International corporate volunteerism programs (ICVs) are formal programs that offer fully compensated release time, ranging from a few weeks to several months, for their interested, high-skilled employees to volunteer with selected NGOs in developing countries. While on assignment, volunteers operate as pro bono advisors using their functional business expertise to provide short-term technical assistance to under-served communities in developing countries. From the perspective of building socially responsible global leaders, leaders participating in welldesigned ICVs begin to view themselves as socially responsible professionals who, irrespective of the situation, will behave in concordance with this identity. Once leaders believe that they have an advanced level of social responsibility, they will act with responsibility across situations and time, long past the conclusion of the ICV program.

A recent survey by Deloitte found that the number of organizations adopting corporate volunteerism programs is rising steadily. In the past ten years, there has been a fourfold increase of leading firms, such as GlaxoSmithKline, Dow Corning, Pepsico, FedEx, and IBM, initiating and growing ICVs.

An example is GlaxoSmithKline's PULSE Volunteer Partnership program. PULSE is a skills-based volunteer initiative that empowers employees to make a sustainable difference for communities and patients in need. Through the program, employees are given a chance to use their professional skills and knowledge during a three- or six-month immersion experience within a non-profit or non-governmental organization (a "Partner"). During the assignment, volunteers address a Partner need and are able to develop their own skills as leaders.

GlaxoSmithKline's PULSE program has both CSR and global leader development goals. Across all organizations currently offering ICVs, roughly 55 percent of these programs have as their primary objective the promotion of CSR. In fact, when designed well, ICVs have the central feature of CSR; they positively affect multiple stakeholders simultaneously. Research shows such programs can concurrently increase employee engagement, improve the functioning of NGOs and the communities they serve, and increase the knowledge base of the business in emerging markets. The other 45 percent of ICVs are initiated with global leader development as a main goal and with CSR as a secondary benefit. As an example of the developmental benefits of ICVs, participants in IBM's Corporate Service Corps reported increased appreciation for global differences and had learned new skills from their experience.

While global leader development programs should foster responsible leader behaviors at the strategic level, the most effective programs will also shape leaders' attitudes and values. This is because a leader's core values will determine how he or she will behave across situations. To develop values of social responsibility as a global leader, even well designed ICVs will require some associated talent management practices surrounding them. We recommend organizations consider the following practices in order to maximize the developmental benefits of their ICVs (Fig. 1).

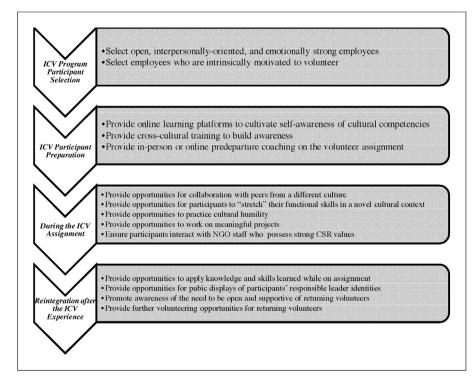


Figure 1 Best Practices for Maximizing the Benefits of ICV Programs in Developing Socially Responsible Global Leaders

Selection of ICV Program Participants

Employees should be selected carefully for volunteer assignments, given that not everyone will benefit from these developmental opportunities. To reap the maximum benefits from these volunteer experiences, employees should be selected who are open, interpersonally-oriented, and emotionally strong. These three traits are relatively immutable and unlikely to change from even the most developmentally rich experiences. The motivation of ICV participants is also vital. Volunteering because one needs to "check the box" is unlikely to have as positive an effect on the participant's social responsibility compared with participating in the program because one has a deeper desire to help others. Thus, motivation is another critical feature to consider when selecting participants.

Preparation of ICV Participants

Designed for both cultural awareness and self-awareness, there are a series of on-line and in-person training and coaching practices to prepare ICV participants for success once in country. As an example, the CALL program (an ICV program created by Northeastern University and the National Peace Corps Association) prepares ICV participants by starting with RW3's Culture Wizard for International Volunteers, a self-directed online learning platform specifically tailored to the country of participants' volunteer assignment. The Culture Wizard program is followed by the Cultural Agility E-Learning Program to raise participants' awareness of their critical cross-cultural competencies and cultural orientations while also providing interactive and facilitated online learning modules to provide instruction on how to build their cross-cultural competencies while volunteering. With guidance from coaches, volunteers are led through the steps that will help them have a successful and developmental volunteerism experience. Pre-departure coaching is also available for both teams and individuals and can be offered in-person or virtually.

Crafting the International Volunteer Assignment

Volunteer assignments should be selected carefully so that employees are assigned to truly meaningful projects. The employees want to make a difference in the lives of those they are serving through the NGO's activities. While stuffing envelopes and taking inventory of supplies are necessary tasks for the NGO, highly skilled professionals are unlikely to perceive this routine office work as meaningful. When working on meaningful projects, volunteers experience affect-enhancing feelings, a "positive buzz" that naturally reinforces CSR behaviors. When volunteers believe that they are making a difference in the long term functioning of the NGO, they are more motivated to learn from the environment because they are inclined to believe that their increased ability to contribute will enhance the NGO's functioning and mission. Research suggests that in a virtuous cycle, once ICV participants begin to feel good from doing something meaningful for society, the socially responsible behaviors continue long beyond the conclusion of the program.

Meaningful assignments should also be those that allow volunteers to provide significant value to the NGO using their relevant professional skills (e.g., strategy, marketing, finance, HR). The ICV experience should be designed as a "stretch" assignment that fully utilizes and pushes the volunteer's skills in the novel NGO environment. For example, researchers in an evaluation of PriceWaterhouseCoopers' "Project Ulysses" service-learning program, found that developmental volunteer assignments provided participants with "exposure to adverse situations, forcing participants out of their comfort zones, confronting them with cultural and ethical paradoxes, and motivating them to change their perspectives on life and business." This exposure to "cultural and ethical paradoxes" helps in building socially responsible global leaders.

Moreover, when the work is meaningful and it "stretches" participants' functional skills, there is a deeper motivation to operate with the *cultural humility* necessary for success in the ICV assignment. Most fundamentally, leaders must recognize that they cannot be successful on assignment without being taught how to work in the host community. They need to be teachable in terms of learning from the host national and NGO environment and recognize that they have something to learn from their NGO colleagues in the host country. Without cultural humility, it is impossible to fully develop the cultural competencies needed to be a responsible global leader.

Finally, volunteers should be placed in assignments where NGO managers and staff embody the values of CSR and volunteerism and support participants in their volunteer activities. Volunteers should feel comfortable interacting openly and demonstrating mutual acceptance and respect with NGO leaders and staff. They can develop the most by engaging with their surroundings, practicing newly learned behaviors, receiving feedback, and feeling emotionally safe to take risks and make mistakes. To encourage a deeper understanding of cross-cultural stakeholders, ICVs should be placed in NGOs with the potential to allow cross-cultural peer-level relationships to form and learning to occur within a supportive host national environment.

Communication During the International Volunteer Assignment

Using a platform best suited to the firm's preferences for collaborative communication, volunteers should share their experiences with their colleagues back home. ICVs can be designed to manage colleagues' perceptions of the experience while increasing camaraderie, perceptions of fairness, and the likelihood of knowledge transfer upon completion of the assignment. For example, we encourage participants to write blog posts about their experiences, being mindful not to focus on tourist-type experiences, but rather on positive CSR experiences and work-focused communications they are having. This will further increase awareness of participants' socially responsible behaviors. We also encourage firms to provide in-country coaches to their program participants, whether in-person or virtually. Coaches can help volunteers reflect on challenges and serve to foster their personal and professional development from their volunteer experience.

Reintegration after Volunteerism Experience

The most important talent management practices to reinforce social responsibility in leaders surround the environment to which they return after their ICV experience. Organizations should recognize and leverage the knowledge and skills that volunteers acquire during their experience. Indeed, employee engagement is highest when volunteers sense that, as a result of the volunteer program, their newly honed skills are highly valuable in the eyes of their employers. In contrast, when the work environment to which volunteers return does not provide opportunities to utilize their newly acquired and developed skills, companies using ICVs run the risk of creating unmet expectations in returning volunteers, who may partially question the ultimate value of their ICV experience. Participants may soon come to believe that while their volunteering may have served the worthwhile purpose of benefiting partnering NGOs and their surrounding communities, it was ultimately only a "one-shot" experience without any lasting value to themselves and their organizations. Worse yet, returning volunteers who do not believe their work environments seek to capitalize on their newly developed skills may question whether their organizations actually "walk the talk" when it comes to valuing corporate responsibility and volunteerism or whether they simply view ICVs as a superficial initiative meant to enhance the firm's image to outsiders. Finally, it is important to recognize that the best ICV experiences are ones in which a socially responsible leader identity is cultivated in participants - an identity that internalizes the core values of CSR. In the absence of a work environment that supports and values this identity in returning volunteers, it is likely that a socially responsible global leader identity will dissolve as participants repatriate into a context that they may perceive as solely bottomline oriented. In some instances, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that employees who have extraordinarily meaningful volunteer experiences, but who are not given adequate opportunities to demonstrate behaviors consistent with their internalized values of volunteerism and CSR, may seek out other jobs and firms that provide them greater opportunities to volunteer and enact their CSR values.

Bearing in mind these considerations, it is therefore critical that organizations implementing ICVs assess the degree to which the work environments volunteers return to are conducive to further reinforcement and maintenance of a socially responsible leader identity. We encourage several interrelated strategies upon volunteers' reintegration into their jobs. First, beyond being given the chance to apply specific technical skills learned while on assignment to their jobs, it is important that recent ICV participants are given the opportunity to engage in public displays of their newly acquired socially responsible leader identities at work. Indeed, research suggests that "claiming" a leader identity through active expressions of that identity within a given social context is critical for a person's development as a leader. Formal and informal programs that allow participants to, for example, give presentations, participate in brown-bag and roundtable discussions, and write in corporate blogs and newsletters about their volunteer experiences, as well as mentor future ICV participants, provide important avenues for recent ICV participants to transfer and reinforce their responsible leader identities within their native corporate context.

Second, research suggests that in order for a person to internalize a leader identity, he or she must not only "claim" that identity but also be "granted" it by others. More precisely, adopting a new identity not only requires that a person display behavior consistent with that identity but that others convey their acceptance of the individual's attempts to assert that identity. Through this process of "claiming" and "granting," volunteers can internalize a responsible leader identity in their corporate roles that others recognize and collectively endorse. To support this process, recent volunteers should feel "psychologically safe" and free from judgment when claiming their responsible leader identities and have their identities be affirmed and reinforced by others upon reintegration. Perhaps the best way to do this is to promote awareness, whether through formal training initiatives or informal team and departmental conversations, of the need to be open, understanding, and supportive of returning ICV participants as they reintegrate back into the company and seek to establish and solidify their identities as socially responsible global leaders.

Finally, and at the most basic level, volunteers should return to corporate environments that allow them to continue their volunteering through initiatives that positively influence others both in and outside of work, as well as freedom to design programs that further foster and reinforce a strong culture of CSR within the firm. Overall, the most important point we would like to convey here is that volunteers, in most cases, do not simply return from their volunteer experiences fully ready to be socially responsible global leaders. Rather, the ICV experience reflects one part of a more holistic process involving multiple parties and structural elements within the firm that support and promote a volunteer's development as a socially responsible leader upon their return.

CONCLUSION

When designed well, international volunteerism programs can create sustainable value across multiple stakeholders. including the development of socially responsible global leaders. In this article, we have outlined a number of critical features that these programs must involve to be successful, including cross-cultural peer collaborations, experiences that "stretch" participants' functional skills cross-culturally, meaningful projects that reinforce CSR values and behaviors, and opportunities to practice cultural humility and apply empathy. Furthermore, we emphasized the importance of undergirding ICVs with strong talent management programs that effectively address critical issues related to participant selection, preparation and support during the volunteer assignment, and reintegration back into the organization. As our discussion underscores, it is unreasonable to expect that simply sending individuals off on volunteer assignments without any consideration of these issues will result in the necessary deep-level developmental changes required for participants to become

socially responsible global leaders. To promote such changes in participants' attitudes, values, and identities related to volunteerism and CSR, it is important that companies view the process of developing responsible global leaders as a comprehensive effort requiring engagement not only from those participating in the ICV but also various stakeholders within the organization. To this end, the best practices outlined in the present article provide a necessary foundation for building strong ICVs and supporting programs

and structures that will allow organizations to more effectively cultivate socially responsible global leaders in the future.



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This article expands on the research included in the book *Cultural Agility: Building a Pipeline of Successful Global Professionals* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012) by P. Caligiuri. This book delves into the specific practices necessary for organizations to build cultural agility and cross-cultural competencies in their current and future global leaders. For readers interested in a comprehensive overview of the global leadership research, see *Global Leadership: Research, Practice, and Development* by M. E. Mendenhall, J. Osland, A. Bird, G. R. Oddou, M. L. Maznevski, M. Stevens, and G. K. Stahl (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); and J. Osland, M. Li, and Y. Wang, *Advances in Global Leadership* (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2014). These edited volumes highlight the key findings affecting both the science and practice of global leadership development.

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