Empirical Paper

The role of international immersion in development of compassionate leadership

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Contemporary business leaders play a key role in shaping community environments that are ethically sound. In line with this proposition, the training of the next generation of business leaders includes emphasis on concepts such as corporate social responsibility, cause related marketing, shared value, and the triple bottom line. Yet, it remains unclear how business organizations should train their staff in one particular type of leadership. The aim of this study was to test the effectiveness of an international immersion in developing one aspect of ethical behavior — that of compassionate leadership. This study examined the effectiveness of a two-week experiential immersion program in East Africa aimed at cultivating compassionate leadership. An initial feasibility pilot test with measurement at pre- and post-intervention was undertaken among a sample of 23 participants attending the program in 2015. The results of this pilot study suggest that Gone Fishing, an immersion program that spans two-weeks aimed at cultivating compassionate leadership, was effective at improving leadership outcomes, emotional intelligence, and compassion. We also found participants had a greater likelihood to engage with not-for-profits after the immersion program.

Keywords: Compassion, ethics, immersion, leadership, service learning

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Abstract

Purpose: Contemporary business leaders play a key role in shaping community environments that are ethically sound. In line with this proposition, the training of the next generation of business leaders includes emphasis on concepts such as corporate social responsibility, cause related marketing, shared value, and the triple bottom line. Yet, it remains unclear how business organizations should train their staff in one particular type of leadership. The aim of this study was to test the effectiveness of an international immersion in developing one aspect of ethical behavior — that of compassionate leadership.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study examined the effectiveness of a two-week experiential immersion program in East Africa aimed at cultivating compassionate leadership. An initial feasibility pilot test with measurement at pre- and post-intervention was undertaken among a sample of 23 participants attending the program in 2015.

Findings: The results of this pilot study suggest that Gone Fishing, an immersion program that spans two-weeks aimed at cultivating compassionate leadership, was effective at improving leadership outcomes, emotional intelligence, and compassion. We also found participants had a greater likelihood to engage with not-for-profits after the immersion program.

Originality/Value: To date, a paucity of research examines the construct of compassion within the business management literature and its relationship to ethical behavior. While many organisations are undertaking international immersions to build personal development and morale among managers, few studies have measured the impacts of these initiatives, or examined the impact upon compassionate leadership.

This research validates one potential pathway through experiential exercises such as immersions.

Keywords: compassion, ethics, immersion, leadership, service learning

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In 2016 Volkswagen revealed in that it had installed software on millions of cars in order to deceive the Environmental Protection Agency into believing that the cars were more environmentally friendly than they were, resulting in financial impact of $20 billion in lost investors, fines and customer's legal actions. Likewise, extensive value was wiped from Toshiba's market capitalisation, in the wake of revelation that it had overstated its earnings by $2 billion over seven years, with an independent investigation revealing that they "had a corporate culture in which management decisions could not be challenged" and that "employees were pressured into inappropriate accounting by postponing loss reports or moving certain costs into later years" (Independent Investigation Committee for Toshiba Cooperation, 2015). As corporate structures in a globalised world have become more complex, the impacts and frequency of these scandals are becoming more severe, magnified and rapidly communicated through social media. They can cause significant reputational damage and can cost businesses and investors millions financially, in addition to social welfare costs - for example, the recent Wells Fargo scandal cost the company $185 million in fines due to 5300 employees opening up more than one million fraudulent accounts (Glazer, 2016). In some instances, entire markets and economies can be affected, and at the centre of these scandals is often an employee or management behaving unethically. In view of the widespread unethical behaviors exhibited across companies and sectors globally, it is critical to address the underpinning values and corporate culture driving this behavior.

In response to the issue of corporate fraud and unethical leadership, business educators have been under increased pressure to implement strategies that facilitate more ethical leadership. Paralleling this development, are organisational level changes encourage leaders to contribute actively to their communities, and engage as globally and socially aware citizens. This much is at least evident in the jargon and critical performance indicators that

emerge in corporate balance sheets and strategic plans (e.g. 'corporate social responsibility', cause related marketing'). Indeed, the hyper-connected, global, complex nature of business now demands deep knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity interdependence with international markets. A movement of commentary has evolved, largely in response to the complex business landscape. For example, Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, and Margolis (2012) advocate the need for management theory to direct attention to compassionate management and indeed the importance of this lens for business. Similarly, Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) emphasise compassionate management as a fundamental element of social intelligence, ethics and the "biology of leadership".

All of this alerts us to the fact that there exists that the need for an adaptable, globally aware manager, free of prejudice and capable of constructive interaction with culturally diverse communities has never been more critical (Brownell, 2006; Holt & Seki, 2012; Marcotte *et al*., 2007). Fostering ethical leadership through new and deeply embedded means such as experiential learning opportunities is therefore important in responding to this dearth of ethical conscience. Simultaneously, many corporates are embracing philanthropic integration into their culture and are seeking to discover ways to genuinely ensure management and employees are engaged with stated corporate causes. Accrediting agencies (e.g., EQUIS) have placed multicultural competence and ethics as key standards in business-schools' curricula and these topics are often taught through experiential or immersion techniques (Christensen et al., 2007). There is some consensus in the management education literature in considering three outputs as key criteria of learning events: affects, cognitions, and skills (Rubin & Martell, 2009).

Despite growing international immersion mobility in the business and education sectors, research is yet to clarify what aspects of multicultural competence benefit from international exposure, and whether attitudinal and behavioral change in terms of leadership,

compassion and empathy are impacted by such immersions. Leaders play a crucial role in developing compassion and how it unfolds in organizations (Frost, 2003; Worline & Boik, 2006). For example, leadership can break down barriers created by status or power differences, by emphasizing equality and similarity through listening and engaging with staff or employees who are struggling (Frost, 2003). Understanding compassion in leadership is still within its infancy, with only a few studies examining ways to cultivate managerial compassion and empathy (Scott *et al*., 2010). A recent review paper which critiqued existing compassion-based interventions highlighted the fact that limited empirical attention addressed compassion within the professional world (Kirby, 2016). The authors suggest that workplace programs designed to integrate wellbeing initiatives based upon compassion promotion are likely to enhance trust, collaboration and egalitarianism.

There is increasing recognition in management education literature of the importance of experiential learning to produce meaningful outcomes (Bennett-Levy & Lee, 2014). In this paper we examine the impact of a two-week international immersion to Nairobi, Kenya, called Gone Fishing in enhancing compassionate leadership. We expect that following completion of this immersion, participants experience a transformative process that manifests itself in a higher motivation to engage in more compassionate leadership. Ultimately, this process represents one way through which to enact change in business compassionate leadership and ethical business management. While some cognitive benefits of such immersions have been identified by past research, (such as language acquisition arising from mobility, e.g., Hernandez, 2010), other outcomes are inconclusive or under-researched. In addition to this, studies have demonstrated inconsistency among destinations, duration of immersions and measures (Pless *et al*., 2011).

Hence, compassion has been an under-researched area in the field of business to date. There are a variety of techniques that help to cultivate compassion (Gilbert, 2014; Kirby,

2016), and one potential pathway is through experiential exercises, such as immersions. One way to examine the utility of immersion programs is to evaluate its impact through a pilot trial design (Sanders and Kirby, 2014) and this paper reports results of a trial intervention program designed to enhance compassionate leadership. In the next sections, we review current literature on compassionate leadership and its link to ethics, followed by immersion impact studies.

Compassionate Leadership and Ethics

Within the literature, compassion is defined as *"the sensitivity to suffering in self and others, with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it"* (Gilbert, 2014, p. 19). Researchers have recognized that compassion embodies elements such as sensitivity to suffering, exhibiting non-judgmental demeanor and behavior, recognizing the commonality of suffering having empathy, managing distress, tolerance, heightened levels of patience and enhanced motivation to alleviate suffering (Strauss, 2016; Feldmen & Kuyken 2011; Gilbert, 2014). Importantly too, all of these attributes can be considered as important managerial and leadership skills. Over the last 20 years, research has shown a number of benefits of compassion for our mental health and emotion regulation (e.g., Jazaieri, *et al*., 2013; MacBeth and Gumley, 2012), and in improving interpersonal and social relationships (e.g., Crocker and Canevello, 2012; Yarnell and Neff, 2013). Compassion has also been found to foster positive group cohesiveness and cooperation (Gilbert, 2014). Because group structures are central to organisations, cultivating compassion among leaders represents one possible conduit for improved organisational outcomes. Suffering and wellbeing is consistently identified as a central tenant of ethics (Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009; Gray, Waytz & Young, 2012; Singer, 1981; Turiel, 1983). In this way, compassion can underpin human values of ethics (Kirby, Steindl & Doty, forthcoming). In adopting this perspective of ethics, we argue that the importance of human values like compassion are key to alleviating

suffering, as well as limiting self-serving actions devoid of compassion, extending to political, economic and social domains. In support, the critical role of compassion in shaping human wellbeing and ethical behavior has been recognised widely in the ethical literature across cultures (Hadot, 2004; Gvatso, 2001)

Self-compassion has been defined by Neff (2003) to include three components, (1) being mindful – that is holding painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them; (2) connecting with others, rather than isolating oneself; and (3) adopting an attitude of self-kindness, rather than being judgmental. Research has found that high levels of self-compassion are correlated with a greater sense of emotional wellbeing, enhanced quality of life, and reductions in depression and anxiety (Neff & Dahm, 2015; Macbeth & Gumley, 2012; Raes, 2010; Yarnell & Neff, 2013). In contrast, individuals with low levels of self-compassion have been found to have high levels of self-criticism, guilt, rumination, and worry (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Raes, 2010).

Critical to our central endeavor is the idea that although compassion may not necessarily be an inherent trait of an individual (as one might expect), there is evidence to suggest that it can also be cultivated and so an individual initially *low* in compassion, might be able to become *more* compassionate. Specifically, a recent meta-analysis that included 23 randomized controlled trials of compassion-based intervention, revealed that such interventions were able to produce significant and moderate effect sizes at increasing self-reported compassion, self-compassion, mindfulness, depression, anxiety, psychological distress and life-satisfaction (Kirby *et al*., 2016).

In the organizational behavior literature, researchers have begun to examine the role of empathy in the workplace. With respect to predicting employee behaviors, the majority of research has paralleled the psychology literature, finding positive relationships between empathy and prosocial behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior (Feldman &

Worline, 2011). Specifically, Kellet and colleagues (2002, 2006), and Wolff and colleagues (2002), in studies using student samples, found that individuals high in empathy tended to be perceived by others as leaders. In addition, Pillai and colleagues (2003) found that students gave higher transformational leadership and charisma ratings to empathic presidential candidates. In the next sections, we examine service learning as a driver of experiential learning in executive education, describe the current immersion in this context and the potential relationship to compassion.

Service Learning Approach and Experiential Education

Extant research in the field has described service learning as an ideal way to integrate experiential education into coursework, while meeting community needs and imbuing students with civic responsibility (Andrews, 2007). Service learning has also been applied in measuring the effectiveness of executive education designed to develop responsible global business leaders. Service learning was originally defined by Sigmon (1979) as an experiential education approach that is premised on "reciprocal learning". This perspective presumes that service-learning occurs only when both the providers and recipients of service benefit from the activities. However, the notion of "service-learning" has been used to characterize a plethora of experiential education offerings from volunteer and community service projects to fieldwork. The definition of service learning has therefore, seen an evolution in definition as, "*any carefully monitored service experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what he or she is learning throughout the experience*" (National Society for Experiential Education, 1994). Further developments of Sigmon include i) a typology of service learning which enables comparison of such activities and ii) a broadening of his earlier "reciprocal learning" definition to include a balance between learning goals and service outcomes.

Immersion Programs

Overall, there have been few studies examining the impacts of immersion programs (that adopt longitudinal or experimental methodology) to directly test causal learning and change outcomes. Three studies have focused on a student sample. Plante and colleagues (2009) examined the possible enhancement of compassion in college students as a result of participating in community-based learning immersion trips. In two separate experiments, participants were given a series of questionnaires pre and post university-sponsored immersion experiences. These questionnaires were designed to measure compassion and related constructs. Results suggested that immersion participants had higher post-immersion empathy and compassion scores and less stress compared to those who did not participate in an immersion. Similarly, Varela and Gatlan-Watts (2014) used a pre-post-test design to assess multiple facets of multicultural competency across participating immersion students, and found enhanced competency across all facets measured. Finally, O'Connor (2009) supports a service learning framework, but extends this concept by emphasising involvement and "critical responsiveness" through experience, critical thinking, reflection and action. Learning outcomes among students are subsequently tested through a case study. While this research is valuable, the restricted participant pool (student focused) limits our capacity to understand the impact of immersion programs on a broader sector of society. Given the aforementioned corruption identified among business, it seems critical to explore this as a potential avenue. Thus far, only one study has focused on immersion in business leaders. Pless and colleagues (2011) interviewed participants who had undertaken "Project Ulysses": an integrated service-learning program which involves sending participants in teams to developing countries to work in cross-sector partnerships with NGOs, social entrepreneurs, or international organizations. In their assessment study, the authors interviewed participants and found evidence of enhanced learning in six areas including responsible mind-set, ethical literacy, cultural intelligence, global mind-set, self-development, and community building.

However, their study was premised upon qualitative data, rather than upon quantitative measures. Our research builds on this study by focussing upon quantitative assessment of key components of ethical management including compassion, empathy, leadership and propensity to volunteer. Outside of the Ulysses Experience, we were unable to find other immersion programs that reported on outcomes of compassionate leadership for active business leaders. A key contribution of our research is therefore to provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of international immersions aimed at building compassionate leadership in executives, given the lack of evidence supporting such initiatives. While some research has been undertaken, it has not covered the unusual immersion context we examine, nor rigorously measured.

From a theoretical perspective, there is much support for the value of such interventions. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory suggests that multicultural immersive experience is likely to prompt cognitions that lead to increased awareness of cultural differences and process novel cultural facts, enhance understanding of appropriate practices and further motivate the desire for deepening knowledge of other cultures (Li *et al.*, 2013). Observation operates as a learning mechanism, despite potential barriers to engagement raised by anxiety with the unfamiliar context (Bandura, 1986). Acculturation theory (e.g., Berry, 1990) predicts that the adjustment and depth of engagement is contingent upon the duration and degree of cultural difference of the immersion destination. The role of critical reflection on knowledge, understanding, and personal decision-making is also recognised by Higgins (2009), which is consistent with the growing notion that mere passive exposure to international settings is ineffective in developing multicultural competence (Berg *et al.*, 2009).

For the purpose of this study, we define responsible global leaders as "*individuals who effect significant positive change in organizations by building communities through the*

development of trust and the arrangement of organizational structures and processes in a context involving multiple cross boundary stakeholders, multiple sources of external cross-boundary authority, and multiple cultures under conditions of temporal, geographical, and cultural complexity" (Mendenhall, 2008, p. 17). Having reviewed the meaning of compassion as a foundation to ethical behavior and the role of immersion programs in influencing management education and leadership development, the possibility of compassion and ethical leadership enhancement emanating from these programs is posited. The next section describes a study undertaken to determine the impacts of a compassionate leadership program intervention called Gone Fishing, designed to elicit compassionate leadership qualities from participants. To conclude, implications for ethical management training in business are discussed.

Gone Fishing Immersion

Gone Fishing is an East-African immersion program aimed at connecting present and future decision makers in corporate Australia with the people of Africa. The program aims to provide a meaningful and challenging international professional development opportunity. More particularly, the program seeks to harness, and further enhance leadership, management and interpersonal skills. During this study, participants start their day at 7:00AM and are involved in a range of activities until the end of day at 8:30PM. More specifically, such activities include visits to Kibera slum (Kenya), seeing extreme poverty first-hand, offering assistance at the Ruben centre which consists of providing teaching in a classroom and/or helping in a medical clinic, providing necessary assistance at the Mary Rice Centre (a centre for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders), engaging with the local orphans of the Kibera slum during meal times, and corresponding with the local communities at all levels-staff, residents, single mothers, and children. Despite the considerable variability of the activities' that they might undertake that day, the participants must consistently meet at the end of each

day to engage in open group discussions to reflect on their experience. Each immersion, including the one examined by our research, was accompanies by a facilitator who had local knowledge and networks in Kenya.

The Present Study

The aim of this study was to test the initial feasibility of the Gone Fishing program as a means of fostering compassion in business leaders and also receive feedback regarding the acceptability of the intervention in a pilot trial. Initial feasibility studies allow program developers the opportunity to learn how the program impacts the primary outcome measures (in our case compassion), and how it is received in terms of acceptability from the consumers (individuals receiving the intervention; Sanders & Kirby, 2014). The Gone Fishing program is based in Africa, where business leaders from Australia spend 14 days on the immersion program, assisting in medical clinics, schools, and kitchens (more details of intervention on page 12).

Our primary outcome was to determine whether Gone Fishing significantly influenced people's motivation to be more compassionate. Moreover, we intended to examine whether Gone Fishing bears the potential to significantly influence leadership outcomes and emotional intelligence. As immersion programs are emotionally draining experiences, the present work also examines whether Gone Fishing impacted participants' levels of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress). Finally, our study intended to assess the acceptability of the program and whether participants might recommend such an experience to work colleagues and friends, or implement through their organisations. Reflecting experiential learning theory and the service based learning framework previously discussed, we predict that exposure to the immersion outcome will promote a number of positive outcomes. We predict participants will demonstrate higher levels of compassion motivation and compassion for both the self and others (as measured by the Compassion

Motivation Scale, the Self-Compassion Scale and the Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale).

We also predict participants will show increases in empathy (as measured by the

Interpersonal Reactivity Index) and higher self-reported emotional intelligence (as measured

by the Assessing Emotions Scale). Similarly, we predict higher levels of psychological

resilience (as measured by the resilience scale) and lower levels of depression anxiety and

stress (as measured by the DASS-21). Finally, considering business perspectives, we predict

improved leadership generally (as measured by the Multi-factor Leader Questionnaire) and

higher levels of intention to engage with not for profit organisation (as measured by the

Consumer Based Brand Equity Scale). Finally, as the measure of program acceptability is

exploratory, we have not made specific predictions in this regard (measured by the

Acceptability Questionnaire).

Method

Participants

Two separate populations contributed to the present study: the first group participated

in the current immersion program whilst the second group did not actually undergo this

program but had previously participated at a separate time point. In this way, data collection

consisted of both quantitative (pre and post the immersion program in the first group) and

qualitative (perspectives on the acceptability of the group for second group). In total, we

collected data from 27 participants, 14 from group one and 13 from group two.

In group one, we had 14 participants who completed the pilot study, with the majority

of the participants being female (8 females; 57%), with an average age of 42.2 years ($SD =$

14.34), the majority having completed university education (85%), all were currently

employed, 12 of the participants were parents, and 13 were Australian, and one being Irish.

All participants were from high socio-economic backgrounds with household earnings

exceeding AUD$100,000. Participants professions included business leaders ($n = 6$), finance advisors ($n = 2$), health professionals ($n = 4$), a lawyer ($n = 1$), and a teacher ($n = 1$).

In group two, we had 13 participants that had previously completed the Gone Fishing program and were contacted to gain acceptability feedback regarding the program. In group two, most of the participants were female (7 females; 54%), with an average age of 46.7 years ($SD = 13.96$), the majority having completed university education (80%), all were currently employed, 10 of the participants were parents, and all identified as Australian. All participants were from high socio-economic backgrounds with household earnings greater than AUD$100,000. Participants' professions included, business leaders ($n = 5$), finance advisors ($n = 3$), business management positions ($n = 2$), and health professionals ($n = 3$).

Participants were recruited through the Edmund Rice Foundation (ERF) to participate in an immersion unit program in Africa. ERF is a non-for-profit organization that seeks to help communities in need of assistance and attempts to meet that goal through the establishment and any ongoing maintenance funding for education and/or medical facilities. The ERF offers participation in the Gone Fishing program to individuals who donate and support the foundation, with the aim of developing individuals in the community with a greater sense of social justice and compassion. Accordingly, participation involved voluntary consent in an immersion program conducted over two weeks in Kenya, Africa.

Design

The design of the study was an initial feasibility pilot test with measurement at two time points, pre- and post-intervention. The study was an initial trial of the Gone Fishing program.

Measures

Demographics Questionnaires. A brief demographics questionnaire was used to collect data concerning participants' age, gender, and educational background.

Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire. The Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MFLQ*; Avolio and Bass, 1995)* was used; specifically 9-items that assessed: leadership effectiveness, leadership satisfaction, and leadership effort.

Consumer Based Brand Equity Scale. This measure included three items that were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 *(Strongly Disagree)* to 7 *(Strongly Agree).* Items are summed to give a total score, with higher scores indicating a greater willingness to engage with not for profit organisations. Items include, "I am likely to contribute financially to not for profit organisations" and "I am likely to recommend this not for profit organisation". This scale had a relatively high internal consistency for this study $\alpha = .88$).

The Assessing Emotions Scale. The Assessing Emotions Scale is a 33-item self-report inventory focusing on typical emotional intelligence (Schutte, Malouff and Bhullar, 2009). Respondents rate themselves on the items using a five-point scale Likert scale from 1 *(Strongly Disagree)* to 7 *(Strongly Agree).* Example items included, "I know when to speak about personal problems to others" and "I am aware of my emotions as I experience them". For a total score items are summed, with higher scores indicating more charismatic emotional intelligence. Internal consistency for this study emerged as quite high $\alpha = .91$).

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index was used to assess empathy in individuals (IRI; Davis, 1980). IRI used 28 self-report items to assess aspects of empathy. IRI contains four subscales: perspective talking (e.g. "I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other guy's point of view"), fantasy (e.g., "After seeing as play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters"), empathic concern (e.g., "I am often quite touched by things that I see happen") and personal distress (e.g., "In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease"). Each subscale is made up of seven items. The items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale 0 *(Does Not Describe Me Well)* to 4 *(Describes Me Very Well).* Nine items are negatively worded and reverse scored (e.g., "Other

people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal"). The higher scores indicate more

empathy toward to others. The internal consistency for the IRI for this sample was $\alpha = .71$.

Compassion Motivation Scale. This 11-item measure was used to assess individual's

motivation to direct compassion towards oneself (CMS; Kirby & Lakzco, 2017*).* This

measure was developed to assess participants' desire, ability, and readiness to engage in self-

compassion. The measure was phrased in the context of parenting practice i.e. "*I would like*

to be kind and caring towards myself in regards to my struggles". The scale is scored on a

five-point Likert scale, from 1 *(Strongly Disagree)* to 5 *(Strongly Agree)*, with higher scores

indicating increased motivation to be self-compassionate. The CMS had reasonable internal

consistency ($\alpha = .93$).

The Self-Compassion Scale. The SCS (SCS; Neff, 2003) was used to measure self-

compassion and is a 26-item self-report measure that is psychometrically strong, and

measures three components consisting of opposing pairs — Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment;

Common Humanity vs. Self-Isolation; and Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification. Participants

are instructed to indicate how often they acted in the manner stated in each of the items on a

scale of 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*).The scale had sound internal consistency for

this sample ($\alpha =.74$).

Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale. The Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale

(SCBCS; Hwang, *et al*., 2008) was used to assess compassion. The SCBCS is a brief version

of Sprecher and Fehr's Compassionate Love Scale (2005). The SCBCS includes five items.

The items were selected based on the evaluation of high correlation coefficients between

individual item responses and the 21 items from the original scale. The items for SCBCS are

scored on a 7-point Likert scale 1 (*Not at All True of Me)* to 7 (*Very True of Me*). The SCBCS

has a number of advantages that include strong psychometric properties and a relatively

shorter length that makes it deal to administer and score in large scale epidemiological

studies. The correlation between the SCBCS and CLS emerged quite high at .95. The internal

reliability for SCBCS for this sample using Cronbach's alpha = .83 (Hwang *et al*., 2008).

The Resilience Scale. The Resilience Scale (RS-15; Neill and Dias, 2001) was used to

assess psychological resilience. Each positively-phrased item is scored on a 7-point Likert

scale 1 (*Disagree)* to 7 (*Agree*) and asks participants to assess their beliefs about their ability

to manage stress (e.g. "I have self-discipline"). Item scores are summed, with higher scores

indicating higher global resilience. The RS-15 is a refined version of the original 25 item

measure by Wagnild and Young (1993), with demonstrated improved reliability (Neill,

2011). Windle *et al*. (2011) notes the RS-15 had the widest application of reviewed measures

of resilience. The measure possessed a Cronbach's alpha of .89 for this sample.

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS;

Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995a) is a 21-item questionnaire assessing symptoms of

depression, anxiety, and stress in adults. It has good internal consistency for each scale (α =

.97, .92 and .95, respectively). The DASS has good convergent and discriminant validity

(Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995b) and test–retest reliability (r = .71–.81 for each scale). All

items are measures on a four-scale response from 0 (*Did not apply to me*) to 3 (*Applied to me*

very much). The measure possessed a Cronbach's alpha of .89 for this sample.

Acceptability Questionnaire. The Acceptability Questionnaire was modified from the

acceptability survey used by Sanders and Kirby (2012). The adapted four-item questionnaire

asked participants: a) how acceptable you found Gone Fishing; b) how useful you found

Gone Fishing; and c) would you recommend Gone Fishing to others. The final item asked

about barriers to completing Gone Fishing which included; excessive emotional investment,

practical considerations (i.e. flights, costs), objections from family members, and/or conflicts

with personal cultural beliefs. All items were measured on a three-scale response of Agree,

Neither Agree/Disagree, or Disagree.

Procedure

The experiment involved three key parts. Participants first received the pre-interventions measures. Second, participants completed the Gone Fishing program. Lastly, participants completed the post-intervention measures, which also included the acceptability feedback of the intervention.

Results

Missing Data Analysis

A non-significant Little's MCAR test χ^2 (1165, N =14) = .758, p > .999, suggests that data was missing completely at random (MCAR) and not systematically related to other scores in the study. The study employed Expectation Maximisation (EM) to estimate missing data points (Dempster *et al*., 1997), which is considered an acceptable strategy (Dempster *et al*., 1997).

Preliminary Analyses

Demographics. Although we were not comparing the two groups in this study, we wanted to determine if the samples were equivalent. A series of chi-squares tests and independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there were any significant differences between the two groups. Results from these tests indicated no significant differences.

Experimental Analyses

Leadership Outcomes. The preliminary findings of this pilot feasibility trial suggested that the Gone Fishing program had a positive significant impact on participants willingness to engage with not for profit organisations as measured by the CBBES, t(1, 13) = -6.817, p < .001. Gone Fishing also appeared to have a significant impact on leadership style as measured by the MLQ, specifically for Effectiveness, t(1, 13) = -3.706, p = .003 and Satisfaction, t(1, 13) = -2.797, p = .015. Extra Effort as measured by the MLQ was also

significant, $t(1, 13) = -2.474$, $p = .028$, however, when applying Bonferonni correction, this finding was no longer significant, (Table 1).

Emotion-Based Outcomes. To examine emotional intelligence of business executives the AES was used, with the Gone Fishing program finding a significant positive impact on emotional intelligence, $t(1, 13) = -5.103$, $p < .001$. Empathy was also measured by the IRI, with the total score resulting in a significant increase in empathy, $t(1, 13) = -3.365$, $p = .005$. Subscale scores found significant increase for Perspective Taking, $t(1, 13) = -3.223$, $p = .007$, but not for other subscales due to applying Bonferroni corrections, (Table 1).

We also examined as to whether the Gone Fishing program impacted the participants emotional coping and adjustment. In terms of resilience, participants scores on the RS increased significantly from pre to post, $t(1, 13) = -2.267$, $p = .041$, and there was no change on the DASS, for depression, anxiety, and stress.

Compassion Outcomes. We found a significant increase on compassion for others, with the SCBCS increasing from pre to post Gone Fishing, $t(1, 13) = -5.225$, $p < .001$. Participants motivation to be compassionate also increased based on the CMS $t(1, 13) = -3.906$, $p = .002$. Finally, overall levels of SCS increased, $t(1, 13) = -2.996$, $p = .010$. In terms of subscales, only the subscale of common humanity $t(1, 13) = -3.512$, $p = .004$, and mindfulness were significant, $t(1, 13) = -3.122$, $p = .008$, when applying Bonferroni corrections (Table 1).

Acceptability Outcomes. Data for the acceptability outcomes were from both groups of participants, thus results were collected from 27 individuals (Table 2). Overall the majority of participants found Gone Fishing acceptable (92.5%), useful (100%), and agreed to recommend the program to others (88.9%). Practical considerations were identified as the largest barrier to participation (37%), followed by the emotionally draining nature of the project (18.5%) and objection from family members (18.5%). Notably, no participants in either sample identified that inconsistency with their cultural beliefs as a barrier (Table 2).

Discussion

The aim of this experiment was to examine whether the fields of education, business

management and leadership may benefit from the introduction of immersion programs or

units designed to enhance compassionate and ethical leadership in executives. Based on this

initial pilot testing, we found encouraging results which extend our knowledge in the field of

leadership, management and compassion. In particular, this is the first study to robustly

address the impact of immersion programs on compassionate outcomes in business leaders.

Despite growing practice of immersions in business and education sectors, there have been

few studies quantitatively measuring impacts upon participants. The results of this study

suggest that Gone Fishing, an immersion program that spans two-weeks aimed at cultivating

compassionate leadership, was effective at improving leadership outcomes, emotional

intelligence, and compassion. Our findings are consistent with our predictions of enhanced

compassion outcomes among participants, premised upon experiential learning and

acculturation theories. This research provides evidence of measureable change in

participant's behavior and attitudes in a compassionate context, implying that immersions to

culturally dissimilar, foreign destinations and communities may be a worthwhile investment

in developing organisation leaders. Indeed, this approach, at least in a service model

approach akin to the one we tested, could be one strategy to improve ethical behavior by

influencing compassion.

Importantly, although our participants were volunteers, the immersion program was

still able to significantly increase willingness to engage with not for profit organisations,

which suggests a broader community benefit produced by immersion participation. The

increased willingness to volunteer based upon immersion participation is a new finding in the

research concerned with immersion impact assessment. Another key outcome was that

participants' levels of psychological distress did not change. This result is noteworthy as immersion programs can be emotionally draining experiences (Ryan & Twibell, 2002; Ryan, Twibell, Brigham & Bennett, 2000). Thus, it was critical to examine whether the two-week experience in Kenya produced any detrimental effects on distress. Fortunately, findings indicated that the experience did not take an adverse emotional toll on participants as measured by the DASS (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995) despite the reservations of a subset of the sample. This is an important finding, as it suggests that seeking compassionate leadership development through international immersions does not pose the risk of significant increased stress upon participants.

Future Research

Future research aimed at extending these initial positive findings is warranted. For example, measurement of additional attributes which are regarded as important for ethical management and leadership, including global perspective and cultural literacy (Christensen et al., 2007) would be worth including in any further examination of immersion impacts. Educational outcomes in terms of applied learning also represent a worthwhile focus, in addition to integrating alternative measures to those used in the current study, for multidimensional, complex constructs such as leadership and compassion. For the purposes of our study, we selected well established measures for these constructs, but it is acknowledged that alternative measures do exist and should be applied to calibrate our results in future studies (for example, Compassion Engagement and Action Scale, Gilbert et al., 2017). Research aimed at development of more granular and reliable measures for these constructs may assist in empirical efforts at assessing effectiveness of immersions. While there has been some research advancement in this area (e.g., Morais & Ogden, 2011), more research is required to test and develop new measures.

Importantly, the empirical research examining the efficacy of immersion units is within its infancy. Thus, despite the positive outcomes obtained on our a priori hypotheses regarding improved leadership outcomes, emotional intelligence, and compassion, it remains unknown what specific aspects of the immersion unit contributed to these positive findings. Are the results indicative of a more holistic impact of the immersion experience or were there specific activities within the immersion itself that directly led to these shifts? These are empirical questions that require testing, as it is important to understand the key ingredients of the intervention that lead to change. Moreover, comparative analysis of different immersion formats, duration, participant profiles and destinations is likely to enhance our insight in this emerging line of research. Research examining longer-term impacts of immersions is another aspect to consider, particularly with reference to organisational quantitative impacts. These impacts might include (but are not limited to) morale, turnover and risk propensity of employees, ethical behavior and possible propensity to support socially responsible causes.

In line with this, longitudinal investigation of these impacts would be a worthwhile research direction, given the capacity for immersion alumni to develop and continue their relationship with communities visited following their return. Indeed, leveraging the findings pointing to an enhanced willingness to engage with the not for profit sector post immersion could broaden the scope of the outcomes for participants and the not-for-profit sector generally. Our research suggests that immersion programs might potentially promote building ongoing connection and engagement among participants, their organisations, not for profits and the communities they serve. This is a desirable outcome for organisations increasingly concerned with fostering compassionate and socially responsible leadership in their employees.

However, it is equally, if not more, important to also assess the impacts of immersions upon the communities visited. Surprisingly, there has been scant research focussed upon the

destination communities. In view of the altruistic aims of the Gone Fishing immersion, it is critical that a mutual benefit be established for participants and the Kenyan communities with which participants engage (Crabtree, 2008; 2013; Porter & Monard, 2001; Simonelli, Earle & Story, 2004). This is particularly relevant in the context of the effective altruism movement (MacAskill, 2015; Singer, 2015); a recent movement promoting evidence-based altruism. Research shows that, often, well-intentioned actions fail to enact positive change, or even cause harm. Voluntourism, for example, has recently been demonstrated to, in many cases, cause harm to the communities that these projects are aiming to assist (Rotabi, Roby & McCreery Bukers, 2017). Similarly, Frazer (2008) identified that clothing donation imports in Africa contributed to 40% decline in production and 50% of decline in unemployment from 1981-2000. This demonstrates that outcomes of well-intentioned actions can be both counterintuitive and harmful, and reinforces the need for assessment of these types of programs. Considering this, it is critical to evaluate the impact of immersion programs for both the participants and recipients to ensure reciprocal benefit.

Limitations

There are also some limitations to this study such as generalizability and durability of these findings across a broader spectrum of business and community leaders. While the sample was Australian and equal gender representation, it consisted of primarily highly experienced business executives from strong social-economic backgrounds and were of a similar age. Hence, our study requires replication across participants from diverse backgrounds, experience and age to test the robustness of our findings. A further limitation to the study concerns the self-report measurement scales used. Finally, the lack of observational or other measures beyond self-report (i.e., emotional expressive software) is a limitation to the pilot study. Another limitation of this study is the problem of sample self-selection, and the possibility that individuals high in compassion might be more inclined to participate in

the Gone Fishing immersion, thus skewing our results and restricting the findings. However, the fact that development in compassion was observed in these participants might imply a larger effect for the general population. Our measurement at two points in time does not rule out the possibility of development in terms of compassion, empathy and leadership occurring in a non-linear pattern. There is some evidence in studies examining multicultural adjustment during international immersions that development may be curvilinear (Church, 1982).

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to assess the feasibility of the Gone Fishing immersion program in developing compassionate leadership among participants, given the importance of compassion in motivating ethical behavior. Rigorous impact measurement of experiential immersion learning activities increasingly undertaken by organisations is critical, given that limitation of unethical management is regularly cited as rationale for such initiatives. As highlighted, there have been many reported incidents involving corporate breaches of integrity, corruption, illegal and immoral management which have adversely impacted our economy and our societal welfare. Our study demonstrates promising results in developing compassion, empathy and leadership behavior in executive participants, which aligns with our predicted outcomes based upon experiential learning theory and evidence of immersion benefits revealed to date (e.g., Bennett-Levy and Lee, 2014; Plante, Lackey and Hwang 2009). Because community-based learning like the Gone Fishing program seeks to increase participant and community engagement and connection to those in greatest need, our research demonstrates it is likely that compassion and related constructs such as empathy are nurtured through these now popular experiential learning opportunities. This type of field learning therefore appears to provide deep insight and engagement with communities visited which may motivate participants in areas of social justice generally upon return.

Global perspective and appreciation of cultural diversity are core business leadership attributes which underpin corporate social responsibility and shared value strategy. Our research demonstrates that ethically responsible organisations can build genuine concern across their organisations by promoting international immersive experiences for their employees. While further research is needed to calibrate these findings in relation to different immersion models and long term impacts upon participant attributes and corporate strategy, the implication is that collaboration with these communities and NGOs is a worthwhile activity — an outcome that is not just desirable from an economic perspective, but a human one.

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Table 1.

Differences between Pre and Post Gone Fishing on Outcome Measures of Leadership, Emotions and

Compassion

	Pre (n = 14)		Post (n = 14)		Difference between the means	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t (1, 13)*	*P*
Leadership						
CBBES	5.33	.453	6.23	.305	6.817	.000***
MLQ Effectiveness	4.30	.511	4.77	.249	3.706	.003**
MLQ: Satisfaction	4.25	.612	4.64	.363	2.797	.015*
MLQ: Extra Effort	4.31	.577	4.57	.356	2.474	.028*
Emotion Outcomes	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(1,13)*	*P*
AES	133.86	12.67	143.93	7.84	5.103	.000***
IRI Total	66.71	9.26	71.21	5.48	3.365	.005**
IRI: Perspective	20.29	4.63	22.76	2.39	3.223	.007**
IRI: Empathy	22	4.08	23.36	2.98	2.852	.014*
IRI: Fantasy	16.64	5.69	17.21	3.97	.939	.365
IRI: Distress	7.79	3.07	7.86	3.03	1.00	.336
RS	82.14	14.62	90.50	3.80	2.267	.041*
DASS	17.43	15.56	15.29	10.19	1.139	.275
DASS: Depression	3	4.35	3.42	3.72	.822	.426
DASS: Anxiety	5.71	6.51	4.29	3.91	1.794	.096
DASS: Stress	8.71	5.64	7.57	4.38	1.035	.319
Compassion-Outcomes	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(1,13)*	*P*
SCBCS	4.81	.854	6.01	.241	5.225	.000***
CMS	3.42	.84	4.27	.18	3.906	.002**
SCS: Total	2.57	.54	2.72	.41	2.996	.01**
SCS: Self-Kindness	2.47	.61	2.64	.47	2.747	.017*
SCS: Self-Judgement	3.53	.920	3.57	.768	.675	.512
SCS: Common Humanity	2.71	.814	3.27	.454	3.512	.004**
SCS: Isolation	3.52	.817	3.5	.727	.291	.775
SCS: Mindfulness	2.96	.746	3.18	.623	3.122	.008**
SCS: Over identification	3.625	.712	3.610	.679	.899	.671

NB. CBBES = Consumer Brand Based Equity Scale; MLQ = Multi-Leadership Questionnaire; AES = Assessing Emotions
Scales; IRI = Interpersonal Reactivity Index; RS = Resilience Scale; DASS = Depression Anxiety Stress Scale; SCBCS =
Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale; CMS = Compassion Motivation Scale; SCS = Self-Compassion Scale.
    *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 2.

Acceptability and Barriers to Gone Fishing

	Agree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Disagree	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Found it Acceptable	25	92.5	2	7.5	0	0
Found it Useful	27	100	0	0	0	0
Would recommend to others	24	88.9	3	11.1	0	0
Barriers to participate:						
Emotionally draining	5	18.5	20	74	2	7.5
Practical considerations	10	37	10	37	7	26
Family members would object to me completing it	5	18.5	8	30	14	51.5
Against my cultural beliefs	0	0	0	0	27	100