

# **Key Factors in Encouraging and Empowering Undergraduates to Practice Service Leadership through Extra-curricular Service-learning Practicums**

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# Introduction

- **The value of internships**
  - Internships are very **popular** among students, firms, and educational institutions (Degraevl, 2011) and they generate **positive effects** for all the players involved in this activity, interns, educational institutions, host organizations, and the larger environment (Degraevl, 2011, Verney et.al. 2009; Harris & Zhao, 2004; Ryan et.al., 1996).

# Service Leadership

- Service leadership (Chung, 2012; Farnsworth, 2007; Grönfeldt & Strother, 2006) is conceived as a prosocially-inclined, non-hierarchical form of leadership (James et al, 2007, Kouzes & Posner, 2003), with organizational **members from the frontline upwards sharing leadership responsibilities** in furthering the service mission of their organization (Grönfeldt & Strother, 2006, p.6-7).
- In service leadership settings, those in higher positions aim to cultivate an organizational spirit that inspires **employees to build and contribute skills, ideas, and knowledge** (Gronfeldt & Strother, 2006, p.9).

# Practical Aims

- To set up an internship or 'practicum' experience that offers opportunities for students to serve as **project leaders**, and to **practice service leadership** rather than just doing routine work or applying specialist techniques.
- To understand how to do this better.

# NGOs & Social Enterprises as Suitable Partners in Service Leadership Development

These organizations typically have flat hierarchies, in which most employees and volunteers have direct service responsibilities. (As compared with commercial contexts) service learning internships may expose students to greater variety and greater challenge, with higher expectations for use of initiative and expertise, and may provide more meaningful work with extended consequences (Rehling, 2000).

- We thus anticipated that NGOs & SEs would provide a fertile context for the development of Service Leadership attributes. They comprised the great majority of our partner organizations.

# Conditions for the Development of Service Leadership Attributes

- Holyoak (2013) anticipates both individual and organizational factors that may affect internship/ practicum effectiveness. She suggests investigating how to create the “optimal conditions for development”.

## RQ1

- What conditions and processes (i.e., good arrangements, good practices) are effective in supporting and facilitating students in practicing service leadership?

# Meaningful Tasks

- Cupps & Olmosk (2008) note that if interns are given only menial jobs, the resulting motivation and quality of work may suffer.
- Interns may become frustrated if there are supervisor-imposed constraints on opportunities for developmental work (Holyoak, 2013).

## RQ2

- How can any requirement to perform routine background office work be effectively balanced with (rather than drown out) opportunities and responsibilities that empower and enable students to practice service leadership?

# Students' Own Developmental Engagement

- Cupps & Olmosk (2008) advise the avoidance of loading too much on the intern in the first few days, which might put him/her on edge, making him or her feel nervous or overwhelmed.
- Interns' attitudes to learning and motivation to learn may be key factors (Roberts, 2006; Holyoak, 2013) in reducing or enhancing the development achieved during internships.

## RQ3

- How can practicum students recognize 'gaps' (conscious learning needs) in terms of their service leadership attributes, and how can they orient themselves toward improvement (e.g. through feedback and guidance)?

## RQ4

- How important is the student's 'developmental readiness' as a factor yielding relatively fruitful or less fruitful practicum experiences?

# Transformative Development

- Often service learning internships expose students to a wider range of (tasks), challenge them with enhanced expectations for initiative and expertise, and provide them with more meaningful work that has extended consequences (Rehling, 2000).

## RQ5

- How can 'transformative development' take place during the practicum, through which a student may develop 'deeper' service leadership attributes, such as 'agency mindset', growth in self-confidence, etc. ?

# Appropriate Roles of Partner Organization Representatives (PORs)

- When studying the effects of internships, attention has focused almost exclusively on self-perceptions of students' learning (Cooper, 2013; Zhang, 2013; Green & Farazmand, 2012; Bradshaw & Johari, 2008; Mihail, 2006; Clark, 2003; Rehling, 2000) or on the perspectives of educational institutions (Holyoak, 2013; Templeton, Updyke & Bennett, 2012; Narayana, Oik and Fukami, 2010).
- Holyoak (2013) suggests that characteristics of the supervisor (e.g. willingness to provide support) can reduce or enhance the development achieved during internships.

## RQ6

- How can PORs play effective roles (as seen by themselves as well as by students) in supporting students' development as service leaders, such as creating appropriate background conditions and atmosphere/climate, by providing suitable coaching/facilitation, etc. ?

# Benefits

- (As stated on the previous slide), attention has focused almost exclusively on self-perceptions of students' learning or on the perspectives of educational institutions.

## **RQ7**

- What benefits for host organizations arise from service leadership practicums?

# Lessons from the First Round in Summer 2013

Feedback from students and PORs indicated the need for more time and more opportunities:

- for initial trust building
- to afford more opportunities for students to acquire and practice Service Leadership attributes.

Revisions made in 2014

- Lengthened the practicum period from 6 weeks to 8 weeks
- Pre-practicum discussions between the University and PORs about appropriate tasks/projects for practicing Service Leadership.

Outcomes

- More opportunities to practice Service Leadership through leading substantial projects to completion.
- More contributions to partner organizations, e.g., posters, guidebook, conducting classes, improvements in operational systems.

Time

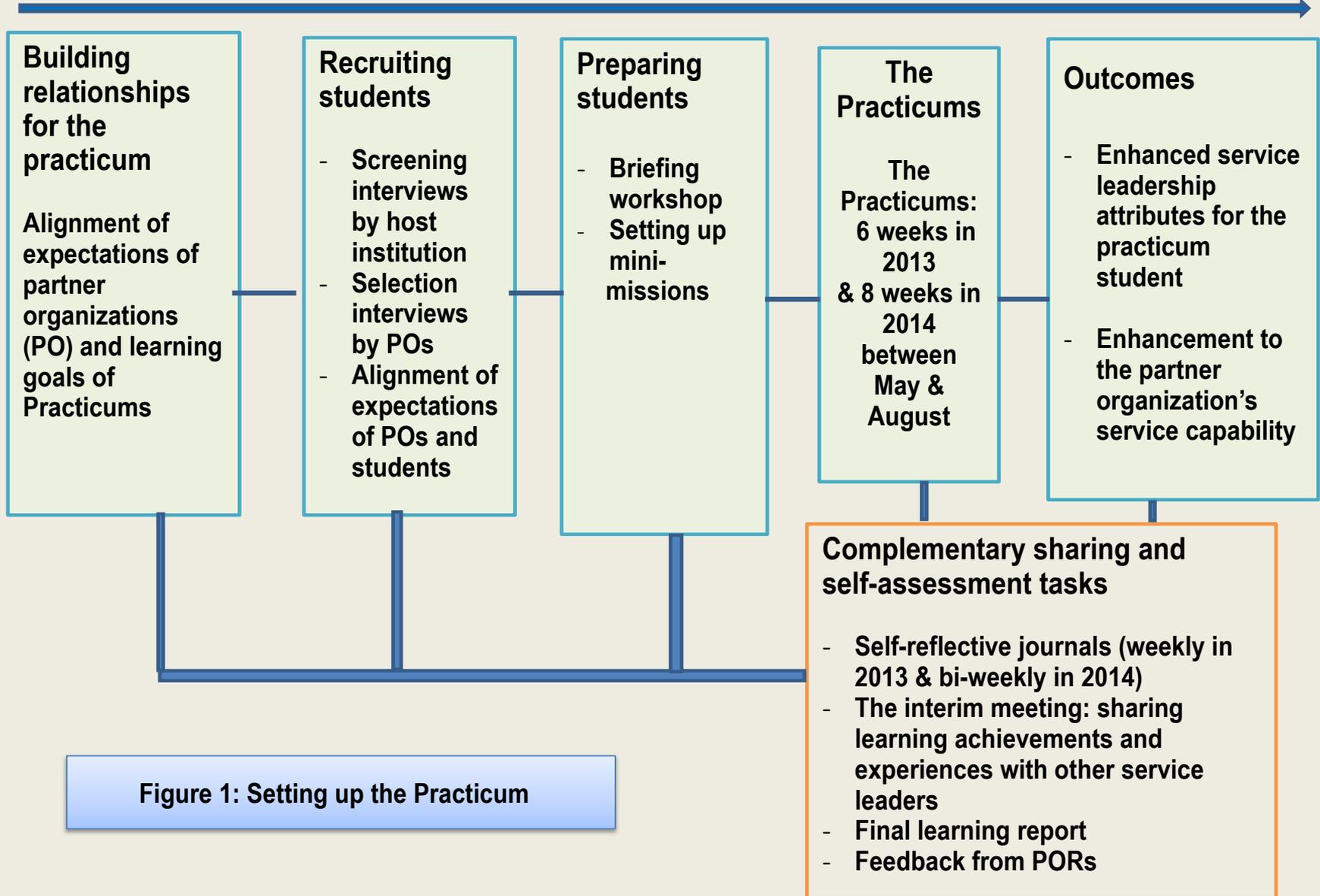


Figure 1: Setting up the Practicum

# Profile of Respondents

Institution - Nature of business (Number)	Respondents (Gender / Year of Study) (Number)	Study Major (Number)
<b>Year 2013</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eco-tourism (1)</li> <li>- Public Relations (1)</li> <li>- Education Centre (1)</li> <li>- Tertiary Education (1)</li> <li>- Social Welfare (4)</li> </ul> <p><b>Total : 8 POs</b></p>	<p>Year 1 Female (5)            Year 2 Female (5)            Year 1 Male (2)</p> <p><b>Total : 12 students</b></p>	<p>Social Sciences (6)            Visual Art (1)            Chinese ((1)            Accounting (2)            Business (1)            Cultural Studies (1)</p>
<b>Year 2014</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eco-tourism (1)</li> <li>- Social Welfare (7)</li> <li>- Education Centre (1)</li> <li>- Tertiary Education (1)</li> </ul> <p><b>Total : 10 POs</b></p>	<p>Year 1 Female (1)            Year 2 Female (9)            Year 2 Male (4)            Year 3 Female (2)</p> <p><b>Total : 16 students</b></p>	<p>Social Sciences (9)            Contemp. English Studies (1)            Marketing (1)            Translation (3)            Cultural Studies (1)            Philosophy (1)</p>

# Four Focal Sites, along with POR and Student Profiles

Site	Partner Organization (POR Codenames)	Student Demographics (Student Codenames)
Site 1	Social Welfare Offering IT courses to elderly people (Si1-P1a & Si1-P1b)	Both: F Both: Yr 2 Social Sciences (Si1-St1 & Si1-St2)
Site 2	Social Welfare Recycling food to help low income families (Si2-P2)	M , Yr 2 Social Sciences (Si2-St1) F, Yr 1 Translation (Si2-St2)
Site 3	Tertiary Education Extra-curricular programme (Si3-P3a & Si3-P3b)	F, Yr 3 Philosophy (Si3-St1) M, Yr 2 Translation (Si3-St2)
Site 4	Social Enterprise Serving ethnic minority groups (Si4-P4)	F, Yr 2 Translation (Si4-St1)

# Theme 1: Appropriate Responsibilities

- Innovation by the students in order to identify and meet hitherto unmet needs.
- Allowing students to develop activities or arrangements that made a clear difference to the social mission of the host organization.
- Empowering students to initiate service planning, organization and delivery, including anticipating and responding to end-user contingencies and demands.

# Theme 2: Supportive Site Supervision

- Willing and able to provide timely briefings, guidance, coaching and feedback.
- Providing opportunities to practice Service Leadership.
- Encouraging students to contribute (e.g., new ideas)

# Theme 3: Developmentally Ready Students

- Were psychologically prepared to seek out new challenges.
- Cared about both end-user service-recipients and other stakeholders.
- Were committed to making a difference.
- Had or acquired sufficient situational skills and knowledge.
- Had sufficient self-confidence to work things out independently and arrive at their own decisions.
- Found effective ways to approach their site supervisor whenever necessary.
- Built trust with their site supervisor, and others, by demonstrating their competence and integrity.

# Site 1

Task Appropriateness	Site Supervis'n	Student Readiness	Outcomes
<p>Both students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Autonomous tasks</li><li>• Met service recipients F2F</li></ul> <p>High</p>	<p>Highly Supportive</p>	<p>Both high</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both delivered and developed service content</li><li>• Established new service locations</li><li>• Performance exceeded POR's expectations</li><li>• Learning satisfaction</li></ul>

# Site 1

## High Task Appropriateness

I would like them to achieve something that we would not otherwise achieve and bring something new to us. (Si1-P1a)

I also arrange different types of jobs for them to try as I expect them to gain the most experiences from different pieces of work in the two months. (Si1-P1a)

## High Developmental Readiness

They showed that they could take initiative on the first day. They took initiative in acquiring knowledge and were also prepared to contribute. (Si1-P1a)

I could maintain my mood when interacting with people even if I felt unhappy at the time. (Si1-St1)

## Supportive Site Supervision

They would be in the room themselves and I would stay outside to observe and listen. I also asked for the feedback of the participants. (Si1-P1a)

# Site 2

Task Appropriateness	Site Supervis'n	Student Readiness	Outcomes
<p>Both students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chose projects from a list</li><li>• Met service recipients F2F</li><li>• 'Owned' the projects</li><li>• Supervised volunteers</li></ul> <p>High</p>	Moderately supportive	<p>One high</p> <p>One moderate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved service infrastructure</li><li>• New supplier</li><li>• Enhanced community relationships</li><li>• Both students appeared to benefit developmentally</li></ul>

# Site 2

<b>Si2-St1 High Developmental Readiness</b>	<b>Si2-St2 Moderate Developmental Readiness</b>
<p>Si2-St1 is mature, independent and responsible. He demonstrated leadership qualities like coordination and responding to contingencies, very well. (Si2-P2)</p> <p>I enjoyed it a lot as I seldom have the opportunity to work on my own from the beginning to end and share with others. I am proud of my achievements (Si2-St1)</p>	<p>Si2-St2 may need some time to understand the service operations. She needs to understand the nature of a more people-orientated service. (Si2-P2)</p> <p>I really did not know what to do on the first day. I dared not ask the supervisor what to do. I just waited for the instructions of the supervisor. I felt bored during the week that my supervisor took leave and another intern had not come yet. And I do not know whether I can lead a team. (Si2-St2)</p>

# Site 2 (continued)

## Moderately Supportive Site Supervision

She (supervisor) asked us to express our opinions openly without hesitation and so she allows us space for improvement. (Si2-St2).

I could not talk with the supervisor immediately.... She had to deal with a lot of arrangements and coordination work in...(Si2-St1).

She is open in providing me with confidential information (Si2-St2).

I needed to stay in the office all by myself from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. My supervisor was away. I stayed in the office for several days all alone (Si2-St2).

# Site 3

Task Appropriateness	Site Supervis'n	Student Readiness	Outcomes
<p>Both students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Undertook programme development</li><li>• Led some service activities</li><li>• Engaged in mentoring</li><li>• Supported programme implementation (Moderate Task Appropriateness)</li></ul>	<p>Supportive</p>	<p>One high  One moderate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Developed materials for end-users</li><li>- Some programme delivery</li><li>- Programme coordination</li><li>- Both students appeared to benefit developmentally</li></ul>

# Site 3

## Si3-St1 High Developmental Readiness

Si3-St1 would take up more leadership roles (Si3-P3a)

I like her quick decision-making ability and critical thinking. She could always give suggestions in many occasions when problems were presented (Si3-P3a)

She is also responsive to problems and areas for improvement. Those are attributes of leaders. (Si3-P3a)

She is confident and people are willing to listen to her. (Si3-P3b)

## Si3-St2 Moderate Developmental Readiness

Si3-St2 acknowledged that he usually talked very little. He also said that he lacked ideas. (Si3-P3a)

At the beginning, he was rather introverted and did not interact well with the students. But later on, we found that he had built good relationships with the students. The participants even found out about his secrets which we did not know. (Si3-P3a)

# Site 3

## Moderately to Highly Supportive Site Supervision

I stepped back more and acted in an observer's role. Occasionally, I would pop in during the classes to observe their performances and also note the progress of the programme. I would provide comments and suggestions after they conducted the activities. (Si3-P3a)

During the weekly meeting, they would evaluate and give feedback to each other how to perform better. They are receptive to ideas for further improvement of their performance. (Si3-P3a)

# Site 4

Task Appropriateness	Site Supervis'n	Student Readiness	Outcomes
Low Task Appropriateness Mainly back office duties <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technical tasks</li><li>• Desk research</li><li>• Ad hoc projects</li><li>• Some promotion activities</li></ul>	Relatively un-supportive	Low	Piecemeal. Background understanding.  Not much leadership development.

# Site 4

## Low Task Appropriateness

Her work mainly relates to research. She also involved in social marketing, and in searching for information about social education. (Si4-P4)

She does not have much opportunity to perform service leadership here. As she does her work with her own computer here, and has little opportunity to perform leadership. (Si4-P4)

## Unsupportive Site Supervision

I feel work freedom there. No one monitored my work particularly closely. (Si4-St4)

The two supervisors always went out for meetings. I spent many sad afternoons (Si4-St4).

# Site 4

## Low Developmental Readiness (Student Accounts)

They (supervisors) perceive me as over-cautious. Even colleagues from other teams perceive the same about me. (Si4-St4)

When my supervisor (Si4-P4) went on vacation for two weeks, I completely got lost regarding what to do in the office (Si4-St4)

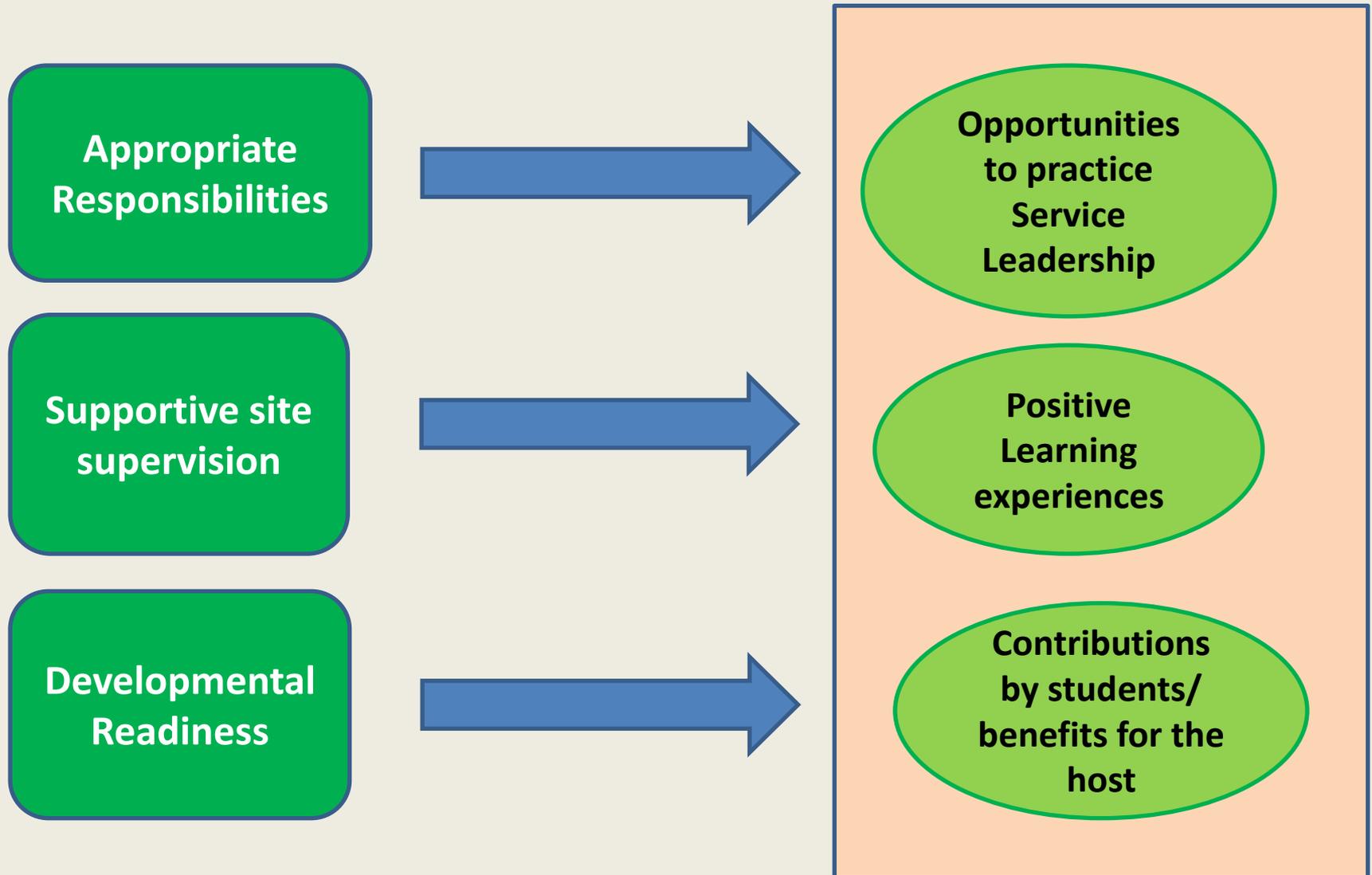
I do not understand what a leader is and I feel that I am not a leader. (Si4-St4).

## Low Developmental Readiness (Site Supervisors' Accounts)

From their reactions during the selection interview, they were not familiar with our institution. They told me that the university did not provide such information. I asked, "Do you know what to expect during internship?" They said that they were not clear (Si4-P4).

She was rather passive. Besides focusing on tasks and assignment, she should also pay attention to interaction with other people. But I observe that she is relatively weak in this aspect (Si4-P4).

# Summary: The Emerging Themes



# Summary of Findings

- Practicums in non-profit organizations provide a potentially powerful platform for students to practice service leadership
- Lack of one or more of the 3 critical factors (readiness, support, appropriate responsibilities) may nonetheless lead to an ineffective practicum experience.

# Practical Implications

- Allow for an initial period of adjustment by the practicum student.
- Readiness: Select students who understand that beyond background orientation they should not wait to be instructed on what to do, and who are willing to try out Service Leadership roles and learn from feedback thereon.
- Site Support: The partner organization needs to understand that supportive site supervision is necessary even for developmentally ready students, and must commit to providing the necessary support, feedback and recognition..
- Responsibilities: Students must be empowered to lead projects or 'mini-missions' that can make a difference