

Safety and Ethics in the Global Workplace: Asymmetries in Culture and Infrastructure

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ABSTRACT. This study described and analysed the circumstances surrounding a fatal car accident involving personnel of a multinational corporation in a developing country. For some companies, road accidents are the leading cause of work-related fatalities in developing countries. This reality highlights the ethical dilemmas encountered in a global workplace. Questions as to how a company addresses safety concerns outside the standard work environment, the ethics of operating in a risky environment and the requirements for international consistency in compensation standards for loss of life were addressed. The authors argued that multinational companies should localize health and safety practices to address the important asymmetries between different regions of the world regarding social, cultural and infrastructural issues. Furthermore, the authors analysed the leadership role that should be played by multinational companies to help and support national governments to reduce traffic fatalities in developing countries. From this perspective, the article represents a contribution for the body of knowledge dealing with the business–society relations. The authors used an action research approach to address these issues, both in response to the particular incident and to contribute to the body of research in this field.

KEY WORDS: corporate citizenship, global workplaces, high-risk workplaces, safety culture, safety ethics, transport-related workplaces

Introduction

Today's businesses operate in a global environment, often integrated in developing and emerging economies such as China, India or Latin American countries. The supply chains of most companies involve purchasing, manufacturing and delivering products or services in one or more of these

emerging countries. A number of challenges are behind this new reality for most multinational companies. One of them is that of managing a global workplace with significant social, ethical, cultural and infrastructural differences from one country to another (Bognanno et al., 2007; O'Rourke and Brown, 2003). In particular, multinational companies deal with levels of safety and work conditions that differ from acceptable international standards (O'Rourke and Brown, 2003; Radin and Calkins, 2006). Under this situation, a number of questions emerge as to what multinational companies should do to prevent unacceptable work conditions in the developing countries in which they are located. The problem is more difficult when considering workplaces outside the limits of the factory or company facilities. This is the case of transport-related workplaces in countries with poor infrastructure and dangerous roads. For some companies (e.g. British Petroleum or Total), road accidents are the leading cause of work-related fatalities in developing countries (BP, 2003; Total Corporate Website). In 2003, BP had 48 fatalities related to transportation worldwide (BP, 2003).

The human and economic toll of road accidents is giving rise to a movement to address and improve road conditions worldwide. Casualties are particularly significant in developing countries (more than 80% of the total of global road fatalities – see Downing et al., 1991; World Health Organization, 2004). This phenomenon affects the operation of companies in these countries and new business practices need to be developed to address the problem. As part of their corporate responsibility, companies should confront this global issue and help national governments develop effective means to address this situation.

This article has addressed this problem through the discussion of a very simple automobile accident with fatal consequences in Venezuela. This incident brings to life the dilemmas encountered in the development of a global workplace. Three sales representatives of a global company died while on duty in a precarious road. Although the company had clearly declared health and safety policies for their employees worldwide and the company prided itself on consistent ethical conduct, these three employees died.

The authors argued that multinational companies should localize health and safety practices to address the important asymmetries between different regions of the world regarding social, cultural and infrastructural issues. Given the higher level of risks in these emergent environments, localization is needed to ensure the same appropriate labour conditions for all of their employees worldwide. This will secure a more effective implementation of global ethical principles throughout the world. In particular, we identified best practices that seem to be cornerstone for the development of ethical policies in organizations with high-risk workplaces and proposed the adaptation of these practices to transport-related workplaces. These practices comprise the development of a safety culture (Bate, 1992; Reason, 1998; Thompson et al., 1996) and the management of workplace risks (Redja, 2004; Vinnem, 1999).

On the other hand, the study analysed the leadership role that should be played by multinational companies to help and support national governments to tackle traffic fatalities in developing countries. We agreed with the statement of Matten and Crane (2005) that multinational companies are in a better position than national governments to identify, analyse and propose actions on certain transnational challenges that are better managed in developed countries. Under this perspective, the article is a contribution to the body of research dealing with business–society relations. In particular, we believe that this epidemic disease of road fatalities might be an opportunity for companies to develop a proactive role for the improvement of road conditions in developing countries and, eventually, a better work environment for their employees. This perspective fits the extended conceptualization of corporate citizenship as defined by Garriga and Melé (2004) as part of the political group of theories of Corporate

Social Responsibility (CSR) and led by Matten and his colleagues (Matten and Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003) and Wood and her colleagues (Wood and Logsdon, 2001; Wood et al., 2006).

This study followed an action research approach for the development of its analysis and reflections. By following an action research approach (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002; McNiff et al., 2003), the authors were both participants and agents of change. The authors incorporated actions for the solution of the problem and they also looked back to the action to reflect on it and contribute to the body of knowledge. We described the accident, the actions taken by the family, the reflections that emerge from the event and the development of a more general theoretical discourse by linking the phenomenon to the literature.

Theoretical background

Wood and her colleagues (Wood et al., 2006) defined a global business citizen as ‘a business enterprise (and its managers) that responsibly exercises its rights and implements its duties to individuals, stakeholders and societies within and across national and cultural borders’ (p. 4). This extended conceptualization of corporate citizenship argues that responsible multinational companies are trying to wrestle in good faith with the challenges of globalization. Such a company is considered as ‘a global business citizen’ (Wood et al. 2006).

Globalization brings up a number of challenges for multinational companies. Most of which are related to differences of social, cultural, ethical and infrastructural issues from one country to another. From a universal principles perspective of corporate citizenship, multinational companies should think globally and act locally by applying basic ethical values everywhere they operate (Wood et al., 2006). Corporate citizenship will be defined according to the industry and the location where the multinational company operates. For example, tackling HIV/AIDS in the workplace is more important in southern Africa than in Europe (World Economic Forum, 2002).

Matten and Crane (2005) argued that globalization has reshaped the demands placed on corporations.

One of them is that multinational companies could take over some functions that have traditionally been administered by governments related to the protection, facilitation and enabling of citizens' rights. Professor Schwab (World Economic Forum, 2008) claimed that the roles of national governments have diminished and that, in this contemporary world, no single government can do everything. According to Schwab, a number of problems require bilateral, regional or global solutions and, from this perspective, multinational companies have a civic duty to contribute to sustaining the world's well-being. The underlying assumption of this extended conceptualization of corporate citizenship is that multinational companies should contribute to the well-being of the global workplace (World Economic Forum, 2008).

This study raises the importance of the global corporate citizenship concept for the solution of the epidemic of road fatalities in developing countries where multinational companies operate. It seems that national governments are unable to address and resolve the problem, and multinational companies' employees and the population in general are living in a deplorable situation. The authors intended to highlight the different asymmetries that exist and propose some actions that could be followed by multinational companies and governments as an integral part of the global corporate citizenship statement of the companies operating in these particular contexts.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was an action research approach conducted in a social context (a family in a developing country) and related to an organizational context (a multinational company operating in that country). Two authors of this study were inside the situation and inevitably influenced by what was happening (McNiff et al., 2003). One of the authors was a very close relative of the victim and handled the conversations with the company and another of the authors helped to prepare strategy to negotiate with GC. Given the specific situation described, the researchers enabled the family and the company to examine several courses of action

(Kickett et al., 1986). In doing so, the researchers acted as catalysts in both the search for a solution and the change of the family's local mindset used to address the problem. From this perspective, the researchers were both participants and agents of change (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002).

Action research is a mode of inquiry in which (1) the researcher can incorporate actions for the solution of a problem being investigated and (2) the researcher must look back to the action to reflect on it and to contribute theory to the body of knowledge (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002; Stringer, 1999). Thus, the action research approach comprises both solving a problem and contributing to science (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002).

This methodology is appropriate to study unstructured problems and integrative issues and allows researchers to be close to a full range of variables in contexts where those variables may not emerge all at once (Westbrook, 1995). More specifically, an action research project is emergent. This is because the problem and the research emerge through the unfolding of a series of events (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002). In this study, two authors were suddenly involved in a sad story related to the work-related death of a close relative in 2005. After 2 years of helping and supporting the family of the victim in solving the emerging problems and dilemmas, an in-depth analysis of the facts and actions taken has led the authors to interpret the situation to produce a contribution to the body of knowledge. At the time of writing this article, the case was still alive and the learning cycles were continuing to iterate. Thus, this study comprises one of the key characteristics of action research according to Gummesson (2000): it is a 'live' case study being written while it unfolds.

As mentioned, when running an action research project, two different analytical routines or cycles act simultaneously. The first is a problem-solving cycle [e.g. the six-step cycle developed by Coughlan and Coghlan (see Figure 1) or the look-think-act cycle developed by Stringer (1999)]. The second is an experiential learning cycle that allows researchers to reflect on what is going on and to make explicit to themselves what they have discovered and achieved from the action. This cycle is based on the Lewinian learning model as outlined in Figure 2 (Kolb, 1984).

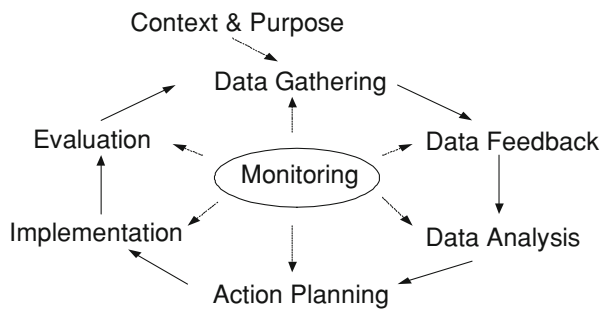


Figure 1. Problem-solving cycle by Coughlan and Coghlan (2002).

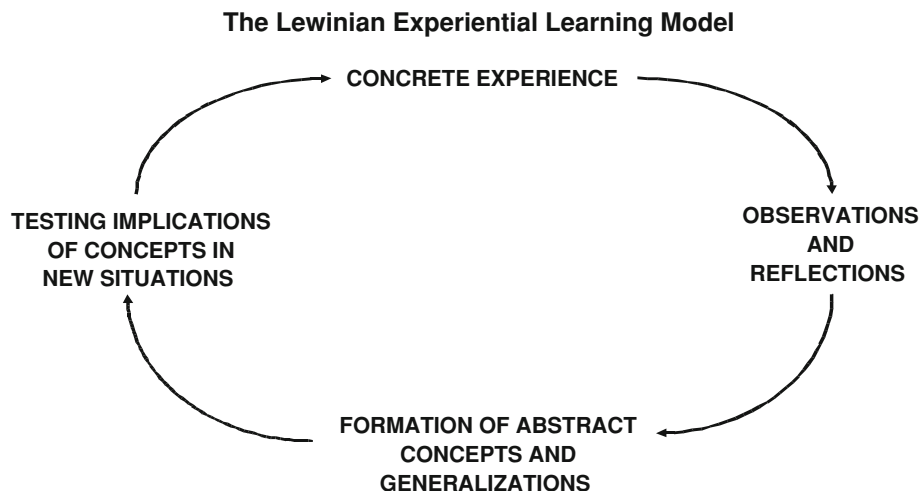
The problem-solving cycle

In this study, the problem-solving cycle could be described according to the Coughlan and Coghlan approach. Data gathering and data feedback included: (1) interviews and meetings with the family, lawyers and governmental organizations related to the monitoring of work conditions; (2) electronic messages with representatives of the ethical department located in the company headquarters in the US and (3) meetings with lawyers and with the company's local representatives (e.g. the production manager, human resource manager and sales manager). Data analysis encompassed the participation of the family and lawyers. In this step, the researchers took Schein's recommendation (1987) of building a dynamic of helping supported by a confronting mode of inquiry. That is,

the researchers shared ideas and knowledge and challenged the other actors to think from a new perspective. For example, in this study three questions were pivotal for the analysis: do you know that this problem is addressed differently in developed countries? Have you thought about acting under the principles of international laws and standards? Have you considered going ahead independently of the consequences? After the analysis, actions were planned and implemented, and the cycle was iterated several times until a final agreement was achieved among the different parties.

Learning cycle and theory generation

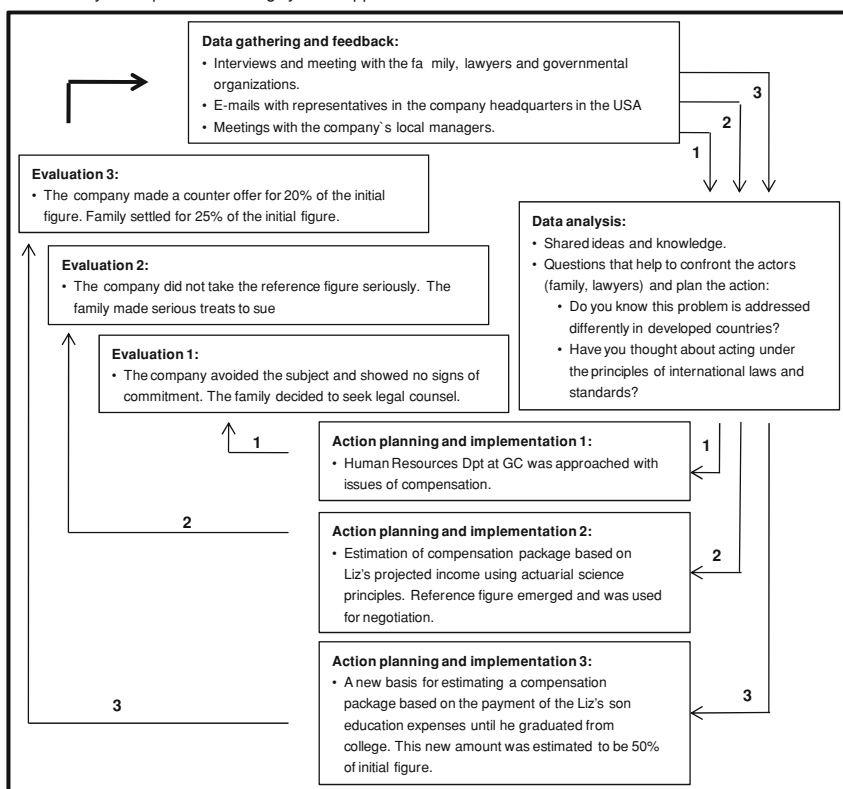
Running the Lewinian learning model allowed the researchers to reflect on the different dilemmas that arose from the case. From this self-reflection, a conceptualization of the specific experience was modelled to be meaningful to others (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002; Eden and Huxham, 1996). In doing so, the researchers attempted to induce theory from a particular experience (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Linking results to the literature was another crucial step in the generation of theory from the particular evidence emerging from this study. By enfolding literature, the internal validity and the ability to generalize were enhanced



Source: Kolb (1984, p. 21)

Figure 2. The Lewinian experiential learning model [adapted from Kolb (1984)].

A summary of the problem-solving cycle as applied on the case of Liz



A summary of the learning cycle as applied on the case of Liz

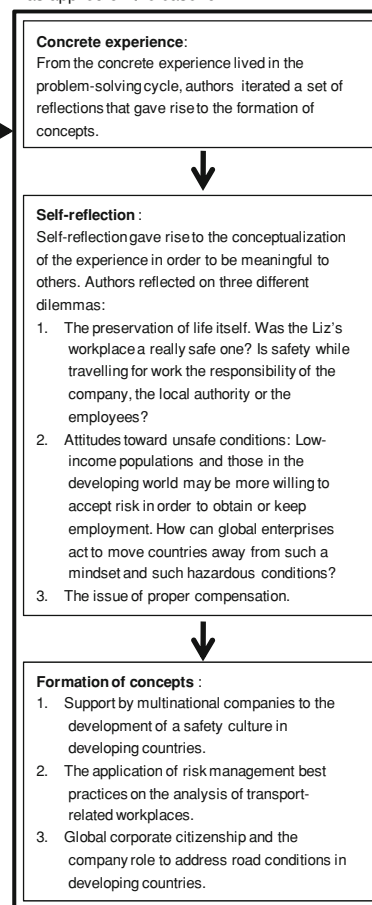


Figure 3. A summary of methodological steps followed by the researchers.

(Eisenhardt, 1989). Five different literature streams were reviewed in depth: (1) global and cultural issues of business ethics, (2) ethics of operating in dangerous environments, (3) ethics related to working conditions outside a firm's facilities, in particular, transport-related workplaces and road safety issues, (4) the statistical value of life and compensating differentials and (5) the extended conceptualization of corporate citizenship. Figure 3 summarizes the methodological steps followed by this investigation by running the two cycles described above.

Setting the scene

This section describes the accident and the events that occurred related to the death of the employee,

Liz,¹ and her two colleagues in an evening of June 2005. Additionally, the section points out (1) the characteristics of the employer Global Corporation (GC) and (2) the context related to poor infrastructure and road traffic injuries prevalent in developing countries.

Liz and the accident

Liz graduated from a local university in Valencia, Venezuela, in 1998 with a baccalaureate degree in Engineering and was hired by GC in 1999 as a sales engineer in the company plant in Valencia. Her job required her to provide expert advice to savvy customers about the technical features and applications of GC products in industrial processes and selling

GC products. Liz had the technical background required as well as the abilities as of a salesperson necessary for the job. As part of her work routine, Liz would visit the headquarters of GC in Caracas, located about 100 miles from her home in Valencia. On her way back, she would often stop to visit customers in the Santa Teresa Valley, industrial area located between Valencia and Caracas, about 30 miles from the latter.

One day before the accident, Liz unexpectedly had to visit a customer located in the city of Los Teques about 70 miles from Valencia. It turned out to be a very busy and tiring day for Liz. The following day, Liz left home in Valencia at 3:30 a.m. to attend a 7:00 a.m. meeting at GC headquarters in Caracas. Traffic along the Caracas–Valencia highway is particularly unpredictable and travelling to Caracas can be time consuming during rush hour: this trip may take anywhere between 2 and 4 h. The lack of transportation options between Caracas and Valencia (e.g. travelling by train or by airplane) magnifies the volume of cars along the Caracas–Valencia highway. Liz completed her work in Caracas by midday and was subsequently assigned the task of visiting customers in the Santa Teresa Valley as she had done in the past. It was expected that Liz would leave Santa Teresa at about 5:00 p.m. and get to Valencia at about 8:00 p.m., given that it was rush hour. Because two colleagues from the same sales engineering department also lived in Valencia, this trip back to Valencia, passing through Santa Teresa Valley, was undertaken by three employees. Liz and her two colleagues never made it to Valencia that evening.

On the Caracas–Valencia highway, Liz took the exit to the Santa Teresa Valley industrial zone to take the narrow stretch of road where the accident occurred. According to witnesses' accounts, there was a drizzling rain, the pavement was wet, it was getting dark due to low clouds and there was no divider between the opposing lanes. Although Liz was travelling at a relatively low speed, it seems that her car suddenly hit a pothole and skidded into the opposite traffic. An incoming truck ran into her car head-on, causing the death of Liz and her two colleagues. Due to the weather conditions, emergency medical help arrived quite late and at that point there was not much they could do. There were two types of risks associated with this accident: work overload that may have caused fatigue and overall conditions of the road.

The company

At the time of the accident, GC was a US\$15 billion global corporation with a leading position in several businesses ranging from consumer to industrial goods with more than 40,000 product lines. With headquarters located in a large US city, GC had operations in nearly 50 countries and sold its products in more than 100 countries. In addition, GC employed more than 60,000 people and more than half of its sales came from outside the US. As a leading global corporation, GC had always been committed to integrity and respect for its customers, employees and society. This company took pride in its outstanding reputation based on personal integrity, shared values and consistent ethical and honest business conduct as stated in its declaration of vision and mission.

In particular, GC had clearly declared health and safety policies for its employees. These policies were communicated through goals for GC managers and employees. GC clearly set the goal of instilling appropriate safety standards in all employees in all working environments. This included the operation and maintenance of equipment throughout all the facilities worldwide. This goal was to educate and train all employees so that their lives were protected on and off the job. Proper communication and response were part of the company philosophy. GC attempted to design the appropriate mechanisms for employees to know, understand and apply these policies in their daily activities. Moreover, the company had mechanisms in place through which employees could report any omission or violation of these policies.

The context

In 2002, there were 1.2 million deaths from road traffic injuries worldwide (see Table I). The World Health Organization (2004) pointed out that developing countries accounted for 88% of these fatalities, despite the proportionally smaller number of cars than in developed countries. While developed countries are reducing these fatalities (e.g. in North America, from 1975 to 1998, the road traffic fatality rate per 100,000 population declined by 27% – see World Health Organization, 2004), in developing countries

TABLE I
Global road toll fact sheet²

1.2 million people die annually on roads worldwide
30 million people are injured annually on roads worldwide
Road crashes are the single greatest cause of premature death and injury for men ages 15–45
Road crashes are the fifth leading cause of death for women
Twenty per cent of fatal accidents in developing countries involve children under the age of 15
Road crashes will soon become the third greatest health burden worldwide
Over 80% of all road deaths and serious injuries occur in the developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East
Road crashes cost developing countries 100 billion US dollars annually

the road traffic fatalities were projected to increase on average by over 80% from 1990 to 2020. Asia and Latin America present the worst forecast though they have clear differences. While in Asian countries many of the people killed in road traffic deaths were pedestrians and cyclists (between 15% and 60%), in Latin American countries car drivers and passengers accounted for the majority of deaths (Downing et al., 1991).

The 1998 ‘Review of Traffic Safety – Latin America and Caribbean Region’ funded by the Inter-American Development Bank reported that Venezuela, Colombia, Belize and Uruguay had the highest rates of deaths per 10,000 motor vehicles (see Figure 4). In particular, Venezuela had a large number of kilometres of paved roads, but a considerable number of these kilometres were in very bad condition (see Figure 5). The risk of a fatal accident while driving on Venezuelan roads was very high. The risks were associated with two main issues: the current state of the roads (potholes, poor lighting and lack of appropriate signs) and a historic lack of road maintenance (El Nacional, 2005). Recently, approximately 70% of bridges in the country presented visible dilapidation (Alcalá, 2007). The most important bridge that linked a key port and main airport to the capital city of Caracas collapsed in March 2006. The same concern existed for highways and tunnels.

In particular, the region where Liz and her colleagues died is composed of a set of high-risk roads in which tens of deaths occur monthly (La Voz, 2007). Newspapers have called for action from the national and regional transport authorities, but these authorities have not responded sufficiently (El

Nacional, 2005; La Voz, 2007). Newspapers have used the term ‘guillotines’ to describe the high-risk situation that drivers face when travelling throughout the regional roads in the Santa Teresa Valley in Venezuela (La Voz, 2007). However, Venezuela is not the only country in such a situation. Similar situations have been found in other countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa (Downing et al., 1991).

Taking actions: back to Liz’s fatal accident

It was difficult to bring the family around to the issue of seeking compensation from GC. All they wanted was to have Liz back. However, the future of Liz’s young son was at stake; in addition, bills were accumulating and they had to be paid. Initially, when the Department of Human Resources at GC was approached with the issue of compensation, the company avoided the subject and showed no signs of commitment. The family decided to seek legal counsel and followed a simple strategy. They estimated a compensation package based on Liz’s projected income assuming an active life of 30 more years and taking her last salary as the initial reference. This is a standard calculation using actuarial science principles (Rejda, 2004). The income that Liz would have generated in those 30 years was then brought to its present value. The figure (Net Present Value or NPV) that emerged from this calculation would become the reference figure for future negotiations. The family would present the NPV figure to GC to reach a mutually satisfactory settlement. If that did not work, the family would sue GC in court.

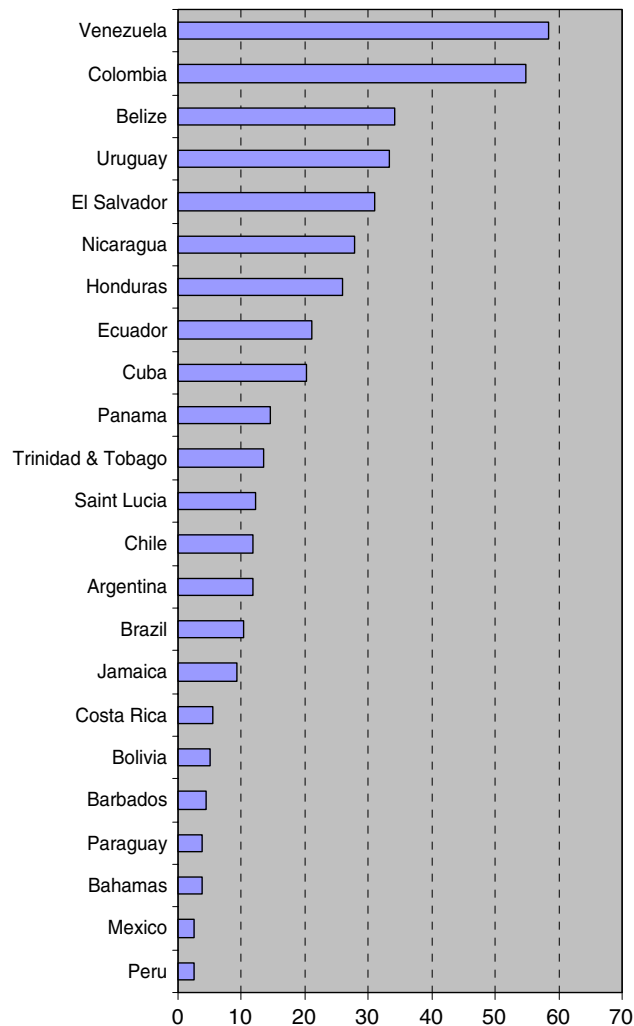


Figure 4. Latin American and Caribbean countries: deaths per 10,000 motor vehicles.³

The first reaction of GC to the NPV figure was of disbelief, as they did not take it seriously. They expressed interest in reaching an out-of-court agreement but they argued that they had no basis to establish a compensation amount. These initial conversations dragged on and GC only began to pay attention as the family's lawyers made serious threats to sue. Finally, GC made a counter offer of 13% of the NPV figure indicated above. As much as the family took the counter offer as a good sign, they found it insulting.

Acting in the best interest of Liz's son and for the sake of a rapid agreement, the family proposed a new basis for estimating a compensation package. They would be satisfied if Liz's son's expenses were cov-

ered until he graduated from college. This amount was estimated to be 50% of the NPV initial figure; however, the proposal was not welcomed by GC in Caracas. In a pragmatic approach, GC made a 'take it or leave it' counter offer for 20% of the NPV figure. After almost a year of negotiations, where time was on the side of GC, the family settled for 25% of the NPV figure.

What was the value of Liz's life in the eyes of the family and in the eyes of GC? There is no easy answer but there are worldwide accepted practices of assessing the compensation damages when lives are lost. The family invoked those practices but GC had the upper hand and exercised it. Is that approach aligned with the guidelines and ethical principles of



Translation into English:

1. Fallas mas comunes: **most common road failures.**
2. Errores de peralte en la curvas: **inverted grade in curves or improper road slope design.**
3. Ausencia de defensas: **lack of guard rails.**
4. Señalización ausente o en mal estado: **either lack of signage or in very poor shape.**
5. Pavimento irregular: **bumpy roads.**
6. Ausencia de demarcación: **absence of dividing and border demarcation lines.**
7. Falta de borde: **border slides.**
8. Falta de iluminación: **poor or nonexistent illumination.**
9. Baches: **pot holes.**

Figure 5. Characteristics of the roads in Venezuela. A sad Parody.⁴

GC? How would this very same situation play out in the US? In Venezuela, most people in this type of situation stay away from the court system because it is simply not trusted and it takes a long time to come to decisions in cases like this. The odds were against Liz on the road, on the job and after her death. Once again, the dilemma between global principles and the local nightmare for both Liz and the corporation arises. How can this be changed?

Self-reflection and learning

Running the Lewinian learning model allowed the researchers to reflect on the different dilemmas that arose from the case. This self-reflection gave rise to a conceptualization of the experience to be meaningful to others (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002; Eden and Huxham, 1996).

The first dilemma concerned the preservation of life itself, a basic human principle. A company may declare as part of its ethical business conduct guidelines that one of their corporate standards is to create a safe workplace. Three employees of that company die in car accident when travelling a long distance to visit various customers in the area. The accident is a consequence of poor highway conditions, non-existent road signalling and the lack of police patrolling. In addition, the vehicle used was completely inappropriate for this kind of road conditions. It was a small three-door hatchback auto-

mobile with no air bags and a very weak steel frame design. The question arose: was that a really safe workplace? It should be pointed out that the three individuals were carrying out professional duties. Is safety while travelling for work the responsibility of the company, the local transportation authority or the employees?

A second dilemma concerns attitudes towards unsafe conditions in general. Trimpop and Zimolong (1998) found that the context in which one lives, including culture, influences both perceptions and tolerance of risk. Frequent, prolonged exposure to a potentially hazardous condition causes people to reduce their perception of risk. For example, those who regularly drive long distances may underestimate the risk such driving entails. The fact that road conditions are poor throughout the country can create a degree of acceptance. In addition, other factors, such as economic well-being, influence the tolerance of risk. Low-income populations and those in the developing world may be more willing to accept risk to obtain or keep employment. How can global enterprises act to move countries away from such a mindset and such hazardous conditions? Should a respected company decide to set up operations in a country with evident hazardous and risky conditions for future employees if that compromises its ethical standards? If so, how can the company manage the high level of risk for its employees?

A third dilemma involves the issue of proper compensation. In spite of the mitigation advocated

in this article to diminish accidents in developing countries, accidents do happen and compensation will always be necessary. The just formula to compensate for the loss of life, particularly of professionals at the prime point of their careers, has not been invented yet. At least there is no sufficient compensation in the eyes of the affected close relatives; there is no money in the world that would bring their loved ones back. There are, however, accepted forms of compensation through life and accident insurance. Again, in developing countries these forms of compensation tend to be largely below the accepted standards in developed countries. Companies tend to evade responsibility until they have a clear idea of the extent of the consequences and the size of the claim by the affected parties. This behaviour is in clear conflict with the ethical behaviour declared and with recent accepted practices of corporate social responsibility. Should compensation packages in developing nations use different formulations to calculate future earnings? The general dilemma is how to be global and yet recognize the basic value of life and as a corporation fight for it. In spite of widespread globalization, practices are far from being global. Globalization is given lip service, but local practices seem to determine the prevailing attitude.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal several important issues. The first of these is the ethics of operating in an inherently risking environment that gives rise to unsafe working conditions in activities away a firm's facilities boundaries (e.g. high-risk transport-related workplaces). Second, once a firm has decided to operate where the larger setting carries risks, it has to determine how these risks will be shared and managed among the company, the employee and other stakeholders (e.g. governmental agencies). Third, once a fatal accident happens, a challenging dilemma for companies is the definition of compensation policies. Should policies be global or local?

In this section, the researchers have attempted to connect the reflections mentioned above with existing formal theory. The aim has been the development of a more general theoretical discourse (Eisenhardt, 1989). Compensation is, in general, an

old issue that has been extensively discussed in the literature (Chelius, 1982; Guadalupe, 2003; Persson, 2006; Siebert and Wei, 1998; Tanase, 1990; Viscusi, 1993; Viscusi and Aldi, 2003). However, there are remarkable differences regarding the market for life insurance premium between developed and developing countries. Data from Cummins and Venard (2008) indicate that the life insurance premium market in the USA is \$1744 per capita and \$50.83 per capita in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2007. These figures are very similar when compared to others developing and developed regions of the world. The end result, however, is that the general population in developing countries is severely underinsured when it comes to life insurance. Among the factors that explain the small size of life insurance premium markets in many developing countries, Outreville (1996) suggests that 'life insurance may be considered irrelevant or inappropriate for ideological, cultural or religious reasons, or because economic security is provided through family'. This explanation is consistent with Trimpot and Zimolog (1998) assertion, as explained earlier in this article, that people in developing countries have learnt to accept risk and to live with it. This mindset, that in part defines compensation standards, is enrooted in the general workforce and that includes native upper managers operating locally.

The literature on global business ethics remains silent on the ethics of operating in a foreign dangerous environment. A similar situation happens with the study of high-risk transport-related workplaces. Looking beyond road safety field, we found some insights in other types of high-risk workplace environments such as fire-fighting, aviation, construction, offshore oil installations, nuclear plants and medicine (Chemical Health and Safety Magazine, 2003; Dietrich and Jochum, 2004; Financial Times, 2005). These studies share the common premise of the ethical obligation towards the mitigation of the underlying high-risk elements existing in these workplaces. How the company attempts to mitigate these risks is a matter of business ethics and should be considered under organization policies for workplace safety. Even more, multinational companies could play a relevant social role conducive to the improvement of road conditions in developing countries and to the development of a safety culture in local communities. In doing so, companies would

be innovative global citizen contributing to the development of a better world.

By analysing these studies, we have found best practices that seem to be cornerstone for the development of ethical policies in organizations with high-risk workplaces. Furthermore, some of these practices could help to the development of a corporate citizenship model related to road traffic fatalities worldwide. We analyse them below and link them to the specific environment of high-risk transport-related workplaces.

Development of a safety culture

A safety culture can be defined as something an organization is and as something an organization has (Bate, 1992; Reason, 1998; Thompson et al., 1996). The former refers to the beliefs, attitudes and values of its members regarding safety while the latter refers to the structures, practices, controls and policies developed to ensure safety. The former is harder to achieve than the latter. It is reported that the lack of beliefs, attitudes and values regarding safety has given rise to a number of recurrent accidents in organizational environments (Cox and Flin, 1998; Meshkati, 1997; Reason, 1998). Reason (1998) argued, for example, that a cheerful unconcern for risks by Chernobyl's operators was a fatal ingredient of the Chernobyl tragedy. This blind confidence was catastrophic. According to Reason, 'it cannot be said that they had forgotten to be afraid. The reality was worse: they had never learnt to be afraid'. Other accidents in which safety culture has been considered as key factor of failure have been the King's Cross Underground fire in London (Cox and Flin, 1998) and the crash of Continental Express flight 2574 (Meshkati, 1997).

Borrowing practices from fire-fighting, the evidence reflects that the development of a safety culture or safety ethics is a key factor to deal with high-risk settings (Chemical Health and Safety Magazine, 2003). A set of statements attempts to develop a safety culture for fire-fighters. In summary, these statements attempt to engineer a culture to value safety, to work safely, to prevent risky behaviour and to promote safety. In the end, fire-fighters are taught to be responsible for their own safety, as any worker should be.

Drawing back to Liz's accident, we could see how cultural barriers were crucial elements in the occurrence of the fatal event. Even though GC had placed in Venezuela its safety practices, controls and policies (i.e. safety as something the organization has), neither the company, the public institutions, the family, nor Liz herself had a safety culture in place to prevent risky behaviour (i.e. beliefs, attitudes and values regarding safety). In light of the accident, we can see that a number of elements constituted a risky situation that nobody considered. For example, the precarious road, the tiredness of Liz because of her previous bad night, her long trips in the morning of that day and in the day before, and the characteristics of the vehicle added to the situation. Worse still, according to the family, this risky situation frequently happened during the period of time Liz worked for GC. The family said Liz had been starting to think of looking for a new job, but it was too late.

There are underlying reasons why people accept these recurrent risky situations. We argue that some local people might be used to living in this context and they might often interpret these fatalities as normal events. Worse still, they may presume that the mitigation of these risks is out of their hands. They have learnt to accept it and to live with it. This seems to be a cultural mindset broadly spread in those involved (managers, employees and the family; Trimpop and Zimolong, 1998). It is particularly curious to see how rarely people in Venezuela sues the government to compensate them for the losses or damages originated by the lack of maintenance of public roads (El Nacional, 2005). We might argue that governmental actors have failed to provide safe roads and local society tolerates this failure as a normal event.

Because of this, multinational companies should not expect local management to successfully address road traffic accidents. It seems that the lack of a safety culture and safety ethics exists even among professionals and managers. Multinational companies could transfer new cultural standards that can help people in the host country to re-evaluate their perception and acceptance of risk. In doing so, companies could fill the gap left by local governmental actors of dealing with the loss of lives in high-risk roads. Such an action meets the renewed interest of management in the extended concept of corporate

citizenship. As argued by Garriga and Melé (2004), corporations enter the arena of citizenship at the point of government failure in the protection of citizens.

Risk management practice

We can also see room for improvement in the safety culture of GC (i.e. that of procedures, practices, controls and so on). This is related to the practice of risk management for transport-related work. Risk management is a key element in the prevention of fatalities in high-risk workplaces such as offshore oil operations. A body of analysis methods, regulations and standards exist (Vinnem, 1999). The practices attempt to prevent or reduce the negative impact of explosions, collisions and environmental catastrophes. British Petroleum (BP) had recently applied risk management practices already implemented in other processes to manage driving risks (BP, 2003). This practice gave rise to the definition of a road safety standard including minimum vehicle requirements, driver fitness requirements, mobile phone use prohibition, compulsory seatbelt use and risk assessments for high-risk routes. The road safety priority in BP emerged as a consequence of many transport-related fatalities the company faced before 2003. For example, in 2003, 14 of the company's 20 fatalities worldwide resulted from incidents involving vehicles. Moreover, 28 of the 31 members of the public who died in incidents related to BP activities were transport related (BP, 2003). Other examples of multinational companies suffering road traffic injuries include Shell, British Telecommunications and Total (BP, 2003; Global Road Safety Partnership Annual Report, 2005; Total Corporate Website). They have also implemented measures and actions to address both the reduction of driving risks for their employees and the development of a safety culture in the local community as part of their corporate citizenship actions (see Table II).

Comparing Liz's accident to the BP safety standards, we can see that the vehicle used by Liz and her colleagues did not have minimum safety requirements such as air bags and the appropriate vehicle size. Given the high number of kilometres Liz needed to drive to do her work, the lack of control on the vehicle requirements seems to be a failure.

Secondly, the route used by Liz to visit her clients was clearly a high-risk one. In order to deal with this level of risk, best practices would suggest the use of alternative routes, the use of video and teleconferencing facilities (to reduce travelling in this route), and the use of a better journey scheduling (to prevent the risks when adverse weather is present) (BP, 2003; Health and Safety Executive, 2007; Total Corporate Webpage).

Playing a leadership role in efforts to address transport-related occupational accidents

Once an employee is on the road and on duty, his/her well-being might be the responsibility of a complex network of stakeholders as shown in Figure 6. It is in the best interest of all the stakeholders that a worker can safely travel by any means of transportation. However, in a developing country with poor infrastructure, weak institutions and the lack of a safety culture, global corporations may take leadership in ensuring that proper safety standards are followed and enforced by all stakeholders. Moreover, a change process of values, patterns of thought and beliefs may be encouraged by the corporation towards their employees and society in general to foster a safety culture. We believe this could be an integral part of the statement on global corporate citizenship for companies located in developing countries.

Taking leadership entails bringing all stakeholders to elaborating a strategic and an action plan to diminish risk. In addition, global corporations can provide seed money to promote these initiatives. The main stakeholders are identified in Figure 6. We have borrowed the stakeholders' framework from Radin and Calkins (2006) and DesJardins and McCall (2005), and we have adapted it to our context.

The firm together with its competitors and customers could lobby government to develop public policy. International organizations can be brought in through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide guidance and know-how in developing policy with consistent with global best practices. Finally, the community (e.g. schools, universities and newspapers) and workers could be the source of consultation to gain public support for such an

TABLE II
Comparative cases of measures implemented by global companies to deal with transport-related accidents

Company	Drivers	Measures implemented	Corporate citizenship actions
Shell	The company had identified road accidents as a cost and a risk to the business	<p>Road safety is a high priority for the company</p> <p>Global minimum road transport standards applicable to employees and contractors</p> <p>'Hearts and Minds' attitude- and behaviour-based safety programme to raise personal awareness of work-related risks</p> <p>Hour limitations and driver health screenings to combat driver fatigue</p> <p>Route hazard maps across countries of operation</p> <p>Alert system that senses micro-movements in the steering wheel sensing if it becomes too erratic</p> <p>A Motor Risk Forum within BT driving road safety policy from a risk assurance perspective</p> <p>Commercial vehicles are bought directly from the Ford manufacturer. Vehicle specifications and safety features are a collaborative effort</p> <p>Growing use of video and teleconferencing facilities to reduce travel to external meetings</p>	<p>Involvement with training and education through GRSP</p> <p>Safety booklets for the community that address issues such as driving in inclement weather and tiredness</p> <p>'Shell Traffic Games' to educate children</p>
British Telecom (BT)	Serious car crashes involving members of staff as well as the public		Not available

TABLE II
continued

Company	Drivers	Measures implemented	Corporate citizenship actions
British Petroleum (BP)	<p>There were 20 fatalities among its employees and contractors in 2003. Most resulted from accidents involving motor vehicles</p> <p>BP staff and contractors cover over 1.62 billion km/year in their fleet-owned and contractor-operated vehicles</p>	<p>New standards including minimum vehicle requirements, driver fitness requirements, mobile phone use prohibition, compulsory seatbelt use and risk assessment for high-risk routes</p>	<p>In some countries, BP teams have taken initiatives to promote safer driving. For example:</p> <p>In Vietnam, 'helmets for kids' programme, which provided 100,000 helmets for young motorcycle riders</p>
Total	<p>Road accidents are the leading cause of work-related fatalities at Total, accounting for 6 out of 11 deaths (in 2003)</p> <p>Improving road safety is critical on those countries where traffic conditions are challenging or where no culture of driving safety</p>	<p>Deployment of a global driving safety policy for Total and contractor's employees that comprises five cardinal rules: wear a seat belt, respect speed limits, not drive under the influence of alcohol, have the appropriate driver's license and drive an appropriate vehicle</p> <p>Refining and Marketing areas bolstered the version of the policy by restricting the number of kilometres that can be driven in a day on main roads and highways</p> <p>Transportation unit analyses accidents, identifies accident black spots and finds the safest routes</p> <p>Programmes are tailored to local conditions and risk factors. The Nigerian subsidiary, for example, equipped its 300 vehicles with black boxes to monitor speed, sudden acceleration and deceleration, enabling their 350 drivers to assess their own performance</p>	<p>A series of Total-sponsored TV programmes on safe driving practices</p> <p>Baby kits in service stations with safety advice</p>

Sources: Global Road Safety Partnership Annual Report (2005); BP Sustainability Report (2003); Total Corporate Website (www.total.com/en/corporate-social-responsibility/).

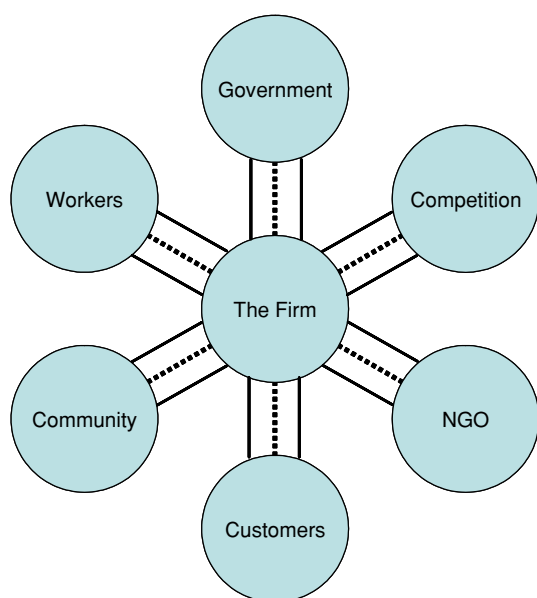


Figure 6. The stakeholders' roundabout towards the development of a safety culture to reduce transport-related fatalities.⁵

endeavour. Once a plan is developed, a great deal of effort should be dedicated to educating all stakeholders at their different levels. Particular attention should be paid to educating the workforce to ensure that they develop a safety culture as they travel on duty.

There are very good examples of global corporations taking the initiative to address issues of public safety. For example, we identified one of these initiatives in Venezuela. Verizon, through its affiliate CANTV in Caracas, Venezuela, hired a business school to develop an emergency response plan to address natural disasters (Esqueda et al., 1994). This was in reaction to a natural disaster that occurred in Caracas in 1993 with the consequent loss of about 250 lives. The telecommunications company had been indirectly blamed for part of the situation because the phone system collapsed in part of the country due to the disaster. CANTV thought that they had been a victim of the whole situation and that the Government needed a plan to deal with disasters rather than pointing fingers. Instead of fighting the issue, the phone company decided to help the Government to develop an emergency response plan. The local business school called a one-day conference of all stakeholders and presented

them with a preliminary plan. The plan was discussed and obtained wide support. The Government later strengthened their emergency response plan as a consequence of the process described.

Another initiative we identified related to road safety is that of the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP). The GRSP was established by the World Bank in 1999 as a collaborative mechanism for business, civil society and governmental organizations to address and improve road safety conditions worldwide. The GRSP represents a very good opportunity for corporations to work on an initiative that aims to provide protection for citizens and employees where local governments are failing or are unable to deal with the challenge by themselves. Hence, a real exercise of corporate citizenship as defined by Matten and Crane (2005) could be undertaken.

GRSP has stated the following objective (see www.grsproadsafety.org):

Principal objective is to facilitate the sustainable reduction of road traffic casualties in developing and transition countries through partnerships between business, civil society and governments. The partnership's main activities are to identify and promote relevant good practice and, in selected countries, to support projects involving collaboration between two or more partners which are designed to test and demonstrate good practice in reducing the number of road casualties.

Because of limited resources and the need to focus on tangible results, GRSP only works in 10 countries: Brazil, Costa Rica, Ghana, Hungary, India, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Thailand and Vietnam. Twelve global companies are members of the GRSP (see Figure 7). GRSP has used a continuous improvement (CI) approach in all these countries based on the American Society for Quality principles (<http://www.asq.org>). Specifically, CI incorporates the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, identifying opportunities for improvement, implementing change for improvement, evaluating current performance using data and making additional changes for improvement based on those evaluations. GRSP has encouraged all these countries to set up the institutional framework to apply CI. As an example, in the specific case of the city of Resende, in the State of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil,

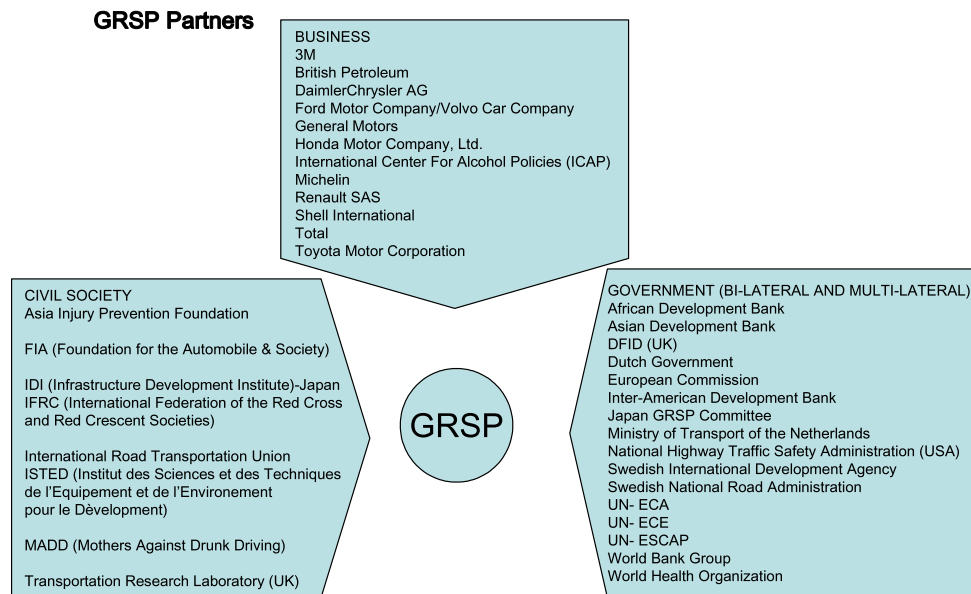


Figure 7. Global road safety partnership (GRSP).⁶

they report a decrease of car crashes of about 26% and a reduction in fatalities and severe injuries of 38% from 2004 to 2006. GRSP has focused on small-scale projects to establish a learning curve.

When looking at the actions deployed by companies while playing a corporate citizenship role (e.g. that of being a member of GRSP), a more general and fundamental debate emerged. How can one measure the role played by global corporations when taking over a governmental function of protecting citizens? As argued by Matten and Crane (2005), governments are approved or discharged through electoral processes. However, similar mechanisms do not exist for corporations.

Implications for research and practice

This study addressed the issue of health and safety of employees outside the confines of a corporation in a developing country by considering the risks encountered by employees travelling while on duty. Because the authors were involved as participants and agents of change for the solution of this complex and fatal situation, action-based research was used. To our knowledge, this article is one of the first studies contributing to the knowledge of the ethical dilemmas existing in work conditions outside the

controllable environment of a factory or other corporate facilities in emerging countries. In addition, the approach of action research to this situation is an innovative aspect of this article. The key issue addressed is bridging the gap that exists between the declaration of safety, health and ethical standards by global corporations and the reality of very poor infrastructure in developing countries. The major consequence of poor roads is a high rate of fatalities in developing countries. The reflection on the different dilemmas that arise from the case presented offers insights to researchers and practitioners in the area of corporate social responsibility and, more specifically, corporate citizenship. The implications for researchers and practitioners of the different dilemmas discussed are further explored below.

Implications for research

Research regarding work conditions in emerging countries has traditionally focused on sweatshops, cruel treatment of female workers and child exploitation (e.g. Radin and Calkins, 2006; Spar, 2002). In this study, we have focused in particular on working conditions involving driving on precarious roads. This represents a further research stream in the area of ethical responsibility of multinational companies

to their employees and local communities in foreign high-risk locations.

In this sense, two ethical dilemmas have been addressed.

- Global principles versus local practices in corporations.
- The mindset in developing countries regarding general safety standards.

With regard to the first dilemma, this study revealed that declaring ethical principles related to health and safety is not enough to deal with the prevailing low safety standards for transport-related workplaces in developing countries. In this study, we have seen how three employees died while on duty even though the company had clearly declared health and safety policies for their employees worldwide. As a consequence, we argued that localization of health and safety practices to address the asymmetries between different regions of the world regarding social, cultural and infrastructural issues is needed. We have borrowed some best practices of localization of health and safety practices from literature based on other contexts such as workplaces related to fire-fighting and offshore oil installations.

With regard to the second dilemma, the main contribution of this study is related to the finding of a cultural mindset broadly spread among managers, employees and society in some developing countries regarding the lack of safety culture and safety ethics. As a consequence, in these contexts there is a general mindset that tolerates unsafe prevailing conditions in general, and worse still that presumes the mitigation of these risks is out of one's hands. Changing this mindset is a challenging task that may include the collaboration of different stakeholders in the context under consideration. We argue that multinational companies should lead initiatives in the host country with other stakeholders (e.g. the government, NGOs, private firms and civil society) to modify the local behaviours that accept and tolerate unsafe conditions outside the limits of the factory.

The recognition of the different asymmetries discussed here calls for multinational companies to respond more proactively to improve the local social, cultural and infrastructural deficiencies. As suggested by Matten and Crane (2005), we believe

global corporations should play a more active social and political role to support some governmental functions that are not administered properly by national governments. In other words, global corporations should 'enter in the arena of citizenship at the point of government failure in the protection of citizenship' (Garriga and Mele, 2004, p. 57). This is an extended conceptualization of corporate citizenship as described by Matten and Crane (2005) who argued that this perspective of citizenship lies in the process of globalization. Global corporations are in a better position than national governments to tackle these transnational key problems or challenges (e.g. road traffic fatalities in developing countries).

We argue that companies addressing the challenge of road traffic fatalities in developing countries are entering in the arena of corporate citizenship as administrators of social rights, by improving working conditions of those employees involved on transport-related workplaces. As described by Matten and Crane (2005), by ensuring better working conditions in the road would place a multinational company as 'provider' of a social right. Under this perspective, companies such as Shell, BT, BP and Total (see Table II) can be considered as corporate citizenships enabling citizen rights of safe working conditions.

This perspective of corporate citizenship is also shared by the United Nations Global Compact, which invites global corporations to embrace, support and carry out a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption within the business context (Arevalo and Fallon, 2008). In the case of road accidents, the GRSP initiative is attempting to fill the gap local governments are unable to fulfil. GSRP is meeting the corporate citizenship statement as described by the UN.

We believe that this article represents just a starting point in the study of ethical issues related to high-risk workplaces outside the limits of a factory in developing countries. It seems to us that the corporate citizenship theoretical framework (Garriga and Melé, 2004; Matten and Crane, 2005) from the CSR literature could be an appropriate stream to approach the dilemmas discussed in this article. However, further research is needed to inform the development of an action plan. In addition, future research could look into the effectiveness of actions taken by companies to protect the employees and

citizens' rights related to the transport-related workplaces and activities. For example, to what extent companies such as Shell, BT, BP and Total (see Table II) have been successful in protecting citizens from transport-related accidents?

Implications for practice

Given that this study has been run by following an action research approach, the emerging dilemmas discussed here represent real and practical issues for multinational companies operating in developing countries. Thus, these findings have important implications for managers and executives in leadership positions in multinational companies in high-risk transport-related environments. The findings suggest that managers and executives should take into account the important asymmetries in social, cultural and infrastructural issues between developed countries and developing countries when implementing health and safety practices. As mentioned before, localization of these practices is a crucial task to ensure the safety of their employees in these high-risk transport-related environments.

We argue that managers and executives of multinational companies should not expect local management to successfully address the road traffic fatalities. As explained above, local management seems to tolerate unsafe, prevalent conditions in transport-related workplaces. As a consequence, international managers of multinational companies should work on the development of a safety culture in both the local managers and the employees. In doing so, managers should work on two different fronts: internally and externally. By internally we mean the development of a safety culture inside the company in the host country. By externally we mean the joint-task with other stakeholders to create and diffuse a safety culture throughout residents of the. In parallel, multinational companies may work with others in the private sector to lobby the government to improve the road conditions throughout the country. International organizations (e.g. the United Nations, World Bank and other multilateral organizations) could also collaborate with funds and advice to ensure the rise of the safety standards in road conditions worldwide.

There are different local actions that managers of multinational companies should apply to their subsidiaries in developing countries with high-risk transport-related workplaces. They mostly refer to the development of a safety culture in both dimensions of the concept: the beliefs, attitudes and values; and the structures, practices, controls and policies to ensure safety. All levels of management and employees should be trained to develop such a culture. This entails the development of performance indicators on the management side as well as behaviour modification for the employee with education delivered inside and outside the company to enhance that culture. The development of a safety code emphasizing a strong ethics of self-preservation is strongly encouraged using observational learning. That would define safety as something the organization is. However, defining safety as something the organization has requires putting in place best practices in risk management such as assessing risk in all areas of the company including the most travelled transportation routes as well as risk mitigation best practices.

The most important action is to educate workers and managers about the devastating effects of fatal accidents and the different ways to prevent them. Firms' policies on corporate social responsibility should embrace these initiatives as part of that philosophy. The main objective would be to reduce the existing gap between global principles and local practices related to safety standards.

Most of our values are acquired during our early years. Education within the family and at school constitutes the most important setting to instil strong values and ethical standards. Most developing countries need to strongly emphasize the importance of human life and its preservation. The loss of life should not be readily accepted and safety standards need to be raised uniformly across the world.

Notes

¹ Liz and Global Corporation are fictitious names.

² Source: The Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT). The ASIRT is a not-for-profit international humanitarian organization promoting road travel safety through education and advocacy. ASIRT was founded as a response to the death of Aron Sobel, a

25-year-old medical student who was killed in a bus crash on the roads of Turkey.

³ Source: Planser (2005).

⁴ Source: El Nacional (2005).

⁵ Adapted from DesJardins and McCall (2005) and Radin and Calkins (2006).

⁶ Source: Bekefi (2006) and Global Road Safety Partnership (2005).

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