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The Challenge of Developing Global Leadership

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Given the impact and challenges of globalization, global warming and the current economic crisis, it is impossible to ignore the need for effective global leadership (GL). The actions or inactions of leaders are quickly felt around the world. In 2003, a Rand Corporation study predicted future shortages of global leaders in all U.S. sectors -- public, private and non-profit -- and urged universities to add global leadership to their curriculum (Bikson, Treverton, Moini, & Lindstrom, 2003).

What Do We Mean By Global Leadership?

The term "global leaders" has different connotations. History is graced with leaders -- political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, military leaders like Alexander the Great, and spiritual leaders like Mother Theresa -- whose influence and followers extended far beyond the borders of their own country. Today's global leaders, however, are not necessarily famous, and some shrink from using this term to describe themselves. They work in less visible roles in a wide variety of settings -- coordinating world-wide sustainability efforts, leading multilateral diplomatic initiatives, stitching together mergers and acquisitions across country borders, commanding coalition forces in the military, and creating scientific and educational consortia to name just a few tasks.

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There is no generally accepted construct definition for global leadership (GL), which is not surprising in a nascent field with limited empirical research (for a review, see Osland, 2008). Global leaders are people "who effect significant positive change in global organizations by building communities through the development of trust and the arrangement of organizational structures and processes in a context involving multiple stakeholders, multiple sources of external authority, and multiple cultures under conditions of temporal, geographical and cultural complexity" (Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, & Maznevski, 2008: 17). This definition assumes that global leaders are not simply people in global positions but change agents engaged in the process of influencing the thinking, attitudes, and behaviors of a global community to work together synergistically toward a common vision and common goals.

How and if GL differs from traditional leadership is a basic question that directors of development programs have to answer. There are no empirical comparisons of domestic versus global leadership as yet, but various arguments support a view of GL as a subfield of leadership with both shared similarities and differences of

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degree and kind (Osland, 2008). GL draws from additional multidisciplinary roots – intercultural communication and competence, expatriation, global management, and comparative leadership. Global leaders demonstrate some additional or expanded skills, such as boundary spanning, and have “unlearned” some traditional leadership lessons that do not work outside their culture. Their developmental path varies somewhat in that key GL lessons come from cultural experiences that are more complex and do not always result in the same lessons (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002).

Most importantly, the global context or the crucible that shapes GL is characterized by:

- **multiplicity** across a range of dimensions;
- **interdependence** among a host of stakeholders, socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental systems;
- **ambiguity** in terms of understanding causal relationships, interpreting cues and signals, identifying appropriate actions and pursuing plausible goals; and
- **flux** in terms of quickly transitioning systems, shifting values and emergent patterns of organizational structure and behavior (Lane, Maznevski, Mendenhall & McNett, 2004).

A study of expert cognition found that global leaders often characterized their change efforts as sailing into uncharted waters. They dealt with the extreme ambiguity of challenging situations by relying on a learned problem solving process, choosing “the right team,” and developing a high level of trust with them and their stakeholders (Osland, et al., 2007). Given these arguments, GL is best conceptualized as “extreme leadership.”

What Competencies Should We Be Developing in Students?

Based on this description of GL and its context, what conceptual and behavioral skills are critical in future global leaders? Let’s begin with these processes, which are required for managing the complexity of the global business context:

- **Collaborating:** working with others in relationships characterized by community, flexibility, respect, trust and mutual accountability.
- **Discovering:** transformational processes leading to new ways of seeing and acting which, in turn, lead to the creation of new knowledge, actions and outcomes
- **Architecting:** the mindful design of processes that align, balance and synchronize organizational behavior
- **Systems thinking:** seeing and/or discovering the interrelationships among components and levels in a complex system and anticipating consequences of changes in and to the system (Lane, et al, 2004).

Another process that explains how global leaders interact with their environment is sensemaking, which involves placing stimuli into a framework that enables people to understand, decode, and predict. To make sense of a complex environment, people need a matching level of complexity. The resulting global mindset, a key aspect of GL, is defined as cosmopolitanism, an enthusiastic appreciation of other cultures, and cognitive complexity, the ability to perceive situations as highly differentiated and to integrate these differentiated constructs (Levy, Beechler, Taylor & Boyacigiller, 2007).

An example of global mindset is comprehending the cultural variants of leadership. The GLOBE Project (Javidan, Dorfman, Sully de Luque and House, 2006) identified leadership profiles for 62 countries and showed how they are affected by cultural values. Global leaders deal with a variety of followers who have different mental maps for the “ideal leader.” Their adaptation could be called meta-level leadership as they learn and adjust to various cultural expectations and leadership practices and find a style that is more universally acceptable. Expert global leaders engage in “code-switching,”

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the act of changing one’s behavior in an intercultural interaction where the leadership norms, differ from those of one’s own culture (Molinsky, 2007). Because global leaders cannot possibly be knowledgeable about every culture, they also have to learn what aspects of leadership tend to vary and be able to spot cues that trigger an appropriate behavioral response. For example, students can be taught to understand their own indigenous leadership style and how that might differ in terms of formality, power distance, decision-making style, communication style, and so forth across cultural regions.

Global leadership research has generally tried to answer what GL is by taking a competency approach. There is growing consensus that global leadership consists of core characteristics, context-specific abilities, and universal leadership skills. The Pyramid Model of GL, beginning at the bottom level of the pyramid, consists of global knowledge, traits, attitudes and orientations, interpersonal skills, and system skills (Osland, 2008). A modified version of this model guides the curriculum of San Jose State University’s new Global

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Leadership Lab (GLLab), which includes modules on: global citizenship and global mindset, global ethics, building trust and relationships, intercultural communication and conflict management, global negotiation, leading multicultural teams, influencing global stakeholders, stakeholder dialogue, creativity and innovation; complex, ethical decision-making, boundary spanning, and leading global change. Given the post-graduation job demands undergraduates are likely to face, they are expected to develop a few less system skills at the end of this list than are graduate students.

How Should Universities Begin Developing Global Leadership Skills?

The short-hand answer to this question is travel, multicultural teams, training, and overseas assignments; the last is most effective. Most of the global leadership development (GLD) research comes from the business setting rather than universities. We can probably extrapolate, however, that study abroad and international internships could be the most effective way to train students and that we should be leveraging the cultural diversity on our campuses. More conclusions from the limited GLD research are: 1) it involves personal transformation and takes time to develop; 2) GLD is best done through experiential learning; 3) GLD designs should be multi-method; and 4) it is non-linear and difficult to predict. For example, not all study abroad experiences are equally designed to leverage student learning; nor does each student take advantage of the study abroad experience in the same fashion.

The Global Leadership Expertise Development model (Osland & Bird, 2008) might provide some guidance for university programs. The *antecedents* relate to potential individual differences in students: individual characteristics, cultural exposure, global education, and project novelty (e.g., multicultural teams, virtual

groups, global projects). The *transformational process* involves a series of experiences characterized by complexity, affect, intensity and relevance. *GL expertise* is conceptualized as cognitive processes, global knowledge, intercultural competence and global organizing expertise (i.e., architecting). Personal transformation is more likely when developmental activities have a high degree of experiential rigor and a large number and valence of feedback sources. For this reason, study abroad, sophisticated simulations, assessment centers, and virtual team projects are likely to be more effective than the traditional classroom experience (Oddou & Mendenhall, 2008).

Unquestionably, there is a lot more to learn about GL and its development in the university setting. The need to prepare global leaders for the future, however, cannot wait. Maybe if we imitate the global leaders who have learned to live with uncertainty by relying upon a problem-solving method that works and picking and trusting the right team, we too can set off on uncharted waters and "effect significant positive change." ■

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