# Leading Globally, Thinking Interculturally: Developing Global Characteristics

**Jason Caldwell**
**Colorado Technical University**

*This paper addresses the characteristics and practices that are essential to leading a global, international, or multinational organization. A global leader must develop a global mindset that allows for interaction with various people and cultures. The issue with developing a global mindset is that there is not a sufficient amount of literature that discusses the necessity for developing intercultural competencies that include cultural intelligence and a progression from ethnocentric to ethnorelative behavior.*

## INTRODUCTION

The society that we live in is developing itself into a shifting tidal wave of interweaving cultures that makes up the world. This tidal wave of cultures is increasing the need and importance for having well-trained and skillful leaders that have characteristics that define them as a global leader. Globalization is increasing, and technological advances are making it easier to be in two places at one time. However, time is certainly not standing still, which means that leaders, especially global leaders have to be sensitive to the growing shifts in society and become proactive. For leadership, the need is for developing practices and processes that are engaging and relevant to the times.

Derungs (2011) stated that leaders can no longer just inspire and involve those that follow them, especially in the current global environment that is full of complexities and competition that can "pull societies apart" (p. 3). Therefore, it is important that a global leader possess the necessary attributes that allow them to lead well while at the same time becoming an integral part of an active and evolving society. In order to do this, a global leader must first be a well-versed leader with a definitive perception of various leadership styles. Second, a global leader must have an acute understanding of the necessary characteristics for leading in a global society, and third, a global leader must be cognizant of the future trends concerning globalization and global organizations.

## LEADERSHIP THEORY

Defining leadership by various theories makes up the total of who a leader is. When trying to determine which leadership theory is most conducive to global leadership, the situational approach fits more appropriately. Situational leadership is considered to be a contingency style because it categorizes the style of the leader. The followers involved and the situations involved constituted the manner in which rewards were attributed based on the needs of the followers (Daft, 1999). In terms of definition, situational leadership has been refined since its conception by Hersey and Blanchard. According to

Northouse (2013), situational leadership draws its foundation from understanding that there are both directive, and supportive dimensions of leadership applied to each situation. The supportive dimensions are done in an appropriate manner by assessing the competencies and commitment of the followers based on assigned tasks (p. 99). Situational leadership develops its level of engagement based on how people from diverse backgrounds work together. The key to understanding situational leadership are the following fundamental concepts: task behavior, guidance and direction provided by the leader, relationship behavior, social and emotional support, follower preparedness (exhibited by task completion), and follower development. These concepts are not independent of one another, but rather work to engage the situational approach to leadership collectively.

Testing contingency theory along side of other contingency theories, Mendenhall et al. (2014) suggested the "predictive power turned out to be less than adequate" (p. 4). However, the evidence does suggest that a leader's contextual situation has an influence on the outcome of the situation and how the leader engages in the various situations. Derungs (2011) suggested that situational leadership requires a leader to be flexible and adaptable to different situations. This alone suggests that situational leadership "convenient for cross-cultural management" (Derungs, 2011, p. 50). Morrison (2000) suggested that context and situation are the moderators for a leader's personality and effectiveness in a given environment. In all, situational leadership, best defines the schema for developing global leadership qualities and characteristics.

## LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics are those traits or features that help to define an individual. When defining a global leader, there are defining characteristics accepted universally. A research study conducted by de Waal (2011) tested and identified characteristics of high performing organizations. The study found a pattern of 35 characteristics framed within the following five factors (pp. 43-45):

1.) Continuous improvement
2.) Openness and action orientation
3.) Management quality
4.) Workforce quality
5.) Long-term orientation

These five factors directly influences how a leader operates within a global organization. Cohen (2010) suggested that a global leader should be able to think globally, appreciate cultural diversity, become technologically savvy, build partnerships, and share in leading. In order to be able to develop these characteristics, a global leader has to develop a global mindset ultimately. According to Rhinesmith, (as cited by Mendenhall et al. 2014), a global mindset has two components, intellectual intelligence, and emotional intelligence. In addition to having a global mindset, another defining characteristic of a global leader is having intercultural training (Gundling, Hogan, & Cvitkovich, 2011; Derungs, 2008, Thomas, 2008).

An intercultural competent leader is one who engages in cultural awareness and seeks to create an environment of shared experiences from varying perspectives that helps to bridge the differences in culture. Gundling, Hogan, and Cvitkovich (2011) stated, "leaders need to be able to discern cultures within cultures along with a substantial degree of individual variation relative to cultural norms" (p. 23). Intercultural characteristics allow a leader to recognize that leading in a global society is about ethnorelativism and pushing beyond one's ethnocentrism. A successful global leader must be cognizant of how racial identity, workplace culture, and societal culture interplay and either becomes divisive forces of retrogression or inclusive paradigms of growth and development. According to Lucas (2010), it is imperative that global leaders work to change the mindset of those that work with them by getting them to share willingly in open discourse. Open communication in an organization aids in moving away from individual concern and achievement (ethnocentrism) to the overall success and achievement of the group

(ethnorelativism). Ethnocentrism has both positive and negative attributes, especially in terms of historical and cultural preservation (Sorrells, 2013). In a global context and global leadership development, it is essential that leaders seek to become mediators of cultural dialogue in a deliberate and engaging manner that helps the organization rather than hurting it by not. According to Sorrells (2013), assuming that one's specific group (whether cultural or team-based within an organization) is superior to others, can lead to "negative evaluations of others and can result in dehumanization, legitimization of prejudices, discrimination, conflict, and violence" (p. 13).

**FUTURE TRENDS**

The complex nature of societal evolution requires a leader within a multinational, international and global organization to be aware of the future trends that can potentially affect the organization. Globalization is a   process that mimics, in a less aggressive manner, the early crusades and pilgrimages where missionaries and voyagers would set sail in pursuit of reaching distant lands in order to establish trade and a dependence on the encroaching culture. However, in a more robust business construct, globalization is a process whereby organizations seek to go global. The literature produced concerning a harmonious understanding of what globalization is has varied throughout the decades. Osland (2003) defined globalization as a process that leads to an interdependence of economics, politics, society, culture and environmental. Osland further suggested that there are both pros and cons to globalization and that globalization can create a monoculture within the cultures that develops a forced enculturation with the dominant culture.

Beyond the parameters of globalization are the increasing numbers of trends that are influencing the way in which leaders engage in a global organization. Gundling, Hogan, and Cvitkovich (2011) developed research that suggested that there are three megatrends that will necessitate skills for global leadership.

Megatrend #1: Population growth in the developing world
Megatrend #2: Changes in the balance of GDP
Megatrend #3: Rapid urbanization in Asia and Africa

In addition to these trends, technological advances are also increasing the development of global leadership skills only because technology is making being global more accessible. Multinational firms now have the ability to communicate in a variety of ways with their members all across the world at any given time (Thomas, 2008).

In addition to the technological and economic developments that are necessary for effective globalization, intercultural development is the developmental process that seen as diversity implementation. One way to engage in intercultural development is through intercultural praxis (Sorrells, 2013). The intercultural praxis is a concerted effort that involves the members of the organization in the development of their intercultural spaces, such as interpersonal development, communal development, and global development. The intercultural praxis utilizes six entry points: inquiry, framing, positioning, dialog, and reflection. An effective global leader seeks to prevent intergroup partiality and cultural ascendancy by serving as a prototypical representation of cultural diversity and praxis (Campbell, 2013); intercultural praxis encourages intergroup development.

**CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDY**

Global leadership reaches across borders by using a vast expansion of skill, ability, knowledge, and understanding to help develop and grow organizations. Society is changing, the world is evolving, and the need for global leadership is increasing. A global leader can be a transformational agent that seeks to help improve not only their organization but also the world-at-large. Based on the literature review, further inquiry into the development of identity models within the global leadership that address ethnocentric and ethnorelative behavior as well as how to be a culturally intelligent global leader is needed. The current

literature is not inclusive of intercultural development models providing just cause for its necessity in future research. The author would propose utilizing competency-based development training models for global leaders. These models include the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986, 1993) and the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) model (Ang & Early, 2003). Without the active understanding of cultural differences, a global leader becomes stagnant and remains ethnocentric when in terms of organizational effectiveness they should seek to become ethnorelative. For leadership development, this means leaders are more engaging with the individuals, community, and society that makes up the global organization. By utilizing the necessary leadership characteristics that help define a leader, a global leader can recognize the trends of the present and engage them for the future.

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