

Adaptive Leadership Appreciative Leadership Artful Leadership Assigned Leadership Authentic Leadership Authoritarian Leadership Charismatic Leadership Collective Leadership Connective Leadership Courageous Leadership Democratic Leadership Dissonant Leadership Eco-Leadership Effective Leadership Efficient Leadership Emergent Leadership Ethical Leadership Executive Leadership Exemplary Leadership Expert Leadership Fierce Leadership Generative Leadership **Global Leadership** Heroic Leadership Hierarchical Leadership Holistic Leadership Implicit Leadership Ineffective Leadership Inner Leadership Inspirational Leadership Intellectual Leadership Laissez-faire Leadership Liquid Leadership Messianic Leadership Moral Leadership Motion Leadership Nondirective Leadership Open Leadership Operational Leadership Outer Leadership Participative Leadership Passionate Leadership Passive Leadership Path-goal Leadership Positive Leadership Practical Leadership Primal Leadership Principle-Centred Leadership Quiet Leadership Resonant Leadership Responsible Leadership Roving Leadership Self Leadership Servant Leadership Shared Leadership Signifying Leadership Spatial Leadership Strategic Leadership Sustainable Leadership Team Leadership Top-Down Leadership Toxic Leadership Transactional Leadership Transfiguring Leadership Transformational Leadership Tribal Leadership Undefended Leadership Virtual Leadership Visionary Leadership

## **Global Leadership – grasping a slippery term**

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Over the last two decades, and the last 10 years in particular, there has been increasing talk of “global leadership” as a significant phenomenon, and distinct from previous forms of leadership. This essay provides an introduction to the field of global leadership by asking what is understood by the term (Section I) and tracing its origins in business and academia (Section II). We then consider how effective is global leadership on both the theoretical and practical levels (Section III). Finally, we speculate how leadership is likely to develop in the light of ongoing globalisation and increasing transnational connectedness (Section IV).

### **Section I – What is Global Leadership?**

Global leadership is a relatively new concept, a fact that is testified to by the lack of an established definition, a paucity of field research and limited methodological sophistication. Whilst many experts – especially in the business realm – have observed that more global leaders are needed, there is little consensus on what such leaders actually *do* or what qualities they should possess (Osland 2008c, 53).

As Turnbull notes (2009, 83), global leadership is a “contested term,” and one which is applied differently by people from different disciplines and with different understandings of leadership. It is often remarked that there are literally hundreds of definitions of leadership, and some of this conceptual confusion has likewise affected its progeny.

It is perhaps best to start with the rather mundane observation that some leaders operate on a multi- and trans-national level, for example CEOs of MNCs. These

leaders' companies operate in most (and sometimes all) countries, meaning that in a very literal sense they are *global* leaders, in that their sphere of influence spans the planet. For a minority of commentators, global leadership is simply this: normal (perhaps national or regional) leadership but enacted on a grander scale.

Yet for most specialists in this area, there is something distinct about global leadership that is not merely a matter of scale; it is *essentially* different. For Osland (2008a, 10) "global leadership appears to be qualitatively different," requiring different skills or competencies from what we might term 'traditional' leadership. This understanding is helpful in that it recognises that what is effective at the national or local level is not necessarily effective on a global level. This is because of the unavoidable interaction with multiple different cultures, necessitating increased cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence in addition to traditional leadership skills (Nirenberg 2002, 99). Global leadership also needs to respond to the increased complexity and uncertainty that come from cross-cultural interaction.

Whilst Adler (2001, 75-76) is correct to generalise that "Global leadership involves the ability to inspire and influence the thinking, attitudes and behaviour of people from around the world," a more precise and applied definition is needed. The best definition to date is undoubtedly that of Mendenhall (2008, 17), which though somewhat technical, is worth quoting in full:

Global leaders are individuals who effect significant positive change in organizations by building communities through the develop of trust and the arrangement of organisational structures and processes in a context involving multiple cross-boundary stakeholders, multiple sources of external cross-boundary authority, and multiple cultures under conditions of temporal, geographical and cultural complexity.

Different descriptions of global leadership usually fall back on outlining particular characteristics or competencies exhibited by global leaders. Counts of these qualities have reached 60 and beyond (Osland 2008a, 11) and debate rages over whether or not there is a universal set of such competencies, given different cultural expectations of leaders and leadership practice. In the presence of so many different lists of requisite global leader behaviour, it is better to follow Mendenhall's practice of defining global leadership more abstractly in terms of scope, influence, relationships and structures, rather than predicating it on a list of ultimately arbitrary personal qualities or competences, useful though these may be.

## **Section II – The Origins of Global Leadership**

If we accept the premise that global leadership is an academic field or discipline in its own right, we must agree with Mendenhall that it is still one in its "nascence" (2008, 16). The earliest published review of global leadership literature was in 2001<sup>1</sup>, and the first writings to consistently use the term appeared in the early 1990s, even if the *concept* of global leadership was beginning to emerge some years previously.

As a discipline, global leadership has its roots in fields as diverse as intercultural communication, expatriation, comparative leadership and global or international management (Osland 2008b, 18ff and Mendenhall 2001, xi). Its deepest roots lie in leadership studies, and it has been a natural progression for those interested in

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<sup>1</sup> By G.P. Hollenbeck, according to Osland (2008c, 40).

leadership of companies to develop an interest in *global* leadership as companies exert increasing global influence.

As a body of literature, and as a concept, global leadership has developed as business practitioners have interacted with academia, both in terms of research and in developing models of understanding (especially the competencies of) global leadership. Companies operating in global markets have quickly come to understand the need to operate in culturally appropriate ways in order to function well in diverse countries. In the 1990s their understanding shifted from an emphasis on expatriate leaders to leaders with a more global outlook, greater international experience and, perhaps above all else, greater cultural awareness and sensitivity. With this came an acknowledgement that leaders would need to think deeply about their own and their hosts' culture; to question things they had taken for granted; to learn to communicate clearly into other cultural contexts; and to nurture their own curiosity and flexibility.

We would do well to consider more broadly the issue of where global leadership has come from, in the sense of leaders practising influence over companies and organisations with global operations. The obvious starting point is the ongoing process of globalisation, which Gill (2006, 307) describes as “a convergence among nations and companies towards a common way of doing things” and which has led to multinational corporations wielding greater economic and political power. Nirenberg (2002, 20) simplifies the origins of global leadership to just these two underlying factors, “the confluence of... globalization and leadership.”

Much depends on our understanding and definition of globalization, and whilst some see this in purely economic terms, other authors make explicit components of globalization such as technological change, new organisational models and boundary integration (Goldsmith 2003, xxxii). In this sense Joseph Rost exercised great foresight when, in 1991, he described a newly evolving paradigm of ‘post-industrial’ leadership (Otter 2009, 1).

In some sense, then, we may consider global leadership to be a practical reaction to changing global circumstances – the consequences of the compression of time and space, and the dissolution of geographical and other boundaries. This response has come from HR departments of MNCs, academics and from corporate executives themselves as they react to this brave new ‘flattened’ world.

### **Section III – How Effective is Global Leadership?**

We will address this question on two levels: how effective is global leadership as a concept; and how effective is it on a practical level.

Firstly, then, we note some reservations about the effectiveness of global leadership as currently conceived and understood. Perhaps the most direct attack is that of Adler (2001, 258), who claims that most global leadership theories “are still domestic theories masquerading as universal theories,” surely a valid criticism given that the vast majority of the published literature and business models in this field originate from North America and Europe. This flaw is all the more significant since global leadership by its very definition needs to be built on a deep cross-cultural awareness and understanding, and it is hard to see how this can be the case given the current dominance of Anglo-Saxon scholarship in the field, to the exclusion of other perspectives.

A further criticism of current understandings of global leadership also goes to the heart of what we consider leadership to be. Whilst some authors sense a trend towards more shared leadership, most commentators focus on the necessary traits or competencies of a single global leader. Any focus on the independent global leader would be in ignorance of the fact that effective global leadership is necessarily a more connected, more team-based, more co-dependent phenomenon. In the view of this author, this fact alone points to the need for more studies of what constitutes a globally effective executive team or business unit, rather than continued emphasis on a solitary leader.

Other limitations in the field of global leadership would surely be surpassed given further research and greater theoretical precision. Examples include the lack of an agreed definition and clarity as to what constitutes global leadership; insufficient distinction between 'traditional' leadership qualities and those specific to global leadership; and a lack of field research to establish which leader competencies are of the greatest importance. Bird (2008, 64ff) has complained of over specification of required global leadership traits; others find the specified characteristics too general or abstract. And, separately, Caligiuri (cited by Osland 2008c, 61) finds evidence that the terms global leadership and global management are increasingly (but incorrectly) being used interchangeably, further adding to a lack of conceptual precision.

In some ways, the development of global leadership as a discipline can be seen to be following the same path as leadership itself (Osland 2008c, 62) albeit in an accelerated manner. This can be seen by the fixation with personal traits (flexible, self-confident, self-aware, good communicator, open-minded), which was typical of traditional leadership studies until the 1960s. On a theoretical level, therefore, global leadership would benefit from paying greater attention to situational and contingent factors.

Secondly, when considering whether global leadership is effective we can also answer on a practical level. Of course, this raises methodological issues concerning what we mean by effectiveness – is this something we measure in terms of revenue and profits; cross-cultural consonance; social responsibility or some combination of these and other things?

Circumstantial evidence comes from human resources and recruitment departments. For example, a study by Alon and Higgins (2005) revealed that only 8% of Fortune 500 companies had a comprehensive global leadership training programme. This can mean one of two things: that companies are so confident in the global leadership skills of their staff that they see no need to develop them further; or – and by far the more likely possibility – that companies are only slowly developing comprehensive training programmes in response to the integrated global markets their leaders now work in. The very fact that such global leadership training programmes are in their infancy – or are entirely absent – suggests that global leadership in practice cannot be highly developed.

Whilst the high revenues and profits generated by global companies may suggest that according to financial criteria there is effective performance, when we apply a broader understanding of global leadership we must recognise that there are other applicable criteria. We will look at two of these now.

### ***Global Leadership and Cultural Intelligence***

One of the key aspects of global leadership is how well a leader relates to, appreciates, communicates with and is accepted by other cultures. Thus effective global leadership must include good communication and relating to those from other cultures. Chin and Gaynier (2006) convincingly argue that such 'cultural intelligence' encompasses both intellectual intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ), and that high levels of cultural intelligence means successfully adapting to different cultures so that competence in that culture becomes second nature and effortless. It is difficult to say that more effective, more culturally intelligent global leadership is happening today, in the absence of sufficient research to prove this assertion, and our verdict must remain open.

### ***Global Leadership and Social Responsibility***

Another aspect of a broad understanding of global leadership is the oft-cited concern for the world at large; that is to say that the global leader of the twenty-first century has a concern for the environment and for the social impact of his/her company. In Adler's words (2001, 259), "global leaders have a responsibility for the well-being of society that exceeds that of their domestic counterparts of yesteryear." Are we witnessing greater responsibility amongst global leaders? In the decade of the Enron scandal, the BP Gulf of Mexico oil spill, the WorldCom accounting scandal, Freddie Mac and Bernie Madoff, it seems difficult to answer in the affirmative. But perhaps away from these headlines there is greater responsibility amongst global companies. To take just one example, PricewaterhouseCoopers has created a leader development scheme named Ulysses, to develop "future leaders with a global and responsible mindset" (Pless and Schneider 2006, 213). The interesting thing about Ulysses is that it was an internal initiative with a deliberate stress on 'responsible leadership'.

In this section we have seen that the effectiveness of global leadership as a concept is still developing, and that the practical effectiveness of global leadership has not yet been convincingly demonstrated, though there are signs of progress. Whilst focus in the future may continue to be on the profits generated by global leaders, their effectiveness must also be judged according to their cultural intelligence and their social and environmental responsibility.

### **Section IV – How Global Leadership is Likely to Develop in our Globalised World**

Global leadership – both as a business practice and as an academic discipline – will undoubtedly develop and mature over the next few decades. Whilst predicting the future is a notoriously difficult enterprise, it is possible to outline several potential trajectories from the status quo.

#### ***Feminisation of (Global) Leadership***

The proportion of leaders of MNCs who are female continues to gradually increase, and it would not be surprising if in, say, 20 years, a more significant number of global leaders were women. We have particular reason for believing that this might be the case: not only are barriers to women in leadership being dismantled; but also many of the qualities seen as necessary for global leadership are often regarded as qualities that are more feminine. Examples include emotional intelligence, empathy and cultural sensitivity. As Adler (2001, 81) explains, "...the feminization of global leadership..."

refers to the spread of traits and qualities generally associated with women to the process of leading organizations with worldwide influence.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***A More ‘Worldly’ Leadership?***

For many people the adjective ‘worldly’ has negative or tainted connotations, but Turnbull (2008, *passim*) uses the term worldly leadership to refer to a form of global leadership, or an alternative to global leadership, which includes a focus on ethical leadership, sustainability and leadership for the common good.

Ever since the earliest days of capitalism, there have been tensions between profitability and social concerns; between private and public agendas. Whilst we would concur with Turnbull’s desire for a more humane, more planetary-aware form of global leadership, if we cannot conceive of the mechanisms that would bring this about then we are merely idealising and hypothesising. Whilst relying on global leaders’ integrity would be one option, perhaps a more pragmatic approach would be to develop more globally-enforceable regulation of multinational corporations – which at the moment can play countries off against one another in seeking tax havens, subsidies and government investment. Two particular issues are important here: the first is addressing tax avoidance, which costs the UK Treasury alone £20-£25 billion each year.<sup>3</sup> It is hard to listen to executives speaking of ethical or global leadership if their companies are avoiding their social and moral obligations. The second issue is finding more, and better, ways of internalising the externalities produced by corporations. This would reduce the conflict between private and public agendas; reflect the true social and environmental impact of economic production; and lead to a more equitable distribution of global resources.

### ***Shared Leadership***

The increased complexity of the global economy and global networks; the ever-increasing number of cultures within which major corporations operate; and the growing number of skill sets which are deemed necessary to lead cross-culturally all point in one direction: towards leadership which is so complex, diverse and demanding that it is simply not realistic to expect future global leaders to carry the burden of leading on their own. Goldsmith (2003, xxxii) anticipates a future where leadership is shared in executive teams (on an operational or geographical basis). This seems a highly plausible scenario, although we are left wondering whether there will be truly global leaders, in the strict sense of the term, or whether there will be leaders who operate within clusters of cultures, such as the ten identified by the recent and ground-breaking GLOBE study (House et al., 2004).

### ***Other Considerations***

Besides these three predicted trajectories, we can be certain of continued technological progress – which will affect global leadership in ways we cannot now imagine. As an example, within 20-30 years it might be possible to have near-perfect, instantaneous multilingual translation between hundreds of languages. As the barriers

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<sup>2</sup> Gill (2006, 309) concurs, citing a 2003 study by Alban-Metcalfé which found that females were rated higher than males in relation to 10 out of 14 contemporary leadership ‘dimensions’.

<sup>3</sup> Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian*, 7 December 2010, p.29.

between people (space, time, language, culture) are eliminated, or at least minimised, will global leadership actually become easier as cultures begin to converge?<sup>4</sup> To an extent, the nature of global leadership will depend on the nature of the companies of the future. As several MNCs now have annual revenues exceeding dozens of countries' GDPs, are we heading towards an era of global monopolies or oligopolies? What type of global leader would head such an organisation? In 50 or 100 years' time, will ever-more-powerful companies challenge the nation-state for people's allegiance? And if so, would global business leaders morph into global political leaders?

We are left with only speculation and unanswerable questions when considering the long-term future of global leadership. In the immediate future, however, we are likely to see more widespread adoption of programmes of global leadership development; ever more networking of leaders; companies realising that their best domestic leaders may not necessarily be their best global ones; traditional leadership being seen as inadequate unless coupled with emotional and cultural intelligence; and a brilliant fusion of global forms of leadership as different cultures increasingly interact in the economic and social spheres.

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<sup>4</sup> This is the argument of M. Marks, CEO of Flextronics, who claimed that if one were to gather 30 people from 30 countries in their 30s, the "chances are, they would all interact quite easily... because there's been a major shift in thinking from the last generation. And that shift will make the task of developing global leaders easier with each passing year" (Green et al. 2003, 44).

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