

Developing Leaders

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The Five Dimensions of Global Leadership

Hardly any company today can escape the truths of the new work environment. Globalization is a reality. Companies are expanding and operating business units offshore, selling to foreign markets, managing global supply chains or confronting more global customers.

By Linda Sharkey

With this expansion diversity in every sense of the word is abounding! Not only do we have many generations in the workforce but also the workforce demographics are shifting. In the coming years the majority of those we will recruit from will be millennials born all over the world with different experiences in life and different needs. Research suggests that these workers want to gain skills and transport them across many industries and job opportunities. The day of the life long job with a particular company is over. Transient workers will be more and more the norm. Layer on top of these trends the increasing power of social media, technology advances and societal complexity and the scene becomes extremely daunting. These trends put pressure on the current leadership models and require new leadership approaches. So how do you build leadership capacity and capture value in this increasingly, global, complex and interconnected world?

In the early days of globalization poor leadership could go unnoticed. Communication was not what it is today. However, poor leadership today is felt immediately in the ability of a company to attract and retain employees and connect with the local communities in which it is doing business. Companies are becoming global overnight through acquisitions and joint ventures and many are ill prepared for the challenges of leading in these new environments and as a result make costly mistakes. Often companies assume that a top talent leader in the home country will be a top talent leader any where in the world. Research has repeatedly shown this not to be true, just because someone was successful at home does not mean they will be successful off shore yet we keep making this same mistake; and according to the Wall Street Journal (July 13, 2013) more and more companies will be leveraging overseas transfers. How do you ensure you are putting the right leaders in global roles that will build your business and a positive brand in the market? And what are the defining characteristics that you need to look for to make sure they are successful? These were the fundamental questions we set out to answer in our research. Myself, Nazneen Razi, Rob Cooke and Peter Barge, all experienced in the global arena wanted to determine once and for all what truly made a global leader successful and how to nurture these leaders in an organization. Global Leadership is a complex job, but it is also ambiguous with a high degree of uncertainty. It is the combination of these factors that makes global leadership so very difficult. Not everyone can deal effectively with these dynamics

Uncertainty resilience

These leaders can function very effectively in highly unclear situations and do not become paralyzed by them. They relish and seek out diverse perspectives



What we did

The field is littered with global competency models. Many derived from observation and interviews. These models include an exhaustive list of competencies but none of them have been correlated to business outcomes. There is no proof that if one follows these models they will in fact have great global leaders. Thus we embarked on a study to see if we could find the 'secret sauce' for a true global leader. We developed a survey based on an extensive literature search and refined it many times. Then we examined more than 150 successful global leaders in Fortune 200 companies around the world. We looked for successful leaders who came from diverse companies of various sizes across industry types from multiple geographical headquarters. We identified and surveyed individuals who had successfully transcended economic and business turbulence and effectively traversed numerous cultures and geographies.

We analyzed the results and conducted extensive interviews to understand exactly what these leaders did to make them successful. Then we compared them to the leaders in the Human Synergistics database of over 5,000 leaders. This database was used because it represented global leaders and included senior organization leaders. To further test our results we surveyed peers and colleagues of our sample to determine their impact on others and if they created constructive organizational cultures that delivered effective business results.

What we found

We discovered five behavioral dimensions of successful global leaders. We believe these five behavioral dimensions are the key to leadership and business success. We call these leaders that exhibit these dimensions Transglobal Leaders because they operate with ease and grace anywhere in the world they are called upon to lead and they create sustainable businesses.



Team connectivity They focus on the success of the teams in their organization and not necessarily in their own hierarchy

Specifically, we know if leaders demonstrate these behavioural dimensions they are more successful than their counterparts who do not. The five behavioral dimensions are:

1. **Uncertainty resilience** – dealing with ambiguity, complexity and differences. These leaders can function very effectively in highly unclear situations and do not become paralyzed by them. They relish and seek out diverse perspectives.
2. **Team connectivity** – integrating across boundaries. They focus on the success of the teams in their organization and not necessarily in their own hierarchy. They create innovation teams, support the teams and disband them when their work is done.
3. **Pragmatic flexibility** – adapting to other cultures. These leaders will carefully adjust their values to get the job done. They operate with high integrity while respecting local needs rather than their own needs.
4. **Perceptive responsiveness** – acting on intuition and fact. They are highly emotional, intelligent and anticipate the changing needs of customers and other key stakeholders. They are attuned to the differences between people, and value those differences rather than trying to impose a 'one size fits all' approach.
5. **Talent orientation** – achieving results through others. These leaders understand the power of people engagement and involvement. They see their role as personally focused on and engaged in the development of others. They understand that the organizations success ultimately rests with the talent they develop over time.

The leaders that demonstrated these behavioural dimensions built strong, lasting organizations everywhere in the world where they were. Impressive indeed.

How does one build a cadre of Transglobal Leaders

First: Before assigning a leader to a global role (whether leading an offshore team or relocating to a new country or region) conduct a thorough assessment of their capabilities against the Transglobal Leadership (TGL) Dimensions. Currently numerous Fortune 500 companies are using the Transglobal Leadership Assessment Survey to get a pulse on the strengths as well as the development areas for those they are sending on global assignments. Then you need to work with the leader to understand the results and determine if the global role is really for them. If it is, then provide coaching to help them:

- Develop a personal action plan for success – remember no one will embody all these dimensions to their fullest so they need to understand the strengths they can leverage and where they may need to fill in the gaps.



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- If feasible conduct a two to three day development experience where these new global leaders can work through some of the issues and challenges together. This is a very powerful experience to learn more about themselves and how they will react as they encounter new and different ways of thinking and working. We use a simulation experience that powerfully presents the challenges of global roles.
- Provide a support group or a group of peer coaches to help each other work through the challenges they will undoubtedly experience in the first 90 to 120 days of their new assignments. Usually these peer coaching groups are supported by a master coach who can help them solidify the discussions and put their ideas into action.
- Check in at the 90 and 120 day marks to make sure they are on track for success.
- As part of their assignment, ensure they develop a local successor to take their role when their ‘Tour of Duty’ is up.
- Be sure to track the experiences and lessons from these leaders, as this can be helpful as you continue to shape your global presence.

Second: Conduct a similar assessment of the trailing significant other. Many times the partners and family members are ill equipped to deal with the isolation of a global assignment. This is one of the most frequent causes of a leader ‘flaming out’ on the assignment according to industry mobility experts and search firms. We have personally experienced and heard story after story of failed global assignments due to family issues. Our experience has shown that about 25% of the reported failed global assignments are due to domestic issues. It is hard to get the facts as this is often very personal information but those who deal in global mobility and oversees executives assignments see this as a critical factor that is ignored or glossed over when selecting the candidate.

One particular story comes to mind where the head of a company’s global sales office wanted to move off shore to be closer to key global customers. I was coaching this leader at the time and exploring the options, challenges and actions for success with him, we discussed his family. He insisted that his wife and family would be fine and excited about a global move. But when I met with his wife and looked deeper into the situation I found that his wife had never moved out of her home town let alone her current neighborhood. Rather than move, from their current location they merely added on to their existing house. Needless to say she was very uneasy with relocating. Had we not explored this issue with the whole family the company likely would have had another disaster on their hands.

Pragmatic flexibility – adapting to other cultures. These leaders will carefully adjust their values to get the job done. They operate with high integrity while respecting local needs rather than their own needs



Thus, we often conduct similar assessments followed by workshops for the 'trailing partners' to help them assimilate into the new region more quickly. Using this approach goes beyond the standard cultural and language training offered. Through this workshop the partner can experience what it will be like to live elsewhere and explore the personal challenges they will have. They leave the program with their own personal plan based upon their personal needs separate and apart from their significant other. We believe this step, which is often ignored, must be taken to ensure success for the whole family unit and ultimately for the company as well.

Third: Develop a pipeline of talent around the world. Make it your business to know the local talent and identify those that have the aptitude to do a global role. Here we use an interview protocol based upon the five dimensions to ferret out interest and curiosity for global roles. Once the group is identified then you can do a formal assessment like the TGL Survey to help solidify strengths and growth areas. Once identified conduct a similar process as in step 1:

- Use the assessment for action planning and development purposes
- Provide short rotational assignments with very clear goals, expectations and measures. These assignments must not be viewed as 'junkets' but real roles with solid accountabilities.
- Debrief these assignments with groups of returning employees to learn their perspective of the company from their new vantage point and what you could continue to do to develop a global mindset in your organization.

Fourth: Have a clear repatriation plan or career plan for those who took on offshore roles or lead global teams from the home country. Again industry research points out that the retention rates of great global talent is low. The reason often cited is that the skills they learned is not valued by the company and they get stuck in jobs back in the home country that do not leverage their considerable global mindset experience. So it is vital to work with your returning Transglobal Leaders on their next 'tour of duty' and overall career objectives, in tandem with the company's overall business needs. Here are some things you can and should do to leverage their expertise:

- Use Transglobal Leaders as mentors to your pipeline of aspiring global leaders.
- Put them on 'swat teams' to assess talent in emerging global arenas where you want to expand your footprint.



Talent orientation These leaders understand the power of people engagement and involvement. They understand that the organizations success ultimately rests with the talent they develop over time

- Gain an honest perspective from them of how your company is seen in the eyes of 'offshore employees' and take some action. Typically, offshore employees feel less valued and empowered than those who hail from the home company headquarters. Take action to change this perspective by promoting local talent and decentralizing power to regions.

Fifth: Understand you company culture. Is your culture open to new ideas? Are you inclusive in how you think about innovation or does only a small group of people at the top have all the great ideas. Having an inclusive culture is essential to capturing the intellectual value of your workforce no matter where they are in the world. Getting you cultural elements right not only means having the right leaders driving a strong high performance culture but knowing your cultural gaps. Here's where you start:

- Assess you current culture. Know where you are creating roadblocks to inclusive thoughts and innovative ideas. Do not think your current culture is what you hope it is – get the facts.
- Create a roadmap to transform you culture if your assessment is not what you hoped it would be.
- Leverage your Transglobal Leaders to help create a more inclusive culture.
- Measure you progress and always keep your eye on the 'cultural ball'.

If you follow these steps you will build a strong global mindset into the DNA of your company.

The facts are the facts – globalization is here to stay and will be the hallmark of the 21st century in ways that we cannot even imagine today. Get ready now for this reality, (which probably already exists)in your company. Finding, developing and keeping great global talent is everyone's challenge. Take action today to get to know your talent, strategically develop them and make sure your organization is seen as a place where everyone, no matter who they are or where they live, can succeed with good work.



Dr. Linda Sharkey is co-author of 'Winning with Transglobal Leadership: How to Find and Develop Top Global Talent to Build World-Class Organization'. She is a frequent key speaker and specializes in leadership development, coaching and cultural transformation. She is host of iLead – the Leadership Connection on VoiceAmerica Radio.

Despite much discussion about the need for leadership development in corporate and public organizations, and the considerable industry that surrounds it, this is the first authoritative periodical focused entirely on this area.

Developing Leaders looks at the critical confluence between the provision of executive education and the real everyday needs of organizations to strengthen their management teams, their corporate performance, and their leadership.

The publication presents the latest thinking and most recent developments in both academic and commercial executive education provision worldwide, what it is achieving and which are the best models for success, sharing the experience and expertise of top leaders and world class educators.

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