

The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence

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CHAPTER 3

The Interculturally Competent Global Leader

Margaret D. Pusch

Contemplating the work that leaders do in society, in organizations, and in the world raises a number of questions about the skills that are necessary, the attitudes that are important, and the intellectual capabilities that are essential to be a global leader. Great leaders have not always been intellectually impressive (although some level of intelligence is necessary) or endowed with extraordinary skill (although some level of technical skill is important). Seemingly gifted individuals have failed, and seemingly less endowed people have soared. Especially in this time of international connections—of organizations that span the earth; of human, economic, and environmental problems that cannot be solved without crossing borders; and of the need to think in terms of the global context—it is important to identify those critical abilities that are fundamental to functioning as a leader in the global *intercultural* environment. It is equally important to determine how those abilities can be learned by the greatest number of people in all our societies. The focus of this chapter is to identify the critical elements of the interculturally competent global leader and to suggest ways to encourage the development of those competencies.

Most research about leadership is rooted in a single culture, and much of it is tied to advice on business practices in various countries as contrasted with cultures in the West. One obvious example is the long list of books devoted to doing business with the Japanese that began to emerge in the mid-1980s (Brannen & Wilen, 1993; Hall, 1993; Hall & Hall, 1987; Ishinomori, 1988; March, 1988). There has been attention to how leadership differs from one location to another, showing contrasts in the approaches to leadership in different countries and different parts of the world (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Lewis, 2005), how leadership matches what motivates workers

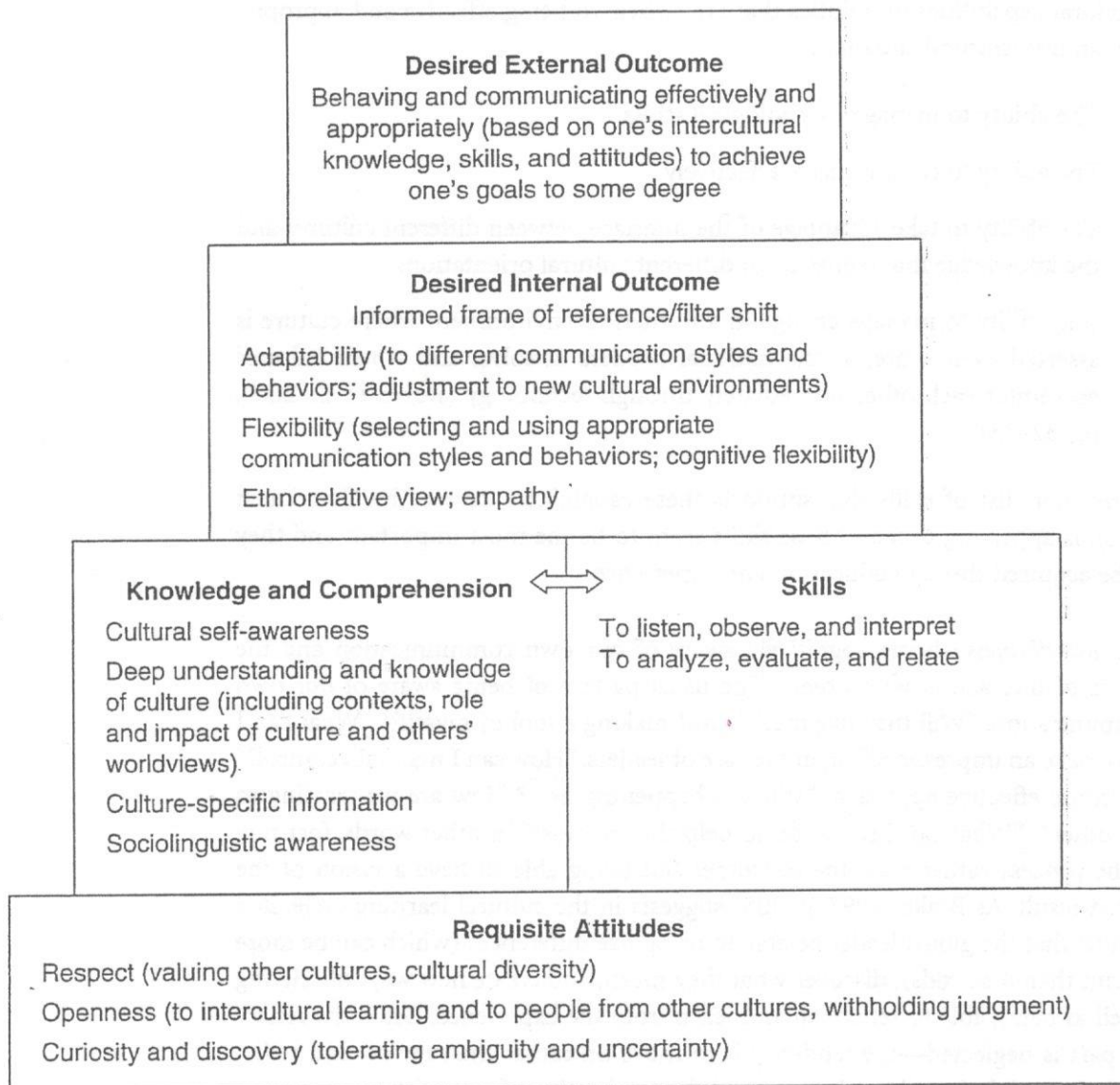
(McGregor, 1960; Ouchi, 1981), and then increasing attention to *global* leadership and management skills in the business world as well as the public sector (Brake, 1997; Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004; Kanter, 1995; Rosen, Digh, Singer, & Phillips, 2000). Leaders, whether they remain in their home culture or work in the global arena, must function in an environment where the population, the needs, and the values are diverse. This requires a mind-set, heart-set, and skill-set that can carry across cultural boundaries, encouraging a shift in worldview and perspective and thus achieving clarity and integrity in complex situations. While some may be born to be leaders in their own culture,¹ leaders with an ability to deal constructively in intercultural situations are made. These leaders must reach a new realization of how worldview and behavior are deeply influenced by cultural origin and how these differences can be bridged. They must learn to be interculturally competent.

Intercultural Competence: How Is It Defined?

Recent research (Deardorff, 2006) conducted to identify the components of intercultural competence resulted in a diagram that was a composite of the consensus reached by a panel of experienced interculturalists that included trainers, researchers, and international educational program administrators within the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The resulting pyramid layers the competencies in a system that shows both internal and external outcomes of increased intercultural competency.

Most competence “lists” are just that, a lengthy listing of the many competences that are part of intercultural effectiveness. Deardorff’s (2004) panel agreed on 44; she consolidated and constructed them into the pyramid pictured in Figure 3.1, suggesting that one begins with attitude and moves toward acquiring the skills and knowledge that produce both internal and external results. It could be argued that attitudes can be influenced by the need to function in a manner that allows one to navigate in an unfamiliar cultural environment or multicultural situation, which, in turn, produces a change of attitude. However, there must be the motivation to explore, to be, as Kemper (2003) puts it, an “edgewalker.” Deardorff presents the acquisition of these competencies as a process that begins with attitudes of respect, openness, and curiosity, arguing that they are fundamental to the process of achieving the desired outcomes.

An exhaustive study of leaders in world-class companies in 27 countries, from Indonesia to Australia to China to Turkey and the United Kingdom, searched for those challenges faced by highly performing leaders in the global economy and the qualities that were essential to dealing effectively with those challenges (Rosen et al., 2000). One point became clear: “Leaders who leverage employees’ intellectual capital, collaborative relationships, and cultures will thrive in the new millennium” (Rosen et al., 2000, p. 24). The ability to do this called for the kind of skills, attitudes, and cognitive flexibility that is represented in the Deardorff model. Earlier, Brake (1997) created the global leadership triad in which he put relationship management, personal effectiveness, and business acumen at each point in the triangle. Cross-cultural



- Move from personal level (attitude) to interpersonal/interactive level (outcomes).
- Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of underlying elements.

Figure 3.1 Model of Intercultural Competence

SOURCE: Deardorff (2006). Used with permission.

communication, curiosity and learning, and thinking agility, among other attributes, ranked high in the required capabilities of global leaders (Brake, 1997, p. 44). To lead in a collaborative global enterprise, it is essential that there be global competency development to produce leaders who can exhibit intercultural competencies.

There is extensive literature on intercultural competencies (see Spitzberg & Changnon in Chapter 1, this volume, for a comprehensive discussion of the literature), but the Deardorff model is a succinct visual research-based display of what has largely been discussed in other texts. A search of the literature shows that nearly all studies, no matter what the terms used in each study, identified four general

behavioral capabilities or abilities that are critical to being effective and appropriate in an intercultural situation:

1. The ability to manage psychological stress
2. The ability to communicate effectively
3. The ability to take advantage of the interface between different cultures and the knowledge that comes from different cultural orientations
4. The ability to manage change in a borderless environment where culture is asserted even more, as the national borders dissolve, and where cultures encounter each other immediately through technology (Rosen et al., 2000, pp. 32–33)

The short list of skills that supports these capabilities, created by Gudykunst (1991), is appealing because those skills seem to be the most important and they can be acquired through education and experience.

1. *Mindfulness*—being cognitively aware of our own communication and the process of interaction with others. The usual pattern of being aware of our own communication: “Will they like me?” “Am I making a fool of myself?” “What can I say to make an impression?” or, in the case of leaders, “How can I maintain control?”

A more effective approach: “What is happening here? How are we reacting to each other?” “What can I say or do to help this process?” In other words, focusing on the process rather than the outcomes but being able to have a vision of the desired result. As Brake (1997, p. 205) suggests in the cultural learning cycle, it is essential that the global leader be able to recognize differences (which can be more difficult than it sounds), discover what they mean, and create new ways of relating as well as being able to reflect on and learn from the experience. Often the reflection part is neglected—the tendency is to move on rather than review and rediscover what might have been learned and the implications for the future.

2. *Cognitive flexibility*—being able to create new categories; the ability to make more rather than fewer categories and avoid the tendency to stuff new information into old, preset categories. This includes being open to new information, being aware of more than one perspective, and becoming aware of how we interpret messages and situations differently than others.

S. Black, Morrison, and Gregersen (1999) use the term *savvy* to indicate that global leaders have the ability to identify and capture resources that are needed and to make decisions, knowing when to wait for more information and when to move forward without all the information that would be useful.

3. *Tolerance for ambiguity*—the ability to be in a situation that is unclear and not become overly anxious but to determine patiently what is appropriate as the dimensions of situations and conditions become apparent.

- Low-tolerance people seek information to support their own beliefs.
- High-tolerance people seek “objective” information from others to gain an understanding of the situation and to accurately predict the behavior of others.

An important element within this skill is curiosity, emphasized by Deardorff (2006; see Figure 3.1) as well as others. S. Black et al. (1999) identify "inquisitiveness" as a component of global leadership for business, suggesting that it is the "glue" that holds everything together and breathes life into the skill set that leadership requires. Black et al. also label "embracing duality" as that ability to manage uncertainty and balance the tensions present when global and local needs and interests come into conflict. They found that global leaders actually seek out those situations or environments in which tension and uncertainty exist at a high level. This suggests that a tolerance for ambiguity not only is a critical skill but also energizes global leaders.

4. *Behavioral flexibility*—the ability to adapt and accommodate one's own behavior to people from other groups. One important aspect is to know more than one language, but language skill does not translate automatically into intercultural skill. One can be a fool in more than one language, and it is quite easy to behave foolishly in an unfamiliar culture. Language does not automatically endow one with cultural knowledge or the ability to adapt to different communicative styles or behaviors. This can be supported by the Deardorff (2004) study in which the experts did not reach consensus on the role of language in intercultural competence. Interestingly, one successful leader noted that "I used to think language skills were as important as cultural adaptability, but I now believe adaptability is far more important. . . . It can be very dangerous to pick people because they have language skills and then find out they have very little cultural adaptability and little interest in adapting" (Brake, 1997, p. 62). With or without language skill, the ability to engage in chameleon-like behavior remains critical to functioning interculturally (Pusch, 1994).

5. *Cross-cultural empathy*—being able to participate in another person's experience in your imagination; thinking it intellectually and feeling it emotionally. The ability to connect emotionally with people and showing compassion for others, being able to listen actively and mindfully, and viewing situations from more than one perspective is an important set of skills that demonstrate empathy.

Brake (1997) describes global leaders as capable of managing relationships, having business acumen, and having personal effectiveness. There is stress on the fundamental capacity to be entrepreneurial, to have professional expertise and know the business the leader is in (whatever it may be), and to be strategically and organizationally astute. However, this cannot be used effectively without a "global mind-set." Included in that mind-set are the competencies that Deardorff (2004, 2006), S. Black et al. (1999), and others list. Generally, it is suggested that a global leader must be able to stretch one's mind to encompass the entire world with all its complexity, while those who lead domestically need only take what is local and familiar into account.

S. Black et al. (1999) indicate several other important attributes exhibited by global leaders: "demonstrating high personal integrity" and inquisitiveness, a state of mind rather than an acquired skill (although it can be encouraged). Inquisitiveness (curiosity in Deardorff's [2004] model) produces an orientation to learning that is essential in a world that changes faster than leaders can reinvent themselves (Rosen et al., 2000, p. 25). The world is full of paradox and contradictions

that must be navigated every day. A television advertisement says, "Life comes at you fast," and indeed, this is a common challenge for anyone in a leadership position. The intercultural field, especially intercultural training, has always been oriented to learning how to learn and considers that process fundamental to being effective in any cross-cultural or multicultural environment. Thomas Friedman (2005a), in a *New York Times* column, wrote of high school teachers who had inspired students and were nominated by college graduates as those teachers they especially remembered and appreciated. Four were selected to be honored over the college graduation weekend. Friedman noted that in an age when jobs are invented and become obsolete with some frequency, the "greatest survival skill is the ability to learn how to learn. The best way to learn how to learn is to love to learn, and the best way to love to learn is to have great teachers who inspire you." If a love of learning fueled by curiosity is a critical attribute for global leadership, it seems that investment in education and recognition of the influence of good teachers are essential. Moreover, developing global leaders within corporate and other organizational environments calls for similar inspirational training and mentoring.

Ethical behavior has been an equally important concern in intercultural work, and being inquisitive, as S. Black et al. (1999) suggest, may contribute to making ethical decisions, taking into account the concerns of local people as well as global goals in a given situation. Ethical decisions cannot be made from some universal code of conduct since none exists. They must be made, recognizing that there are multiple choices, drawing on the knowledge of various options, and being sensitive to the cultural issues involved.

J. Bennett (2009, p. 97) sums this up in a list that consists of a cognitive dimension (mind-set) that includes, among other qualities, culture-general frameworks that can be useful in sorting through the differences encountered, a behavioral dimension (skill set) that includes empathy, and the affective dimension (heart set) that includes attitudes and motivations mentioned above.

It should be assumed that if the competences and qualities discussed in this chapter are present in an individual and encouraged in a group, a high degree of cultural self-awareness is present. One of the first steps in becoming an interculturally competent leader is to achieve awareness not only of one's home culture but of its influence on one's behavior, values, and ways of looking at the world. Indeed, the widely stated admonition to start with oneself at home is an important one. Often, this occurs, however, when you leave home because it is hard to see your own culture when you are in the midst of it. Interestingly, nearly everyone who writes on the topic of leadership indicates that the early step in becoming globally competent is to begin to experience life in places other than your home country/culture. We can, therefore, build future leaders by having them participate in structured learning experiences abroad both during their student years as well as in a working situation. Building structured learning opportunities into business travel has been recommended most notably by Oddou, Mendenhall, and Ritchie (2000).

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the term *edgewalker* has been used to describe the "new-century leadership paradigm" essential in a complex world. Kemper (2003) states that living in a diverse world "is more than a mental construct, a memorized list of cultural differences, or a willingness to be tolerant. It's about examining how

well we function at the margins and interfaces of life, where divergent ways of being and believing meet and collide.”

As implied in the work devoted to identifying intercultural competencies, especially those important to global leaders, how well one functions at the point of interface calls for the competences discussed here. However, the willingness to go beyond tolerance and to be fully inclusive requires a higher level of commitment—one that involves taking responsibility for being personally connected with and learning from and caring about those who are unlike ourselves. This means a serious exploration of our beliefs and our convictions, as well as an ability to deal with the chaos that characterizes the world as we now know it. As Black and Gregersen suggest (2000), this requires a reordering of one’s mental map, of stretching one’s mind beyond the known to include the entire world. While no one can know everything about every country or region of the world, one can take on that “global mind-set” that recognizes that the map that was developed while growing up does not transfer to the rest of the world.

Global Leadership: Why Is Intercultural Competence Important?

Global leadership obviously requires crossing national borders and encountering many different cultures both within and among those borders. Defining the activity of “leadership” and the term *leader* is not an easy task, but attempts have been made to differentiate between the two and between being a manager and a leader. Bert Lance, President Jimmy Carter’s budget director, declared “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” This defines how managers think. Leaders understand that “when it ain’t broke may be the only time you can fix it” (Zaleznik, 2004). Leadership is seen as an activity, the process of mobilizing a group of people to accomplish a goal or fulfill a vision. While others, the followers, may carry out many of the tasks and be those without whom a goal could not be accomplished, the leader must articulate and inspire with vision, take responsibility for the outcome, and carry out the leadership function in collaboration with others (Golandaz, 2003). The leader is the one looking ahead, defining the path, and helping others take the walk. If this is to occur in a global setting, it necessarily involves people from different cultures with distinctly different ways of thinking, behaving, and valuing the activity and perceiving and accepting the vision or goal. The leader, therefore, must be an effective intercultural communicator.

Friedman (2005b), in his book *The World Is Flat*, states that culture matters when it comes to economic success. He explores the concept of “glocalization,” which means the ability to absorb foreign ideas and the best practices from other places and meld them with indigenous traditions. He suggests that a culture that is tolerant of others, builds trust enough to allow strangers to collaborate together, and whose elites are concerned with the masses and ready to invest at home influences how well it will flourish. “When tolerance is the norm, everyone flourishes—because tolerance breeds trust, and trust is the foundation of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Increase the level of trust in any group, company, or society, and only good things happen" (p. 327). While Friedman's focus is almost exclusively on economic activities, his words ring true for leaders in every domain because while culture matters, it can also change. Culture is "nested in contexts," not hardwired into human DNA. The contexts can be altered, and leaders can change and adapt to meet the imperatives of the challenges that exist; local leaders and those who function in the global arena must be prepared to engage in glocalization (Friedman, 2005b).

Research shows that culture matters in all forms of human endeavor and certainly in how leadership is exercised. Hofstede (2001) demonstrated how cultures cluster along certain cultural patterns; similar results were demonstrated earlier by Hall (1959, 1966) and Haire, Ghiselli, and Porter (1966). Hofstede showed that corporate culture does not trump the native cultures of employees. While they may adapt to the corporate culture, their native cultural tendencies often prevail. These are resources that leaders draw on not only for insight into local cultures but as sources of learning alternative solutions to dealing with the human condition. The research of both Hofstede and Hall continues to be relevant as it provides general templates to help identify the characteristics of a culture and behavior that may be exhibited and encountered in a multinational, multicultural environment. Hofstede's research on power distance, for example, has implications for how to lead in an environment where the leader is expected to care about and assist in many aspects of the employee's or a student's life as opposed to a flat organization where power and responsibility are more evenly distributed. Hall's research on how time is viewed and used and on how relationships are more important than individual achievement provides considerable insight into what gives meaning to life and what motivates people from different cultures. These "guides" are on a continuum rather than being binary, so there is attention to the relativity of those differences rather than an "either/or" approach. Thus, they provide guidance to understanding what to watch for that might have considerable impact on exercising leadership and implications for an effective response. Both these theorists provide fundamental concepts to build the knowledge base for achieving the intercultural competency that is so critical to good leadership.

Patterned after Hofstede's seminal study, the most comprehensive study to date on examining cultural differences in leadership is known as the GLOBE research, compiled by the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Project Team (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Conducted by 170 researchers who collected data from 18,000 managers in 62 countries over a period of 10 years, this team found nine distinguishing characteristics across cultures that have implications for global leadership. A third of these characteristics overlap with Hofstede's dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and collectivism versus individualism while the rest are unique: assertiveness, future orientation, power orientation, in-group collectivism, humane orientation, and gender differentiation. One overarching finding, among many, is the increased importance of leaders' sensitivity to cultural difference. N. J. Adler (2008, p. 171) points out that Gardner (1995) made a remarkable contribution to the study of leadership when he discovered that extraordinary leaders, worldwide, consistently practice reflecting,

leveraging, and framing more than most people. These leaders think deeply about what they are trying to accomplish and how they are going about it and making course corrections when things are not going well. Second, they know what their strengths are and focus on what they do well, pushing their competitive advantage hard and encouraging others to do the same. Finally, they are risk takers; when they fail, they learn from those failures and apply that learning better than others.

The Global Leader: How Can Intercultural Competence Be Identified?

The global leader is one who embraces difference and has achieved a state of ethnorelativity. Cultures teach us to be ethnocentric, to think of our own cultures as central in the universe and providing the “natural” way of doing things. The default position of people is to be ethnocentric, and yet the global leader cannot fall into the default setting but must move well beyond ethnocentricity.

The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) provides a way of identifying the personal change in individuals as they move from being ethnocentric to ethnorelative (M. Bennett, 1993), a shift that is essential for global leaders. The DMIS has three “states” of ethnocentrism (denial of difference, defense against difference, and minimization of difference) and three states of ethnorelativism (acceptance of difference, adaptation to difference, and integration of difference). *Ethnocentrism* can be defined as the “assumption that the worldview of one’s own culture is central to reality” (M. Bennett, 1993). Signs of ethnocentrism can be seen in behavior that is dismissive of other cultures, is prejudicial toward certain groups, exhibits racist attitudes, and/or sets up clear “we/they” distinctions between their own and other groups. There may also be attempts to glorify one’s own culture.

Denial is a state in which it seems impossible to comprehend cultural difference. This may be due to ignorance of, isolation from, or separation, voluntary or involuntary, from cultures different than one’s own. “Others” tend to be dehumanized or identified in the most general of terms or thought of only in broad stereotypes. Cultural differences are seen as something that happens somewhere else, if it is thought of at all. *Defense* is a bit more active in that there is a recognition of difference, and it is seen as threatening. Defense may take three forms: (1) denigration in which other cultures are evaluated negatively (the greater the difference, the more negative the evaluation); (2) asserting superiority in which one’s own culture is seen as better than any other and, sometimes, a propensity to enforce this perspective; and (3) reversal, a tendency to see another culture as superior to one’s own, which obviously requires experience in another culture. These stages show a strong orientation to dualistic thinking.

Minimization is ethnocentric because it is still an attempt to preserve one’s own worldview as central to reality. In this stage, human similarity seems more compelling than difference whether it is based on physical universalism, where we look different but everyone functions from the same script to meet fundamental human needs, or transcendent universalism, emphasizing that we come from a common

source of a transcendent principle or belief system. Minimization assumes that at the core of human existence, we are all the same and can understand each other once we get past relatively superficial cultural differences. This may be a transition stage that is helping the person prepare for a greater appreciation of cultural differences. In ethnocentricity, one is in a state of unconscious incompetence, although it is possible to begin to be consciously incompetent in minimization, to recognize times of cultural insensitivity, and to attempt to learn new ways of relating to people and behaving (Howell, 1982). Certainly, there is an increased interest in learning about other cultures if only at a level of holidays, food, and celebrations.

Moving into a state of ethnorelativism usually requires a significant other-culture experience. In *acceptance*, cultural differences become something that is recognized, appreciated, and respected. Acceptance tends to begin with respect for behavioral differences and a comprehension that all behavior occurs in a cultural context. The second step in acceptance is respecting the beliefs and values of another culture. There is an acceptance of the assumptions that lie beneath behavior patterns and a recognition that values are not stationary “things”; instead, a process of valuing occurs within cultures when relative “goodness” or “rightness” is assigned to events or occurrences. One in acceptance is quite likely consciously incompetent but learning more and more effective ways of interacting across cultures.

In respecting the integrity of cultures, it is through *adaptation* that the individual more consciously and skillfully relates to and communicates with people of different cultural origins. One takes on new ways of being, though not giving up the home culture, and becomes more empathetic and able to shift worldviews. A second step is internalizing more than one worldview and shifting between them with some ease and less conscious attention. It is here that one can move beyond conscious competence to unconscious competence, but this is an uneven process. As some ways of being become more unconscious, others are just being discovered, and this process may have started long before adaptation. It appears that one is always in a state of discovery in an intercultural environment because it is impossible to learn everything about another culture, much less more than one. The unconscious competence occurs in the internalization of interculturally competent skills and of a consistent display of inclusive and adaptive attitudes.

Integration brings the person to the state of being a multicultural person as described by Peter Adler (1975). The integrated person no longer identifies solely with one culture but is able to function between and among many cultures, having mastered the skills of bridging between them and enabling members of those cultures to constructively engage with each other, often for a particular purpose. Thus, while they may become marginal in their home culture, this is not seen as a negative factor but as part of the process of adding new cultural perspectives to one's repertoire of responses to living constructively in a multifaceted, multicultural world. Having access to multiple worldviews, the integrated person is able to evaluate situations contextually, make ethical choices, and act in “the profoundly relativistic world.” This person is also able to enhance intercultural interaction and is ever open to new learning and to continued development both professionally and personally. Here is a person who is in a state of *dynamic inbetweenness* (Yoshikawa, 1987).

J. Bennett (1993) addresses marginality by differentiating between constructive marginals (those who accept responsibility for choosing and constructing value sets and who are at home anywhere) from encapsulated marginals (those who lack the ability to shift between worldviews and are in danger of becoming alienated from all the cultures they know). Encapsulated marginals see themselves as so unique that it is hard for them to relate to any group, something that has been termed *terminal uniqueness*. They may seem "self-conscious and self-absorbed" and find it hard to feel at home in any environment (J. Bennett, 1993). Those who assume leadership responsibilities would tend to fall into the constructive marginal category because they exhibit an ability to be at home anywhere, to see more than one perspective rather than be captured in the ethnocentric center of their own culture, and to entertain various approaches to any situation and to exhibit good judgment in making decisions.

In applying this DMIS specifically to intercultural competent leadership, a truly competent global leader must reach the stage of adaptation to difference and, preferably, integration of difference. Since minimization is more an attitude of tolerance based on similarity, tolerance falls short of what is needed to have the requisite adaptability for effective global leadership. Minimization is a transition state in which one tends to fall back on the solutions in one's own culture as the superior or natural or correct ways of doing things. Minimization tends to be fairly benign and can be operative within one's own culture but does not hold up well in a global environment. Acceptance of difference shows a recognition and appreciation of differences in cultural behavior and values and a beginning of understanding cultural relativity. The adaptive person is able to consciously shift perspective into different cultural worldviews and behave in culturally appropriate ways. This demonstrates the use of empathy and behavioral flexibility as well as mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, and a tolerance for being in unclear situations. When the person begins to internalize different worldviews, he or she can shift unconsciously, obviously behaving in ways compatible with each worldview. The integration of multiple frames of reference allows an individual to evaluate situations from a variety of perspectives. It can lead to constructive marginality, which is useful when exercising global leadership because the constructive marginal may be seen as that edgewalker who lives and functions well at the margins between conflicting, divergent cultures and who can view situations from more than one perspective.

One might ask if it is possible to test for this kind of capacity and to predict who might have the inclination to become a global leader (see Part III of this volume for further discussion on assessment of intercultural competence). While it is possible to measure where people fall on this intercultural sensitivity continuum using an instrument such as the Intercultural Developmental Inventory (IDI; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003), this is not an infallible predictor of competence. People who can be expected to do well often do not, while those who seem the least likely to be successful intercultural communicators are surprisingly effective. As measures go, this has strong validity and reliability as an instrument and a considerable amount of research to support a recognized and well-established conceptual model. The proof, however, lies in how adroitly one demonstrates an

ability to navigate the interfaces between contrary worldviews, make sense of them, and lead with wisdom and compassion.

The Interculturally Competent Global Leader: What Does This Leader Look Like?

The global leader is called upon to bridge the differences, to take various perspectives and life experiences into account when making decisions and interacting with others, especially when leading the work of groups of people. Achieving the more inclusive ways of thinking (intellect), feeling (emotion), and functioning (action) is critical to success for the global leader. The head, the heart, and the hands are fully engaged in whatever the global leader, as well as those with whom there is collaboration, undertakes. The total engagement is obvious when the skills are finely honed. This is, as Peter Adler (1998) described, a multicultural person. Adler began his description of the multicultural person with these words:

A new type of person whose orientation and view of the world profoundly transcends his indigenous culture is developing from the complex of social, political, economic, and education interactions of our time. (p. 227)

The multicultural person has “psychologically and socially come to grips with a multiplicity of realities” (P. Adler, 1998) and has been able to cope well with the psychological process of adapting to a new culture and with moving from place to place. The global leader is, simultaneously, a multicultural person if one connects P. Adler’s (1975) description with the capabilities needed for global leadership. Adler spans the adaptation and integration stages of the DMIS as he describes a person who is “always in the process of becoming a part of or apart from a given cultural context.” Advanced adaptation and integration are marked by “attitude, emotions, and behaviors that are independent but not independent of cultural influence” (P. Adler, 1975). Yoshikawa (1987) interprets this as being “independent, yet simultaneously interdependent. This paradoxical existence can assume a new identity—the ‘identity-in-unity’ or ‘duality-in-unity’” (pp. 142–143). This is when “one becomes capable of bringing new ways to explore the paradox of human diversity and unity” (pp. 142–143). This relates to the characteristic that S. Black et al. (1999) list as important to interculturally competent leadership, the ability to embrace duality. Coupled with being comfortable with ambiguity, the ability to embrace duality is essential when being presented with vast amounts of data and multiple ways of conducting business or making decisions, especially within a working environment. A leader must be able to sort things out, to be involved and, at the same time, objective when dealing with paradox that is inherent in the global scene.

It is important to consider how an interculturally skilled leader approaches the use of power, a topic rarely addressed when discussing intercultural competence. When we talk of leadership, we also are talking about the ability to influence events, to affect situations or environments, and, in fact, to rally support from groups of

people. People in ethnocentric stages tend to be exploitative, deny others their rights, and, in minimization, fail to perceive the presence of institutional privilege. People in acceptance tend to avoid any exercise of power, feeling that it is not useful to developing good intercultural relations. Thus, it is critical for global leaders to reach the stages of adaptation and/or integration when there is greater comfort with exercising power when it is necessary. This is when people tend to "recognize and respond to power in cultural context" and are able to exert it appropriately in various cultural contexts. In integration, there is a strong orientation to consensual decision making and power sharing (M. Bennett, 1999). Global leadership calls for that kind of approach, and it takes a rather advanced level of intercultural sensitivity to exercise power in a nondominating manner and to use critical thinking to analyze structures that impede human development and, in fact, are oppressive. Value-driven leadership promotes "humane governance, socially responsible management, and multicultural cooperation" (Safty, 2003). A high level of intercultural sophistication and skill along with technical expertise contributes to that end.

There is another factor to be considered in approaches to leadership in today's world. It is becoming essential that leadership skills be widely dispersed rather than concentrated in a few at the top. Leadership happens at all levels of organizations and in society. It is essential to prepare as many people as possible to function as leaders wherever they are as they face the challenges that exist in the world today. Leaders in traditionally structured societies who understand this challenge distinguish themselves from other in their cultures and tend to become leaders because of their vision and ability to engage in changing the culture as well as functioning as leaders within it. Especially when transforming organizations, being able to bring others along and remain with the change process over a long period of time while maintaining the vision for the future is essential. It is a messy process and requires perseverance and persistence and enormous skill. In an interview about where tomorrow's leaders will be found, Hill (2008) states that decision making must be broadly distributed across institutions, and in any endeavor, collaboration is essential. No one leader can keep abreast of all that is necessary to know about the constantly changing environment, nor can innovation emerge from a single source. A distributed leadership model will draw on the abilities within groups or teams whose members have different functional abilities and varying perspectives. This model empowers people to be innovative. Hill suggests that we have to become conscious of invisible people in organizations, people who are rarely tapped for positions of authority and influence because of "gender, ethnicity, nationality or even age" ("demographic invisibles") or because they do not conveniently fit into the preconceptions of how leaders look and act ("stylistic invisibles"). Often, these invisibles have learned to lead from behind, a paradoxical statement that aptly describes how many people, unable to acquire recognized leadership positions, have learned to get things done and to be change agents. It takes extraordinary skill and hard work; many who lead from behind are perfectly capable of leading from the front. They become very adept in the competencies that are recognized as essential for global leadership and are able to exercise good judgment, set boundaries, encourage people to flourish where they

are, and manage tensions that inevitably occur in a group. The issue is recognizing potential leaders by moving beyond our preconceptions about how leaders look and begin to look at how people contribute.

Jean Lipman-Blumen (1996) has studied leadership styles of more than 5,000 leaders worldwide and talks of leading in an interdependent world as requiring a fundamental shift from patterns of competitiveness, authoritarianism, and individualism to what she has labeled *connective leadership*. She quotes Vaclav Havel, who suggests that “we stand helpless” before the global challenges the world faces “because our civilization has essentially globalized only the surface of our lives” (Lipman-Blumen, 1996, p. 5). There remains a tendency to revert to our tribal ways in the midst of a demand for greater interdependence in the midst of diversity. We often feel that culture lies on the surface when indeed it is the signs of globalization that lie at a superficial level. Leaders who must deal with this new era of connectivity are those edgewalkers who must deal with the endless restructuring of organizations, of alliances, of partnerships, of the pace at which change seems to occur, all at the nexus of different expectations and needs. The connective leadership model is an important contribution because it takes into account differing styles individuals may bring to the leadership role but also includes the capacity to “identify the most effective leadership strategies” to apply in unique situations, “evaluate the leadership potential in others” and match those skills with specific challenges, and “design new types of structures” to fit tasks and “the behavioral preferences of participants” (p. 25). It requires all of the intercultural skills that we have discussed here and insight into leadership patterns, culturally based, of the past.

Rosen et al. (2000) found leaders around the world who are developing cultural literacy, who are skilled intercultural practitioners, and who are looking toward a future that has limitations as well as opportunities. There are examples of radical changes in practice to take into account the need for sustainability, to deal with global and local diversity, and to cultivate new leadership within their industries. We are not bereft of models to emulate.

The Interculturally Skilled Leader: How Does a Potential Global Leader Develop Intercultural Competence?

Moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism and becoming interculturally competent requires a significant “other-culture” experience. Gregersen, Morrison, and Black (1998) suggest four strategies for creating global leadership skills: “foreign travel, with immersion in the country’s way of life; the formation of teams in which individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives work together closely; training that involves classroom and action learning projects; and overseas assignments, which serve to broaden the outlook of future global leaders” (p. 23). One could argue that foreign travel alone, without an opportunity to become deeply involved

in foreign cultures, has little merit. Being in the vicinity of another culture but failing to engage with it does little to increase intercultural skill. In-depth exposure to unfamiliar cultures with an educational emphasis on learning intercultural skills as well as the history, economic conditions, environmental issues, political realities, religion(s), and cultural practices, values, and beliefs of at least one other culture is a process that can prepare future leaders. This can occur in short stays if there is preparation for the experience, if there are encounters that challenge assumptions, and if there is guided reflection on this experience. The goal is to provide an opportunity for transformative learning. Study abroad can provide this kind of opportunity. Organizations and corporations can develop programs that provide similar experiences. It takes planning and commitment that often do not exist in our institutions.

One transformative learning model for education abroad is the international service-learning experience discussed by Brown (2005). The research conducted on the international service-learning programs of the International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership found, surprisingly, that students in those programs developed leadership capabilities. This finding, in fact, caused the organization to add the word *leadership* to its name and to deal with leadership skill development more consciously. Students, dealing with new methods of organizational management and leadership, must discover how to fit into the community agency to which they were assigned and assume a productive role. Many create new ways of providing service to the agency's client population and grow in self-confidence, in an ability to use scarce resources, and develop empathy for those they serve on a daily basis. Living, working, and learning in a new society with people who provide some guidance and who readily answer questions help them become the kind of skilled interculturalists that are needed in the world (Tonkin, 2004). Too many study-abroad programs are devised to imitate the systems at home, which conveniently avoids the kinds of encounters that produce the greatest learning.

Outside formal education systems, there are opportunities to devise programs for employees, volunteers, and other stakeholders that will instill a global mind-set. This does not necessarily have to be in a different country, although getting outside any semblance of a comfort zone is essential. International assignments are clearly preferable for employees, who can even take advantage of business trips by avoiding the usual cocoon of comfortable hotels, a closely managed itinerary, fine restaurants, and limited contact with those outside the corporate structure and constructing a "traveler" rather than a tourist experience (Oddou et al., 2000). Another method is to assign people to multinational teams who have a defined purpose and have been trained to function in an intercultural environment. Often these teams work virtually, which is a powerful learning experience fraught with the kinds of communication and working style differences (Brake, 2007). There are many creative solutions to the dilemma of training people to be interculturally competent without overseas assignments. Often, people working internationally do so in short spurts rather than extended stays.

Selecting potential leaders for further development could be a frustrating process fraught with the potential for serious miscalculation. Providing opportunities for

“other culture” immersion to a broad range of people is a more fruitful approach. It is better to prepare everyone to be involved in the leadership activity, assuming that those who can actually “lead” will emerge from this prepared population. Leaders cannot do it alone. Creating a population that thinks more broadly, has experience with multiple cultures, and has developed a considerable set of intercultural skill provides followers, in addition to leaders, who can contribute to the future development of good relations around the globe and greater attention to the problems that we collectively face.

Safty (2004) states that leadership education is “an urgent priority.” He indicates that it is important not only to establish centers of leadership education with an intercultural perspective but also to transform the many leadership programs that exist so they more consistently reflect the multicultural nature of the world in which the leaders will work.

In addition, leadership development must start early, with educational systems that begin preparing children at a young age to appreciate and understand the multicultural society in which they live and to function in an increasingly skilled manner within it. This is no small order, but it is much easier to start with the children who come with few inhibitions about exploring something new and a tendency to ask questions that an adult is reluctant to voice. Recently, I read that children coming up in the world today are more accepting of cultural differences because it has been part of their lives from birth. While greater pluralism in societies may help children learn to accept people unlike themselves “naturally,” it is easy to believe that they can be diverted from this attitude by unscrupulous leaders and others who have much to gain from inciting fear, which drives those who have not fully realized the development of an ethnorelative perspective back into defense. Dedicated and interculturally competent teachers are necessary for this educational paradigm to succeed (see Cushner & Mahon in Chapter 17, this volume, for a detailed discussion on developing interculturally competent teachers). Some interculturally competent teachers exist in educational systems but need encouragement and recognition. It must be demonstrated to incoming generations of teachers that this work is valued and rewarded. Continued attention to education about differences and to training in intercultural skills throughout all the developmental stages of a child’s life, through higher education, is essential to keep attitudes of openness and caring for others alive, growing, and present in the adults they become.

Conclusion

The need to develop in leaders the attitudes that go beyond tolerance toward embracing difference and living constructively and compassionately in a multicultural world is critical to the survival of humankind and the planet. How leadership qualities are exhibited, recognized, and rewarded differs from culture to culture. Leaders who can function across cultures, who can create and sustain systems that draw on the strength of those differences, and who allow innovative approaches to emerge are essential in every human endeavor. This does not come just from building

a set of skills but in acquiring a new mind map. Opportunities for acquiring a global perspective, for moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, and for developing the range of competences essential for global leadership must be provided even as we look for potential leaders outside the usual leadership frame. Where will the next generation of leaders come from? Often from those who are invisible, but they must be allowed to make themselves visible, from the ranks of those who have been required to deal with challenging situations in cultures other than their own (Hill, 2008), and from the classrooms where building intercultural competencies has been taught. N. J. Adler (2008) states, "Today's challenge is . . . to become a global leader who can meet the challenges of the twenty-first century— . . . who can rise to the challenge of shaping history" (p. 171). To train leaders to play this role requires the full attention of the global society.

Note

1. Although see Lipman-Blumen (1996, p. 25), who suggests that it is impossible to learn leadership skills.

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