

Leaders of Tomorrow: Dissolving Borders for 21st Century Education

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Abstract

The paper considers the changing nature of leadership roles in increasingly globalized social, educational, and professional environments and the corresponding need for leadership education development. Historically unprecedented multinational conditions in these spheres call for similarly unique conceptions of leadership and leadership studies. The competencies that will be most valuable to the future are adaptability, self-awareness, cultural consciousness, collaboration and network-based thinking. We are now in the digital era, where business and organizational networks reach across oceans. Educational changes necessary to develop the leaders of the future. Previous understandings assumed leadership resided in individual managers. However, singular, centralized power figures are less viable in the digital age, as cultural and social commonality between leaders and followers can no longer be safely assumed. The research of leading experts such as Daniel Goleman, Robert Greenleaf, and the GLOBE project, the theoretical approach of servant leadership, and the authors' experiences as international instructors of leadership majors in China are used to propose new models for ongoing study. The paper suggests that going forward, the discipline of leadership studies' focus will need to become increasingly collaborative, inclusive, and adaptable. Contemporary definitions of leadership must reflect greater awareness of international perspectives, as a variety of different goals, worldviews, and understandings of power structures are newly required to cohere around mutually satisfying common visions. The leaders of the future will be faced with a complex set of tasks and aims that calls for a decentralized, international approach to organizational structuring.

Keywords:

Leadership Education, Leadership Development, Globalization

INTRODUCTION

As the situation facing leaders and leadership studies has evolved over the last few decades, increasing attention has been paid to the complex and differing perceptions of leadership faced by those who must lead organizations in different parts of the world (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Kim & Starcher, 2011; Northouse, 2013). However, figures provided by the World Bank (2014) and the Institute of International Education (2014) suggest that the pace of internationalization is increasing. Leaders are facing conditions that have traditionally received little attention, and new models of organizational design that affect power dynamics have begun to emerge. This paper examines some of those changes and the ways in which current scholarship and leadership theory is and is not applicable to global conditions. It supports a reassessment of leadership and leadership education, focusing on adaptability, inclusion and cultural sensitivity, as well as highlighting areas where future research is needed.

LEADERSHIP ACROSS CULTURES

While traditional theories of leadership have tended to examine questions of leadership effectiveness within a single cultural milieu, in an international context, the question of what makes for an effective leader is less easily answered. Contemporary globalization creates a need for research on how cultural differences affect leadership and perceptions of its effectiveness, and recent research has begun to question the culturally monolithic approach to leadership studies.

The GLOBE project

One prominent recent example is the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project, whose researchers used cultural dimensions to analyze perspectives on leadership across the globe. In this study, House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta (2004) examined conceptions of leadership of over 17,000 respondents in 62 countries. Those countries were then clustered into ten broad categories based on statistical similarities in their responses. These groupings include Confucian Asia, Southern Asia, Latin America, Nordic Europe, Anglo, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Sub-Sahara Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Analysis by Northouse (2013) notes that these regions show substantial differences. However, those differences are also often more complex than is typically understood. For example, the GLOBE study verified the commonly held perception that Confucian Asia and the Anglo group differ in their views of in-group collectivism, with Confucian Asia showing a broader concern for family and societal groups when compared with the Anglo nations, which focus more on individual identity. However, those two groups also demonstrated high scores on performance orientation, suggesting that they are both more results-driven than Latin America or the Middle East, who scored much lower on that dimension (House et al., 2004).

Similarly complex relationships abound. Eastern and Germanic Europe both showed relatively high scores in questions regarding assertiveness and assertive behavior while Nordic Europe's low scores suggest distaste for those behaviors. However, Germanic and Nordic Europe both scored high on measures of future orientation, suggesting an interest in long-term goals, which seems incompatible with Eastern Europe's low scores and evident preference for focusing on current events (a quality it shares with Latin America and the Middle East). Nordic Europe also scored low on in-group collectivism, suggesting a focus on individuality that puts it in opposition to the high-scoring Confucian and Southern Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. However, its higher scores on institution collectivism – a value associated with company and organizational loyalty – suggest a similar view to Confucian Asia and distinguish it from the low-scoring Latin America, where views are more similar to Germanic and Latin Europe (House et al., 2004). Differences in leadership and leadership style are therefore not easily reducible, and attempts to generalize about how leaders should lead in various situations are difficult to discuss in truly universal ways.

International leadership in an educational context

To further complicate matters, an increasingly globalized educational environment tends to produce partnerships where leadership power is shared among multiple individuals and groups in several nations. For example, at the College of International Business of Shenyang Normal University in the Liaoning province of China, an undergraduate degree program is offered by Fort Hays State University in the United States. Instructors of record are paid by Fort Hays State University and evaluated annually by department heads based in the U.S. Cooperating teachers are hired, paid, and evaluated locally by the administration of Shenyang Normal University. Instructors of record teach on the Liaoning campus, subject to the rules and policies of the Chinese institution, but they also provide lesson plans, grading, and oversight to the cooperating teachers who run their own classrooms and are flown to the U.S. for training at the beginning of each school year. In a learning environment like this one, leadership becomes a fluid concept, as the question of who is in charge and to what extent frequently changes depending on the situation. It may even be unsettled in unusual circumstances.

This educational model differs in some fundamental ways from more traditional international exchange programs, where a student elects to travel to foreign university on their own initiative. In those cases, the student is subject to the rules of the host country's educational system, the leadership role rests clearly with the administration of the host university, and programs rise or fall based in large part on the capabilities of those leaders. Under the more integrated model, the student is subject to the rules of both universities, the leadership role is divided among both administrations, and student success depends to a large degree not only on the traditional abilities of the institution's leaders, but also on their ability to communicate across cultures and efficiently share power. The mutual trust required in this arrangement is obvious, as basic institutional functions like staffing, environmental maintenance, and student development are often undertaken under the direct supervision of only one leader or set of leaders.

Inadequacies of traditional models

In collaborative, international circumstances, traditional models of leadership often prove lacking. For example, much of leadership research is based on identifying personal traits that make for effective leaders, a preoccupation that goes back to Thomas Carlyle's (1849) "Great Man" theory of history. Since then, a number of qualities have been viewed as important to good leadership, including persistence, responsibility and insight (Stogdill, 1948), intelligence, masculinity, and dominance (Mann, 1959; Lord, de Vader, & Alliger, 1986), confidence and task knowledge (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), and problem solving, motivation, openness and extraversion (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). Classical research and discussions of personal leadership traits were necessary and frequently insightful, but they have drawbacks. One of the more noteworthy is that they tend to encourage a view of leadership that puts most of the focus on the leader, giving little emphasis to the followers or the situation.

Still, the basic conception of leadership is as something that rests primarily with an individual's characteristics is powerful and popular. Examinations of business leaders and leadership intended for the general reader frequently carry titles like *Business the Richard Branson Way: 10 Secrets of the World's Greatest Brand Builder* (Dearlove, 2007) and *Inside Steve's Brain* (Kahney, 2008). Such titles suggest a focus on the achievements and actions of individuals instead of the complex web of relationships and collaboration that more accurately reflects the decision-making apparatuses of many modern international organizations.

In the middle of the 20th century, leadership models emerged that placed less emphasis on the leaders themselves and more on the relationship between leaders and followers as a vehicle for positive change. Peter F. Drucker, who pioneered the idea of the knowledge worker, introduced one influential model in 1959. Drucker believed in decentralization and simplification. He discounted the command and control model and believed that companies work best when they are decentralized. Drucker contended that a manager's job is both to prepare people to perform and give them the autonomy they need to be successful. In his book *Landmarks of Tomorrow*, he advocated an approach where managers' ultimate goal should be a situation where employees or small groups of employees are sufficiently well-educated and informed as to their roles in the organization that they can conceivably manage themselves.

Drucker's model, while outmoded in some ways, nonetheless contains some elements that have become even more necessary in the current climate. Subordinates based in or coming from a culture that differs from their superiors' are, in some important ways, already

better equipped to navigate the local business or educational environment. A less autocratic and more participative style of leadership that emphasizes employee expertise is vital under those conditions.

One way to promote this 21st century approach to leadership is found in an educational philosophy suggested by Robinson and Aronica (2013). They advocate an approach to education that rejects heavy standardization in favor of an emphasis on creativity, diversity, and the needs of individual schools and students. Under this system, a student's learning process is assisted and nurtured by a teacher's actions rather than driven and controlled by them. Whatever other advantages or disadvantages this model might offer, its most important feature for this discussion may be that its leadership model more closely resembles the actual situation faced by institutions around the world today. A largely or entirely domestic organization can often expect to exert a high degree of informed control over most facets of its operations under a single government. The degree of autonomy left to departments or individual employees is largely a matter of choice, and an organization can select the style of management most suited to its needs and institutional temperament.

For the modern organization that wishes to function internationally, the same degree of control is often simply not possible. In those cases, the fate of the organization is subject to the regulation of multiple governments, the needs and desires of international partners, and differing fundamental expectations for leadership like those examined by House et al. (2004). A more collaborative approach to leadership is not only suggested, but demanded by conditions wherein an organization has only partial control over its own actions and limitations. Therefore, it does a disservice to students to model an educational style focused on standardization or top-down control from a lecturer when the professional world is moving farther away from this model of organizational structuring.

Possible models for future education

An adaptable, culturally sensitive approach to leadership likely requires a nontraditional approach to leadership education. Goleman (1998) suggests a model that relies less exclusively on intellectual development and more on emotional intelligence. Indeed, most of the qualities found to be most desirable for leaders across all cultures by House et al. (2004), such as trustworthiness, charisma, and honesty, are not intellectual factors at all. Further research by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) concludes that emotional intelligence creates a platform for information sharing, trust, healthy risk-taking, and learning. Low levels of emotional intelligence create climates of fear and anxiety. Because tense or terrified employees, students and stakeholders can be very productive in the short term, their organizations may post good results, but they most likely will not last. Thus, an emphasis on more personal, emotional factors like self-awareness and continuous self-assessment suggest a way forward that relies less on strict, controlling educational environments and more on encouraging students, as future leaders, to come to a better understanding of themselves as people and the role their culture has played in shaping their attitudes and perceptions.

That personal and cultural awareness is an indispensable requirement for a leader who intends to function at a multinational level. A true international partnership requires power to shift back and forth. The leader at one moment may be required to follow the path determined by the international partner at the next, necessitating other ways of thinking about the nature of leadership. One option for how to proceed can perhaps be found in the servant leadership approach, which focuses on employee empowerment and meeting followers' needs as a path to increased organizational performance. Hu and Liden (2011) found that servant leadership increases shared confidence, therefore creating more effective teams and partnerships.

Although the multi-headed organizational structure required by international partnerships does not directly coincide with the leader/follower relationship, there are enough parallels for the comparison to be compelling. Specifically, the need for a clear, consistent understanding of the needs, desires, and motivations of your collaborators becomes a key element of leadership in both situations.

A more integrated partnership with an equal exchange of power can undoubtedly lead to confusion and conflict, and there is a certain appeal to the notion of a single unifying figure whose vision guides an educational institution. Yet, a more useful model in an increasingly global education system is, the more inclusive type of leadership, which puts emphasis on collaborators' needs. This model is based on the servant leadership approach first named and described by Robert Greenleaf (1991) and advocated by a number of theorists (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003; Block, 2008; Covey, 2002; Ferch & Spears, 2011; Glashagel, 2009; Jennings & Stahl-Wert, 2003; Keith, 2008; Sipe & Frick, 2009). In this scenario, the leader is attentive to the beliefs, requirements, and concerns of collaborators, and the focus is on empathizing, assisting and understanding instead of steering and directing. Followers are put first and empowered, and their full potential is taken into consideration. Based on the writings of Greenleaf, Spears (2002) identified ten characteristics which a servant leader should possess, including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Spears (2002) further notes that servant leadership is incorporated into many established organizations, an assertion supported by Northouse (2013) who gives "The Toro Company, Herman Miller, Synovus Financial Corporation, Service Master Company, Men's Wearhouse, Southwest Airlines, and TDIndustries" as examples (p. 223). Northouse concludes that many organizations see servant leadership as a way to care for their employees and create a more profitable business through a happier, more productive environment.

However, whereas in the past, servant leadership has existed simply as one of a number of competing conceptions of leadership, its philosophical backing becomes more urgent in a more collaborative world. Servant leadership makes altruism a central component of the leadership process, which, while initially appearing idealistic, actually offers substantial practical advantages. By training leaders that are conditioned to think of others' perspectives as a primary component, we train leaders that are prepared for the kind of international relationships that are necessary for a truly global institution. The servant-leadership model argues for sharing control and influence rather than dominating, directing and controlling. It is the only approach that frames the leadership process around understanding and meeting others' needs. Far from being a simple ethical perspective, this goal is vital to the functioning of an international partnership, where dissatisfaction on the part of either partner, either partner's local or national government, or a diverse group of clients and consumers could mean the end of the relationship. Rost (1991) defines leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real change that reflect their mutual purposes" (p.102). The use of influence instead of command in the servant leadership model serves well for international partnerships whose structure cannot be that of control and domination but instead tends to require a certain amount of mutual growth and shared benefit.

The benefits of this kind of international approach to leadership and leadership studies are numerous. According to the Institute for International Education's [IIE] "Open Doors Report on International Exchange" (2013), the 2012/2013 school year saw a 55,000 student increase in the number of international students enrolling in U.S. institutions, a continuation of a growth trend that goes back seven years. According to statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education (n.d.), nearly a third of a million Chinese students study in the U.S.,

Canada, Australia, and New Zealand alone. The IIE (2014) also notes that there were 86, 923 international students in Malaysia in 2010, and over 30,000 students studied just in Australia, Egypt, and the U.S., according Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education.

Students are not only going abroad in force, but they are benefiting from the experience. Research has found that students with international experience are more likely to graduate, more likely to earn better grades, self-report greater understanding of other cultures, personal growth, and confidence, and generally achieve higher levels of personal independence, maturity, and adaptability. (The Center for Global Research, 2014; Murphy, Sahakyan, Yong-Yi, & Magnan, 2014; Sutton & Rubin, 2010).

Cooperative arrangements between a foreign school and a domestic university similar to the Fort Hays-Shenyang partnership provide additional opportunities not offered by traditional exchange programs. Relocation costs, tuition, differences in cost of living, and unfamiliarity with the local economy often make studying abroad a very expensive proposition that is accessible only to those with access to significant amounts of money. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (2014), a student studying in the US spends an average of \$14,300 on undergraduate tuition and room and board for public institutions, \$37,800 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$23,300 at private for-profit universities.

On a personal level, international relocation is a more dramatic change than many students are prepared to accept. While there exist students who are willing to move abroad, there are many others who would benefit from an international experience who are unwilling or unable to leave their home environment. Indeed, a domestically located organization with some level of international management is likely a more realistic picture of the future of business and society. Student exchange programs require the student to abandon the leadership structures of their home culture and adapt to the dictates of a new one. Programs like these make sense in a situation where an individual plans to move and work abroad for an extended period of time, but under current conditions, a person's international experience is far more likely to involve a less pronounced separation of native and foreign culture.

Increasingly and across the world, a country's businesses are likely to be partially or wholly foreign-owned. For example, according to the "2013 China Private Wealth Report" prepared by Bain & Company in conjunction with China Merchants Bank, approximately 1/3 of wealthy Chinese investors, defined as those worth over 10 million RMB, have investments abroad, twice as many as in 2011, and half of those who don't currently have foreign assets are planning to acquire them. World Bank figures show that foreign direct investment (FDI), defined as the net inflows of investment to acquire a lasting management interest (10 percent of more of voting stock) in an enterprise operating in an economy other than that of the investor" has increased significantly in most major world economies between 2009 and 2013. In billions of USD, the FDI in the United States increased from \$153.79 to \$235.87, in China, it increased from \$167.07 to \$347.85, in the United Kingdom, it increased from \$4.06 to \$35.13, and in the Russian Federation, it increased from \$36.58 to \$79.26. Furthermore, of the eighty-seven nations on which the World Bank has published FDI information for 2013, all but nine of them are calculated to have a positive score, suggesting that recent years have resulted in new foreign investment in the overwhelming majority of the world's nations.

Under these conditions, employees are increasingly likely to find themselves operating in familiar cultural milieus, but under leaders with a different set of values. Without a strong emphasis on cultural understanding and leadership styles that stress the differences in

collaborator perspectives, individuals and organizations have little hope of bridging this divide.

Lack of information on cultural perceptions of international leadership

While the past decade has seen an increased awareness of the way leadership functions at the international level, there is still a dearth of research on the topic of how specific leadership qualities function across cultures, as most studies on leadership behaviors tend to focus on internal perceptions. It seems probable that things like confidence, encouragement, decisiveness, and other leadership qualities could be perceived quite differently when they are coming from leaders within one's own culture than from leaders from other places, as different histories and the cultures' traditional views of each other are potential influencing factors.

The conceptual differences between, for example, authoritarianism and decisiveness, confidence and arrogance, and encouragement and patronization are often blurry, and there is a strong possibility that what is perceived as strength from a leader from one's own culture could be interpreted as bullying if it comes from a perceived outsider. Legacies of colonialism and longstanding national conflicts, conscious and unconscious racial and ethnic biases, different understandings of how to appropriately express ideas and emotions, and numerous other factors potentially create a situation where simple actions could produce wildly different impacts depending on the culture and background of both the person committing and the person interpreting those actions.

To date, however, there has been little study on this topic as it relates to international leadership behavior, and extrapolating from more general studies on cultural differences fails to account for the unique power dynamics between leaders and followers. How those differences might influence this special relationship is, at present, primarily a matter of speculation based on a smattering of isolated case studies. The GLOBE (2004) project provides a good overview of what cultures ostensibly value in a leader, but how to express those qualities cross-culturally in order to produce the best result remains under-researched. If an important goal of leadership education is to train leaders to function in the world as it currently exists, then it seems appropriate to design curriculums with a more globalized understanding of leaders' roles in mind, and future study of these issues is needed.

CONCLUSION

Due to differing economies, levels of governmental oversight, social relationships between leaders and followers, and cultural conceptions of leadership, it may no longer be possible for a single leader to accomplish all of his or her economic or professional goals. The new paradigm requires a willingness to cede control to local operatives when a transaction requires the cooperation of large numbers of international participants and organizations. Leadership education needs to reflect these changing conditions. Strength that was formerly conceived to rest in a unifying vision from a single source now rests with multiple agents. The ability to synthesize multiple needs and visions and to lead and follow alternatively and even simultaneously is not just beneficial but vital for success in our current professional landscape.

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