
Introduction

Martha Maznevski*

Institute for Management Development (IMD),
Chemin de Bellerive 23,
P.O. Box 915, CH-1001 Lausanne, Switzerland
Email: martha.maznevski@imd.org
*Corresponding author

Günter K. Stahl

WU Vienna,
Department of Global Business and Trade,
Institute for International Business,
Augasse 2-6, 1090 Vienna, Austria
and
INSEAD, Boulevard de Constance,
77309 Fontainebleau Cedex, France
Email: guenter.stahl@wu.ac.at
Email: guenter.stahl@insead.edu

Mark E. Mendenhall

J. Burton Frierson Chair of Excellence in Business Leadership,
College of Business,
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga,
615 McCallie Avenue,
Chattanooga, TN 37403, USA
Email: Mark-Mendenhall@utc.edu

Biographical notes: Martha Maznevski is Professor of Organisational Behaviour and International Management at the Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne, Switzerland. She directs the MBA programme, recognised among the top programmes in the world for developing global leaders. Her research focuses on high-performing global teams, and leading people in global complexity. She has published many articles and books about cross-cultural effectiveness, global leadership, teams, and other international management topics. Her teaching spans a broad range of international organisational behaviour themes, and she has worked on all continents addressing challenges and opportunities of managing people globally.

Günter K. Stahl is Professor of International Management at WU Vienna and Adjunct Professor of Organisational Behaviour at INSEAD. He received his PhD in Business Administration from the University of Bayreuth, Germany, and was a Visiting Professor at Duke University, the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, and Hitotsubashi University, among others. His research interests include the dynamics of trust within and between

organisations; responsible leadership and corporate social responsibility; talent management; and the socio-cultural processes in teams, alliances, mergers and acquisitions, and how to manage people and culture effectively in those contexts.

Mark E. Mendenhall holds the J. Burton Frierson Chair of Excellence in Business Leadership in the College of Business at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. He is past president of the International Management Division of the Academy of Management, and the author of numerous journal articles and books in the areas of global leadership and international human resource management. His most recent book is *Global Leadership: Research, Practice and Development* (Routledge). He is also a partner in The Kozai Group Inc., a consultancy that specialises in global leadership and expatriate development processes.

It is no secret that business needs strong leadership now more than ever. The problems facing society are enormous, ranging from climate change to inequality. Megatrends such as hyperconnectivity and the rise of China are double-edged swords, bringing seemingly insurmountable challenges as well as boundless opportunities. Business clearly has a vital role to play in the solution to the problems of globalisation, and creating innovation and value for everyone. Finding the opportunities and implementing the innovations inevitably relies on the ability of leaders – people who influence the actions and performance of others.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) reports in their 2013 “Global Agenda Outlook” that today’s leaders believe that the global leadership vacuum is one of the ten most urgent issues to address in the world; it states: “Given... that most of today’s leaders ... grew up in a vastly different world from today’s, it is perhaps no surprise that leadership remains the biggest challenge of all for 2013 and beyond” (WEF, 2013, p.6). McKinsey’s recent global study found similar results – respondents cited global leadership as a key factor for success: “Just over a third [of respondents] chose developing culturally and functionally proficient leaders as an important way to be more effective globally, significantly more than selected any other option” (McKinsey, 2012, p.8). Although leadership has been the focus of serious academic research for decades, the evolving environment keeps changing the game and raising the stakes. The issues raised by the WEF report and the McKinsey survey are neither static nor easily structured. Consider the following typical questions that came to us recently from global leaders:

A leader launching a new global account team in a Europe-based multinational: “How should I build up my team and my organisation? Who should I select, how do I develop them? In this 24/7 environment, how do I lead this team to guarantee customer value without sacrificing the health of the team members, including myself?”

A leader brought into a European manufacturing plant, with a mandate to bring the plant up to – and then surpass – global standards, so the high cost structure produces high value in the global economy: “How can I lead people who learned their trade in a more stable environment and have not adapted to globalisation? How can I inspire them with what frightens them? In this world of austerity measures, how can I help them see their place in the global economy? How can I build trust when our views of the world are so different?”

A leader of an IT services firm: “We hire 18,000 engineers every year across the globe, but we don’t retain as many as we would like to. How can we retain more of them, make our global value proposition more compelling to them, and implement that effectively around the world?”

A leader of a global specialty chemicals firm: “We need to build an organisational culture that fosters inclusiveness and innovation globally. It is also part of our company’s mandate to “do well by doing good,” to make a positive difference in the world beyond our economic value, and the organisational culture should be grounded in that principle. We have so many great people, but we’re not letting them perform at their best to make a difference – how can we do that?”

The global leadership research literature provides useful guidance for these leaders. We know a fair amount, for example, about competencies, communicating across cultures, global teams, networks, and international human resources best practices – but it is not enough. As academics, we often find ourselves making vague statements about the importance of reading the situation, understanding cultural differences, building trust, collaborating, and managing change. As indicated by the WEF Global Agenda and the McKinsey Global Survey, today’s leaders need more from us.

The IMD conference on global leadership

In the fall of 2011 a group of 35 scholars and practitioners interested in issues related to global leadership gathered at the Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne, Switzerland, to explore the challenges facing leaders in today’s highly competitive, interconnected and globalised landscape. Group discussion and scholarly presentations addressed current issues in global leadership research from rich, novel perspectives through proposing new theoretical frameworks, sharing cutting-edge research, and contemplating possible future directions for scholars to consider in conducting research in this field. The collective group of authors of these papers came from different disciplines, research domains, and regions of the world, thus providing diverse insights into the research domain of global leadership.

Based on the paper presentations and discussions that were held at the conference, three major themes or trends seemed to us to be emerging in the field of global leadership:

- 1 The need to bridge the macro-micro divide in theoretical and empirical work on global leadership.
- 2 A shift away from content-oriented research that focuses primarily on global leadership competencies to a process- and learning-perspective on global leadership.
- 3 The need for research at the intersections of global leadership and other fields of study.

Theme 1: Bridging the macro-micro divide in theoretical and empirical work on global leadership

The issues addressed by current global leadership research range from the very micro (e.g., identification of global leader thought processes and expert cognition) to the very macro (e.g., investigation of the relationship between aspects of the context within

which global corporations operate, global strategy, and global leadership capability development; for reviews see Lane et al., 2004; Osland et al., 2012). Based upon an analysis of the papers presented at the conference and the papers that were eventually included in this special issue, there seems to be a consensus among global leadership researchers on the importance of linking macro- and micro-level perspectives in the investigation of phenomena such as the development of global leadership capabilities, the antecedents of effective global leadership, and the way that characteristics of the global environment affect global leadership processes and outcomes – phenomena which by their very nature are a synthesis of organisational, social, and psychological processes and are strongly influenced by cultural and institutional factors.

In this special issue, this trend is reflected in the article, “An exploration of two perspectives on leadership in globalised contexts”, by Rune Rønning, Bjarne Espedal and Atle Jordahl. They examine two logics of global leadership: one of instrumentality, which they contend is universal across boundaries, and one of appropriateness, which they argue is sensitive to cross-boundary differences. They conclude that the logic of appropriateness constitutes a suitable and complementary alternative in leadership development programme design as it builds upon exploration and reflection of specific contexts of global leadership processes. In the article, “Exceptional global leadership as cognitive expertise in the domain of global change”, Joyce Osland, Gary Oddou, Allan Bird and Asbjorn Osland study the process of how global leaders perceive and respond to their work context. Based on applied cognitive task analysis and content analysis, they investigate how effective global leaders think and what they do. Their findings suggest that specific characteristics of the larger work context strongly influence the type of expertise that global leaders manifest.

Theme 2: A shift away from content-oriented research focusing on global leadership competencies to a process- and learning-perspective on global leadership

Osland et al. (2012) report that empirical research has, for the most part, taken a content approach to the study of global leadership, in that it has sought to identify the competencies of effective global leaders. While the content approach to the study of global leadership has generated important insights into the personality characteristics, mindset, and skills required by global executives, it nevertheless fails to shed light on the acquisition process of these dimensions. Also, with a few notable exceptions, such as the Chattanooga Model of Global Leadership Development (Osland and Bird, 2013) and others (e.g., McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002; Osland and Bird, 2013; Wilson and Yip, 2010), there are few models and empirical studies that describe the global leadership development process. Researchers are now beginning to pay more attention to process, for example, by (1) developing global leadership process models that include interaction with the environment; (2) identifying bridging mechanisms between individual-level dispositions and the development of global leadership capabilities; or (3) focusing on the temporal dimension and dynamic aspects of global leadership development.

In this special issue, Tara Wernsing and Rachel Clapp-Smith look at global leadership through the prism of learning processes in their article, “Developing global leaders through building cultural self-awareness”. They posit that cultural self-awareness

can act as a bridging mechanism between unconscious culture knowledge and conscious learning modes, and highlight how the environment plays a critical role in the learning process within the global leadership context.

Theme 3: The need for research at the intersections of global leadership and other fields of study

The field of global leadership has made noteworthy progress over the past two decades in answering some of the foundational questions demanded of any nascent research construct (Mendenhall et al., 2012, 2013). Scholars working in the field are now beginning to produce research at the intersections of global leadership research and other fields of study, including corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability, global talent management, and global teams.

Work at the intersection of global leadership and CSR/sustainability acknowledges that there is increasing pressure from stakeholders – among them governments, local communities, NGOs and consumers – that corporations and their leaders take more active roles and contribute to the “triple bottom line” of creating environmental, social, and economic value (Elkington, 1997; Savitz and Weber, 2006). For example, the UN Global Compact requires members to commit their companies to help find solutions to pressing global problems, such as poverty, pandemic diseases, environmental degradation, and human rights, within their sphere of influence.

There is a growing body of research at the intersection of global leadership and CSR/sustainability that addresses these issues by investigating how different approaches to corporate governance in global corporations may affect the enactment of responsible global leadership, exploring the ethical dilemmas facing global executives, and evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development programmes designed to promote corporate citizenship and responsible global leadership. In their article, “Intercultural competencies as antecedents of responsible global leadership”, Christof Miska, Günter K. Stahl and Mark E. Mendenhall report findings of a simulation-based study, the purpose of which was to gain a better understanding of how specific global leadership competencies influence CSR-related global leadership decision-making. To date, the relationship between global leadership competencies and CSR-related decision-making and behaviour, termed “responsible global leadership” in the field, has not been well understood, and their study was a first attempt in both the CSR and global leadership fields to map these relationships.

Recent research in the field of global talent management (Stahl et al., 2012; Schuler and Tarique, 2012; Tarique and Schuler, 2010) has highlighted the importance of top management commitment and line manager involvement in creating world-class talent management systems. Leading global corporations, such as GE, IBM, Infosys, and Procter & Gamble, have come to realise that senior leaders must be actively engaged in the process and make talent recruitment, succession planning, and leadership development their top priorities. Line managers at all levels need to participate in the process and be accountable for developing their people. Research at the intersection of global leadership and talent management addresses a range of issues, including the use of local talent pools to develop global leadership capability in managerial cohorts, how companies align their global talent management activities (branding, recruitment,

succession planning, retention management) to build a strong leadership pipeline, and the role of global leaders in developing talent through role modelling, mentoring, and instilling values. In their article, “Are you willing to do what it takes to become a senior global leader? Explaining the willingness to undertake challenging leadership development activities”, Ingmar Björkman and Kristiina Mäkelä examine several factors that explain why employees choose to undertake challenging global leadership development activities. Their large-scale international study reveals that individual-level motivational factors are an important component in the global leadership development process, and based on their findings they offer thought-provoking considerations for global leadership education and talent management processes.

Finally, there are currently a wide variety of attempts to cross-fertilise insights from the global leadership and global and multicultural team literatures. Scholars have pointed out that leaders of global and multicultural teams face significant challenges, including diversity composition and dispersed configuration. Recent research suggests that team leaders play a critical role in overcoming and transcending some of the challenges facing global teams and achieving positive outcomes. Such leadership strategies include, for example, boundary spanning, bridging, and blending, people-oriented and value-based leadership, and positive leadership interventions (Zander et al., 2012).

Two papers included in this special issue are representative of the above theme of intersections with the global and multicultural team literatures. Over the past ten years increasing numbers of scholars have been studying biculturalism, and in the article, “Demystifying the myth about marginals: implications for global leadership”, Stacey R. Fitzsimmons, Yih-teen Lee and Mary Yoko Brannen apply models from this field to global leadership. They discuss how marginals – people that are both cultural insiders and simultaneously outsiders – under certain conditions may evince skills and behaviours that are beneficial to effective global leadership. They apply their ideas to organisations interested in developing global leaders who can lead a diverse workforce. In their article, “Global leadership and supportive stereotypes”, Ciara Sutton, Lena Zander and Katharina Stamm apply concepts from the research on stereotyping to global leadership. They contend that the use of stereotypes and categories by global leaders when working with a diverse workforce can be supportive and aid in effective global leadership. They propose that global leaders not only need to wisely overcome negative stereotypes in interpersonal relationships, but also should invoke supportive stereotypes when managing people who are culturally different from them.

Final thoughts

Returning to our initial questions from leaders, we observe that the research trends identified here and in this special issue help us respond more completely. Bridging the macro-micro divide will help the European plant leader to inspire entrenched workers, and the IT HR leader in developing a global value proposition to retain new employees. Focusing on process- and learning-perspectives in addition to content will facilitate the new global account team to develop strong teamwork, and the high-tech start up to develop leaders for the future. Intersecting global leadership with other fields of study will provide answers to the specialty chemicals MNC leader in shaping an inclusive and responsible organisational culture, as well as all the other leaders on their specific challenges and opportunities.

Although next year's WEF Global Agenda and McKinsey's Global Survey are still likely to identify "developing global leaders" as an urgent priority, the "disconnect" between what the global leadership field knows about global leadership and what managers can learn from the field is weakening. Similarly, the "understanding gap" between global leaders who face day-to-day challenges and ivory-tower based scholars' perspectives is strong – but it too is weakening. As the field of global leadership enters into its 25th year, we have observed that a better mutual understanding between managers and scholars is slowly evolving, and it is our hope that this special issue of *EJIM* can heuristically contribute to that evolution.

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