In this article, I will address the following three questions: (1) “Why develop global leaders in India?” (2) “What are the competencies that Indian leaders need to thrive in this context?” and (3) “How do we develop these competencies in Indian leaders?” More simply put, what are the why, what, and how of global leadership development?

WHY DEVELOP GLOBAL LEADERS IN INDIA?

In the 21st century, leadership and globalization are inexorably linked. With the world having become metaphorically smaller from technological advancements that have geometrically increased communication, travel, and trade, leaders, by default now work in a global context—whether they are aware of that or not. This reality is often simply called, “globalization.”

There are a multitude of definitions of the concept of “globalization”; however, I find the conceptualization of globalization by Martha Maznevski and her colleagues to be the most useful for helping leaders understand the nature of the context in which they work.1 Maznevski argues that globalization is nothing more than “extreme complexity” on a global scale, and she delineates this “global complexity” into four mutually influential dimensions: ambiguity, interdependence, diversity, and fast flux.

Ambiguity refers to the difficulty of extrapolating cause-effect relationships from the mountains of information available to executives and managers. Leaders are overwhelmed with data, but their capability to make sense of it has not kept up with the technology to collect, process, and maintain it. Parsing nuances, threats, opportunities, and future trends in global markets from a plethora of information that is often conflicting or paradoxical in nature is neither a simple nor straightforward undertaking for leaders.

Interdependence refers to the reality that “everything is connected to everything.” When a company is global, a marketing event or a political event in one part of the world will affect customers in another. Leaders must therefore be aware of the potential impact of their actions on their organization’s performance.

Diversity refers to the condition that everyone and everything a manager must interface with has numerically increased compared to the nature of pre-globalization work. The multiplicity of stakeholders (e.g., governments, culturally diverse workers, community groups, NGOs, etc.) that a manager must now pay attention to in comparison to the recent past is significant. Working to satisfy the demands of this diversity is an arduous task for even the most talented executives and managers.

Fast flux serves to further complicate the other three dimensions of global complexity. Fast flux is the unpredictable, overwhelming, rapid change inherent in extreme complexity—it amplifies ambiguity, interdependence, and diversity. Nothing holds stable long enough to enable executives and managers to develop systems that will actually control organizational operations and workers. Instead, leaders have to learn to negotiate the “white-water rapids” of the raging river of global complexity. Essentially, they have to learn how to facilitate productive outcomes despite the fact that they cannot control the “river”—the context and processes in which they work. In short, global complexity confronts leaders with the following reality: It is impossible to organize one’s self or firm out of global complexity.

Maznevski argues that the only way to deal with complexity is to develop a cadre of executives, managers, and workers who have the competencies to work within complex environments in ways that increase the potential for functional rather than dysfunctional organizational outcomes. All of this leads to my second question:

WHAT ARE THE COMPETENCIES THAT INDIAN LEADERS NEED TO THRIVE IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT?

My colleagues and I have worked over the past decade to unearth the core competencies of global leadership. Based on our reviews of the global leadership literature and on our own empirical research, we found that global leadership is a multi-dimensional construct; that is, global leadership is made up of many skills and competencies. In fact, we found from the research that there are over 50 competencies that can be tied to effective global leadership. These competencies, however, conceptually group naturally into six “competency dimensions”: Cross-Cultural Relationship Skills, Traits and Values, Cognition, Global Business Expertise, Global Organizing Expertise, and Vision. The specific competencies and their grouping into the six competency dimensions are illustrated in Figure 1.

Three of these competency groups (cross-cultural relationship skills, traits and values, cognition) constitute more fundamental, intra- and interpersonal competencies associated with global leadership. We have combined these three groups into the intercultural competencies dimension of global leadership. The other three competency groups (global business expertise, global organizing expertise, and vision) constitute higher order global leadership competency domains, and we have combined these three groups into the global business competencies dimension of global leadership (please see Figure 2 for an illustration of these conceptual groupings).

Some scholars hold that the intercultural competencies dimension is fundamental and acts as a developmental prerequisite to the ability to effectively deploy competencies at the global business competencies level of global leadership. The implication for Indian companies of this conceptualization of global leadership competencies is clear: intercultural competencies must be the focus in training and development programme design in order to develop global leaders. Some firms make the mistake of focusing solely on higher-order global leadership competencies to the exclusion of the more fundamental global leadership competencies. However, the research seems to indicate that it is virtually impossible to accomplish the higher-order global leadership activities without the fundamental competencies serving as an anchor to those efforts.

This leads naturally then, to another question: “What are the fundamental global leadership competencies that should be focused on when designing global leadership training programmes?”
As I noted previously, empirical research has shown that there are many competencies that can be shown to influence effective intercultural competence. So many in fact, that trying to develop all of them in managers through management development programmes would be impractical.

My colleagues and I undertook a research programme to delineate those competencies that seemed to be the most critical to intercultural effectiveness for global leaders. We reviewed an extensive amount of empirical literature and concluded that the key intercultural competencies can be grouped into three general dimensions: **Perception Management**, **Relationship Management**, and **Self Management**.3

**Perception Management.** This dimension focuses on how people cognitively approach cultural differences, which

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is critical to global leadership. Mental flexibility when faced with cultural differences, the tendency to not make extreme or final judgments about cultural differences in response to challenging experiences, the ability to manage and assess cognitive perceptions when faced with situations different than preconceived versions of those situations, and possessing an inherent curiosity concerning other cultures are all critical competencies for global leaders. Within the dimension of Perception Management are specific sub-competencies that we measure in our development and consulting work with companies: Nonjudgmentalness, Inquisitiveness, Tolerance of Ambiguity, Cosmopolitanism, and Interest Flexibility.4

Relationship Management. This dimension focuses on how aware leaders are of others and their interpersonal interaction tendencies, cultural beliefs, etc. Also, it focuses on the degree to which leaders have self-awareness—that is, the degree to which they are cognizant of their own intercultural strengths and weaknesses and of the impact their behaviour has on other people. Healthy relationships with superiors, subordinates, clients, customers, and stakeholders who culturally differ from the leader are necessary vehicles for the leader to (1) receive accurate information about all aspects of the business situation; (2) understand the nuances of other cultures; (3) receive social support and coaching; and (4) achieve intercultural job performance.5 Within the dimension of Relationship Management are specific sub-competencies that we measure in our development and consulting work with companies: Relationship Interest, Interpersonal Engagement, Emotional Sensitivity, Self-Awareness, and Social Flexibility.6

Self Management. This dimension focuses leaders’: (1) self-identity robustness and (2) emotion and stress management abilities. The research indicates that self-identity—having a clear understanding of one’s fundamental beliefs and values—is critical given the stress and emotional challenges in working in a global context. Also, being able to cope with stress and one’s own emotions has been found to be vital to effective intercultural interactions. Within the dimension of Self Management are specific sub-competencies that we measure in our development and consulting work with companies: Optimism, Self Confidence, Self-Identity, Emotional Resilience, Non-Stress Tendency, and Stress Management.7

My colleagues and I have developed an inventory (the Global Competencies Inventory-GCI)8 that assesses all of these competencies for use in selection and management development efforts in companies that are trying to globalize their workforce. Our approach to applying the research literature to global leadership is outlined below in answer to the third question addressed in this article:

HOW DO WE DEVELOP THESE COMPETENCIES IN INDIAN LEADERS?

There is both good news and bad news surrounding the competencies of global leadership as they apply to developing global leadership training programmes. First, the good news – to date, the research literature seems to indicate that the competencies of global leadership are universal in nature. That is, the competencies are the same at their core for Indian, North American, Japanese, Chinese, German, British, Egyptian or any other nationality. Behaviourally, individuals from these different cultures may choose to deploy those competencies in varied ways due to cultural orientation, personal preference, or socialization, but individuals who are high in global leadership competencies from any of these countries are more likely to be effective global leaders compared to those managers from any of these countries who have lower levels of these competencies.9 So, companies do not have to go on a global competency fact-finding mission or begin from scratch or develop global leadership competency frameworks that differ from nation to nation and culture group to culture group. This appreciably simplifies global leadership development programme design.

Now, for the bad news – despite the universality of the competencies, very few firms have discovered how to

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4 For more information, please see: Mendenhall, M E; Stevens, M J.; Bird, A and Oddou, G (2010). Specification of the Content Domain of the Global Competencies Inventory (GCI), The Kozai Working Paper Series, Volume 1, Number 1. St. Louis: The Kozai Group, Inc.
6 Mendenhall, et. al., 2010.
7 ibid.
8 ibid.
effectively develop these competencies in their workforce. It is my view that the global leadership challenge facing Indian firms is no different than that facing North American, Chinese, Japanese, or European firms. All of them are wrestling (and most not very successfully) with developing a leadership pool of global leaders. Thus, even if we look to best practices in this area, they are very recent, and their long-term outcome has not yet been assessed.10 I will share below, the general approach that my colleagues and I take when we work with firms who desire our assistance in developing their managers to become global leaders.

Phase I: Training and Assessment of Global Leadership Intercultural Competencies

In our experience, it is vital that the intercultural competencies associated with global leadership should be taught to the participants not only through traditional training methods (short lectures, case analyses, video cases, role plays, etc.) but through a personal assessment conducted on executives, managers, and employees before actual competency development efforts are begun with them. To accomplish the latter, as noted before, we use the Global Competencies Inventory (GCI) to assess participants’ current levels of intercultural competencies associated with global leadership. Debriefing their GCI results with them enhances their self-awareness of their own current levels of strengths and weaknesses and provides them with a clear understanding of what they need to focus on to become stronger global leaders. We have found that it is very difficult for managers to develop global leadership competencies unless they first have a firm sense of how strong or weak they currently are on these competencies.

Phase II: Personal Development Planning and Coaching

After training and individualized assessment have taken place, we have the participants develop a personal development plan wherein they focus on creating a concrete plan whereby, over time, they can develop a weaker competency or more effectively deploy a stronger competency. The number of competencies each person selects to work on in their plan is dependent on two factors: (1) the desire of the company and (2) the desire of the participant. Sometimes a firm may desire their managers to work on more than one competency at a time, and if so, we follow that desire and work accordingly with the participants. If the company only wants their participants to work on one competency or a small number of competencies, we again design our programme accordingly. Sometimes we run into a participant who is incredibly self-motivated and desires to work on many competencies simultaneously; in this case, we work with them to create a plan that is broader in scope but retains a good potential for successful completion.

This phase is usually paired with personal coaching that goes beyond personal development planning, exploring the dynamics of their competency constellation, what lays behind that competency constellation, and integrates an understanding of their competencies into multi-faceted aspects of their work and personal lives. This type of coaching can provide nuanced insights that empower participants to accomplish not only their personal development plans, but also to enhance many other aspects of their lives.

Phase III: Accountability Reporting

After a pre-agreed upon time period (which varies depending on each company’s preferences), the participants report to us the outcome of the implementation of their personal development plan. In some cases, they write a report in which they explore the degree to that they have improved the competency, their learning experiences during the implementation of their personal development plan, and what they think their next steps should be in continuing to strengthen the competency or competencies they worked on. We have been quite flexible in how to structure this accountability phase, as different firms have different philosophies and approaches to following up with their managers.

No matter what the type of preferred follow-up, it is our experience that without this accountability portion of the development programme, the positive impact that occurred in Phases I and II significantly dissipates. Without the expectation of accountability, we have found that many participants simply put their personal development plans on the shelf and never get around to putting

them into practice, and thus never wind up developing their intercultural competencies.

**PARTING THOUGHTS**

In summary, firms must build their global leadership training programmes upon what is known from the empirical research as opposed to what people in the organization simply believe global leadership skills to be. It is important for companies to accept that their managers will differ widely on what they are strong and weak in and that global leadership development must be tailored to individual development needs – not “one-size-fits-all” training methods.

Three vital principles should drive global leadership programme design: *self-awareness through analysis*, *individualized planning*, and *accountability*. The degree to which these principles can be applied in a robust way will differ based upon the time, budget, and corporate culture constraints of firms; however, it is important to hold fast to the necessity of applying these principles in global leadership training programme design at all costs, for without these principles firms will find themselves continually trying and failing to make headway in developing global leaders.

Finally, as with all initiatives, if top management only gives lip service to global leadership development efforts, little progress will be made. Some firms’ CEOs are squarely behind their firm’s global leadership efforts, but they tend to be the exception. Sam Palmisano – IBM Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer – is one such exception. He is a good “best practices” example of a CEO who has clearly seen the need to develop global leaders as part of IBM’s need to become a truly globally integrated enterprise. Under his leadership, IBM has developed a comprehensive global leadership development programme that focuses on developing all of IBM’s employees in intercultural competencies commensurate to the degree to which they interface with co-workers, clients, suppliers, etc., who culturally differ from them.11

IBM has also determined that global competency development is best addressed from an individualized perspective, and each IBM employee has been tasked to develop the competencies that they are weakest in; thus, IBM has not taken a one-size-fits-all approach within their programme, a stance that, as aforementioned, we fully agree with. IBM has done as fine a job as any firm of which we are aware of integrating the critical principles of *self-awareness through analysis, individualized planning*, and *accountability*.

There is no royal road to global leadership development. At present, we see Indian companies facing the same challenge as North American, Asian, European, African, Middle Eastern, and South American firms in this regard. The context and culture in India may present unique ancillary challenges associated with developing global leaders, but these are exceptions at the margins of the issue. The challenge of developing global leaders is *not sui generis* by nature; rather it is more a matter of will and vision in C-Suites around the world. Sam Palmisano “gets it”:

> “The nature of competition and the forces of innovation shift the frontiers of science, business and technology at a rate we’ve never seen before. Which is why expertise is not static. To be competitive, any individual—like any company, community or country—has to adapt continuously, learning new fields and new skills . . . . We need a workforce model that recognizes this shift. As always, the really hard part is culture and mindset.”12

The role of vision, one of the higher-order global leadership competencies, applies as much, if not more, to global leadership as it does to domestic leadership. In my view, global leaders must have more than a vision of “what” needs to happen; they must simultaneously have a vision “how” to go about achieving it as well. In fact, this “process vision” may be even more important than the actual “target vision.” Why? Culturally diverse workers have to be able to visualize and sense how they can play a valid role in achieving the target vision; if they cannot see a role for themselves there will be a natural lack of synchronicity in the workface, the effect of

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which will be various types of “process losses” in terms of productivity, efficiency, and performance. In such cases, organizations will move forward only in fits and starts, and will fall short of the target visions that have been erected by senior management. Wise leaders of global organizations will invest equal amounts of effort on both types of visions in order to thrive in the context of globalization.

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_It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership._

— Nelson Mandela