



Learning to lead

Dr Mark Mendenhall takes a moment to talk about the changing role of the business manager on the international stage and what leadership means in an era of increasing globalization

You are a partner of the Kozai Group, a consultancy specializing in intercultural business management. Could you tell us the group's primary objectives and how you became interested in global leadership and international HR?

The main goal of the Kozai group is to help companies transform their leadership cadres into global leadership cadres. I was one of the pioneers in the early movement to study expatriate effectiveness in the management field back in the early 1980s. Driven by the rapid advent of technological innovation in the early 1990s, globalization emerged as a powerful force in the business world. From this, companies realized they needed leaders who possessed not only the culture-to-culture skills of expatriates, but competencies that enabled leaders to be effective in culture-to-'multiple simultaneous cultures' scenarios where diverse national, ethnic, religious and professional cultures may be working together.

Further to this, has your work with companies, such as IBM and Molex, inspired your research?

Yes, definitely. As I consulted with expatriates to help them solve their problems, I realized I was involved in much more than just helping companies be more productive in their leadership concerns – I was actually helping people become wiser, and more productive and edified human beings, and that is tremendously rewarding. I found that working with managers to enhance their global leadership competencies had the same impact – as they develop their competencies the positive outcomes not only radiate throughout their work environment, but also into their personal lives.

Can you briefly discuss the main aims of your current research?

My current research focuses on clarifying two issues in order to make them more useable in practical ways for managers who work in the global context. First, I want to refine our understanding of the factors or features of the global context that differentially impact global leaders' effectiveness and explore the ways in which they do so. Secondly, I want to discover better methods that are more effective for developing global competencies in leaders and students that are both cost-effective and time-constrained in nature.

Have you uncovered any key findings or major successes to date?

First of all, my colleagues and I have delineated the most important intercultural competencies that are related to global leadership effectiveness. It is very difficult

to know how to become a global leader if one is not aware of the competencies that one should be developing. From this we have been able to develop a robust, valid and reliable instrument to measure the most important intercultural competencies associated with global leadership effectiveness.

Finally, my colleagues and I have created a cost-effective, understandable and successful technique of developing intercultural competencies associated with global leadership that we are continually refining and improving upon.

How have the organizations that you work with through the Kozai Group responded to your training programmes?

Organizations see the rewards once they realize that they cannot train up their leaders to be global leaders unless they first know which areas they need to improve. It's when our assessments are combined with coaching and ongoing development programmes that these companies find success.

Is the assessment of the competencies needed for global leaders particularly important at present with the increasing globalization of companies and organizations?

With globalization increasing the answer here is that it is not just important, it is an actual prerequisite to leaders enhancing their global leadership competencies. Without such assessment, to put it simply, global leadership development cannot take place.

Finally, how do you see your research direction evolving in the next five or so years?

My research is likely to continue to focus on the two dimensions I noted above. Everyone thinks they know what the term 'global' or 'globalization' is but there are as many definitions of it as there are managers. What are the underlying dynamics of 'global' and what are the most important elements of those dynamics that impact leaders? Likewise, finding the best possible methods of developing global leadership competencies that are cost-effective is one of the next critical steps to help organizations of all types move forward in globalizing their people.



Global competence

The **Kozai Group** is at the forefront of research aiming to help today's business leaders develop the skills that an increasingly globalized world demands of them

CEOS OF THRIVING firms do well because they have a particular set of skills needed for the job. They know their market, they know their business and they know their colleagues and employees. But even the best executives can flounder once they leave their comfort zone; the qualities that make a competent domestic business executive have diverged dramatically from those that make a successful global business leader.

In the business world, 'global leadership' is a ubiquitous phrase. Organizations are increasingly recognizing that without leaders who can operate successfully at an international level, they will simply produce executives who rapidly become fish out of water. It is not restricted to the upper echelons, however. Globalization demands that employees in all tiers can operate in their roles from a global perspective, but how can these qualities be instilled where they are needed most?

CONCEPTUAL CLARITY

After more than 15 years of research Dr Mark Mendenhall understands the core competencies and skills necessary for leaders to excel in global and intercultural contexts. A prestigious scholar of international renown, Mendenhall has published extensively in the fields of global leadership and expatriate management, and currently holds the J Burton Frierson Chair of Excellence in Business Leadership at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga (UTC). As a partner of the Kozai Group, Mendenhall implements his research to assist a variety of organizations in developing global competencies in their employees, from executives to students. As such, he has consulted with and conducted numerous training programmes for many firms including IBM-Asia Pacific, IBM-Japan and NASA.

Born out of research in expatriate management, global leadership encompasses a wide variety of competencies but, without a common conception of the meaning of 'global', the notion has been plagued by ambiguity. In order to raise it from the quagmire of academic uncertainty, Mendenhall has been a key player in developing a conceptual framework for understanding globality in leadership. As such, the qualities that set global business leaders apart from domestic leaders can be delineated in reference to contextual, relational and spatial-temporal dimensions.

The contextual dimension of global leadership refers to the complexity of the environment in which individuals operate and live. The relational dimension is about spanning boundaries such as culture, ethnicity, religion, politics and education and lastly, the spatial-temporal dimension relates to the degree that an individual is physically required to cross geographical, cultural and national boundaries.

GLOBAL COMPETENCIES INVENTORY

To assess intercultural competencies important for working in the global context, Mendenhall and his colleagues developed the Global Competencies Inventory (GCI). Comprising a set of competencies related to working effectively across cultures, the validity and reliability of the GCI as a training instrument has been demonstrated in numerous studies.

Initially, the inventory was developed to target expatriate business leaders immersed in a different culture to their own. Therefore, they are expected to come into working contact with different beliefs, values and customs and need to be able to manage the stress that naturally comes with such an immersion. GCI works as a checklist against which a candidate's suitability for intercultural work can be assessed. It doesn't simply show who is capable and who is not, however. By showing an individual's strengths and weaknesses at the time of assessment, GCI allows managers to identify the areas that need work so they can improve their suitability for candidacy.

Comprising 16 competencies, the focus of GCI is split into three management categories. Perception Management includes inquisitiveness, tolerance of ambiguity, cosmopolitanism, non-judgmentalness and interest flexibility. Among the Relationship Management competencies are relationship interest, interpersonal engagement, emotional sensitivity, social flexibility and self-awareness. And finally, Self Management includes optimism, self-confidence, emotional resilience, self-identity, stress management and non-stress tendency. These categories encompass the core skills that Mendenhall has identified as a prerequisite for individuals to lead, strategize, organize and implement strategy in a global and intercultural context.

Even the best executives can flounder once they leave their comfort zone

Unless a candidate has the good fortune to possess every single competency right off the bat, they will need to be prepared for some hard work. Mendenhall is adamant, however, that this should not deter anyone. Knowing which way to go to improve one's leadership development is the beginning. After the individual assessment, it is necessary to create personalized development plans so that managers can engage in short, incremental daily improvement activities. Interestingly, Mendenhall has found that accountability plays an essential role in development, not dissimilar from having a personal trainer at the gym to add some much needed motivation. What is absolutely crucial above anything else, however, is the degree of personal motivation or 'developmental readiness' harboured by a candidate. Without it, one cannot hope to develop.

BEYOND INITIAL INTENT

The obvious beneficiaries of GCI are organizations with global ambitions such as businesses, governments and non-profit agencies, but GCI can potentially be employed in any context where boundary spanning activities take place. There are massive cultural differences just between different generations, for example, and one should not forget the differences that exist between a company's distinct business functions, such as marketing and engineering. With an ability to predict higher language acquisition skills and resilience under extreme pressure, it is easy to imagine the inventory being used in contexts where it is important to assess an individual's capacity for foreign languages or an ability to remain calm in dangerous situations. However, if it is used in the future, it is clear that the application of GCI is far from restrictive.

The most valuable lesson Mendenhall has learned is the importance of the individual. There is no mould, no one-size-fits-all training programme that works. Development has to be personalized. Often, it is Japanese firms that take the brunt of criticism about companies lacking a global mindset but in reality organizations the world over lack the knowhow to produce global business leaders. As they have done with numerous firms already, Mendenhall and the Kozai Group are dedicated to imparting this lesson.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNATIONAL HR

Research interests

- Global leadership assessment
- Global leadership development
- Intercultural competencies
- Expatriate adjustment and productivity

KEY COLLABORATORS

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MARK MENDENHALL received his BS and PhD from Brigham Young University, USA, before serving as Assistant Professor of International Management at Loyola Marymount University, USA. He has been at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, since 1989 and a partner of consulting firm the Kozai Group since 2001. He has published in over 80 academic papers, and authored and edited numerous books over the course of his research career.

