



## ***Integrating Cultural Synergy and Leadership Development Through Globalized Initiatives***

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### **Abstract**

*Purpose* – The purpose of this paper is to stress the benefits of integrating cultural synergy and leadership development on a global scale through innovative solutions for specific obstacles that restrain companies from running a lean operation or prevent them from being globally competitive.

*Design/methodology/approach* – The approach is to provide critical reasons why global leadership programs should be initiated and then supporting this notion through testimony of students and executives from top ranked business schools.

*Findings* – Leadership development programs have helped develop a clear “line of sight” between the organization and the individual through a strategic focus on cultural synergy and initiatives that support organizational behavior and leadership qualities.

*Practical implications* – Integration between cultural synergy and leadership development can work effectively and efficiently within any environment. This case study supports existing leadership programs and gives evidence on why and how they should be created and implemented on a global scale.

*Originality/value* – Schmidt focuses on cultural synergy and how ignoring the constant change and expansions of the marketplace are detrimental to an organizations’ stability, if they want to maintain a globally competitive advantage. However, few case studies have been published that articulate how cultural synergy and leadership development can be successfully integrated through existing methodologies and innovative global initiatives.

### **Introduction**

Organizations that seek to sustain a competitive advantage on a global scale or enhance their global operations need to understand the importance of leadership development. Programs designed for leadership development should focus on various aspects of the qualities that a strong leader possess and teach the importance of effective communication within the workforce to carry out tasks in an effective manner. Problem-solving, for example, is one significant aspect that should be taught in such



programs because it enables leaders to handle unfortunate and unpredictable situations that may arise. Leadership development allows individuals to understand employee motivation, work quality, market conditions, and company strategies; it creates a set of values that aid in robust decision-making and productivity.

## Findings

Multinational organizations must possess the ability to coordinate and control their operations while responding to local needs and maximizing organizational learning. They need to evaluate their own distinctive corporate postures and strategically locate themselves along the power continuum of centralization/decentralization (Schmidt, 2006). Terpstra and Kenneth (1992) have identified five critical factors that multicultural corporations should consider when initiating a new leadership program or improving upon an already existing model (Schmidt, 2006).

- 1 . *Cultural variability* refers to the conditions of stability within the organization.
- 2 . *Cultural complexity* relates to high- and low-context cultures and concerns itself with the need to match the degree of context with the appropriate communication content, style, and quantity.
- 3 . *Cultural hostility* is the degree to which local conditions appear threatening to employees and organizational values. It reflects the perception of the local or host culture toward the multinational corporation itself.
- 4 . *Cultural heterogeneity* is the degree to which the organizational culture is similar to or different from the local or national culture. When cultures are very diverse or heterogeneous, it is more difficult to coordinate the behavior of local subsidiaries and their employees, thereby requiring management to be more differentiated and to decentralize communication and policy.
- 5 . *Cultural interdependence* refers to the economic dependence the organization has with other interacting cultures to obtain resources such as raw materials, equipment, technological support, and critical institutional and infrastructure processes.

These critical cultural factors are helpful in gaining a global perspective and developing specific strategic objectives. They need to be understood and utilized within an



organization to maintain global competitiveness. Further, leadership programs that follow these five factors can help develop a robust organization and core competencies, which are the foundation of a company's success.

Many companies are struggling with the ever-changing landscape of cultural diversity within the organization. It has become more difficult for global organizations to deal with the flux in regulations and laws, when handling the same instabilities in-house. For example, Fulk and Collin-Jarvis (2001) emphasize on the challenges of managing the process of communication by being sensitive to technology selection and understanding the complexities of various media (Schmidt, 2006). There are six elements to determine the potential effectiveness of various media:

1. equality of participation
2. socioemotional expression
3. encourages consensus
4. efficiency
5. decision quality
6. satisfaction

In addition to media selection, Maznevski and Chudoba (2000) found that the temporal rhythm of communication was critical to the interaction process because *the rhythm prevented inadvertent transitions from happening and maintained effective interaction equilibrium patterns* (Schmidt, 2006).

## **Synergy**

According to Schmidt, synergy is a cooperative or combined action that can occur when diverse or disparate groups of people with varying viewpoints work together (Schmidt, 2006). Also, synergy involves groups of people who may work in different parts of the world, but must collaborate and work together to achieve a common goal. Synergy is powerful, in the sense that it can create innovative solutions to problems that rarely would be conceived from one person. The power of synergy rests in the reality that *when solving problems, groups are often smarter than the smartest people within them*



(Surowiecki, 2004). Synergy allows global businesses to better manage their diverse components and create a stronger, more flexible and adaptive organization ready to compete in the world market.

### **Integrating cultural synergy and leadership development**

In today's world, multinational organizations are becoming more sophisticated through technological advances. They are starting to understand the importance of leadership development from a global perspective and how the qualities developed from leadership programs cultivate lean management and innovation. *To succeed, we will have to develop new mindsets and work habits for a radically changing world. We need to be prepared for almost anything and be willing to give up some of the attitudes and postures that have limited our thinking and constricted our behavior* (Schmidt, 2006).

To prepare, the initiatives have to follow globalized guidelines that should be understood and implemented by multinational organizations. Some of the initiatives that this paper presents have been implemented in top-ranked business schools. This paper provides testimony to support the leadership development theories taught in these programs. Also, high-level executives and MBA students share their experiences and the values they derived from these programs. It should be understood that feedback can be just as useful as scientific evidence in supporting leadership development programs. It enables the reader to understand that the benefits and values derived from these programs can be used on a global scale, bringing people together all around the world, to work more efficiently and effectively in this rapidly changing society. In general, the idea is to value cultural synergy, promote leadership programs that have been proven sufficient, and then link them together through a globalized approach.

### **Leadership programs**

The Wharton School of business at the University of Pennsylvania conducts an annual two-week long trek along the lower slopes of Mount Everest that is designed to allow MBA graduates and mid-to high level executives put their leadership and communication skills to the test. The objective of the program is to give the participants the chance to reinforce leadership theories that are taught in the classroom, by asking



them to practice those theories in an unfamiliar and unpredictable wilderness environment. Reaching elevations of approximately 13,000 feet, participants are forced to make rapid adjustments in a way that deals with potentially threatening situations, while convincing others to follow. The focus of the journey is on safely completing the task at hand while considering and communicating all of the possible ways to do so in a timely fashion. The idea of saving one's life on this journey represented how critical it is for everyone to be ready to lead in the workplace, even if they are not in charge. The following is a short excerpt from an article from the Harvard Business Review representing the need of leadership from all levels of an organization (Useem, 2001).

*His leadership had saved her life, she said, but hers had fallen short in saving his. Pittman's frank assessment of her actions helped bring home the notion that leadership is not just about mobilizing those below; it's also about marshaling the people above. After all, everyone is fallible, and even the most experienced CEOs and other top executives have blind spots. Our responsibility, then, is to help them avoid the pitfalls that they haven't seen. Of course, leading upwards often feels wrong because of the hierarchical culture prevalent in most companies, and it requires tremendous diplomacy and tact to avoid a political blunder that can derail or end a promising career. At the same time, many great companies have foundered because of faulty decisions made at the top while middle managers sat on their hands. The harrowing experience of Weathers and Pittman-and the difference that upward leadership might have made for them and for Scott Fischer that day - stands as a forceful reminder for keeping this leadership principle in mind.*

The approach is simple: take the lessons learned from Mount Everest to develop a cultural leadership program that includes members of similar functions of a company but who live and work in separate countries. Further, participants will be given the chance to



share their views as they work together to solve minor problems along with tough obstacles. Their differences in culture and methodologies will sync together to create robust leadership tactics that will enable participants from around the world to complete the task at hand. The success would be based upon their safe return and how they did managed to do so. These lessons and strategies can then be used at the workplace and presented to companies and universities world-wide. The global approach is backed by the emerging countries that are projected to match the United States in a few decades. This is where today's leaders can showcase their knowledge and skills yet work together to develop innovated solutions to key issues of their company.

Business schools are falling behind in preparing students for careers in an increasingly global market and need to become more strategic about how they weave cross-border content into their programs. They need to make deeper and more sustained efforts across the curriculum to help students understand the challenges of conducting business in different cultures and countries (Damast, 2011).

However, top business schools have a long way to go when it comes to globalizing their curricula, and the majority are still in their infancy in figuring out how to do that (Damast, 2011). Also, drilling an abundant amount of information into a student's brain in a short-period of time will force the student to cut corners and overlook important topics; it will create a gap between aspiration and achievement and that is unacceptable. There is still a way to establish a globalized approach in a short-period of time and almost guarantee that students will not cut-corners.

Darden business school has a new global executive MBA program, which has become a huge success in executive education in the last few years. It is a 20-month program that requires students to take several two-week residencies over the course of the degree in a select amount of emerging economies, including India and china. *The program will enhance the skills of high-potential executives who need to be ready on day one to do business in any market around the globe*, said Darden Dean Robert Bruner (Damast, 2011).

## **Conclusion**



The big picture presents multi-national companies along with business schools worldwide focusing on one thing: global immersion. We are missing one key element though: Time. With the rapid progression of emerging markets, how do we plan to compete? Combining an executive MBA like that of Darden with a leadership development program like that of Wharton will enhance the theories taught in the classroom by the lessons learned on the mountain. Executive students, who possess experience and knowledge from the workplace, will be able to provide their insights on business and management topics. However, the purpose of combining these two programs is to develop better leadership skills and progress in cultural synergy. Leadership development programs have helped develop a clear “line of sight” between the organization and the individual through a strategic focus on cultural synergy and initiatives that support organizational behavior and leadership qualities. This combination will not only differentiate the individuals who participate, but will benefit the companies who hire them or encourage them to participate. It can rapidly enhance relationships across the global supply chain. *When leaders truly serve and subordinate their private welfare to that of all others, their authority often becomes unquestionable* (Useem, 2001); these managers see the big picture.

### Works Cited

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